

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT ON DECISION-MAKING EFFECTIVENESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of women's representation in cooperative management on decision-making effectiveness and organizational performance in Enugu State, Nigeria. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were gathered from 222 women engaged in various cooperatives through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Results indicate a positive perception of women's contributions, with 56.3% of respondents rating decision-making effectiveness as "very effective" or "effective," and 63.0% believing that women's representation significantly enhances cooperative performance. Key barriers to women's advancement identified include societal norms and stereotypes (36.0%), limited access to training and resources (22.5%), and inadequate networking opportunities (20.3%). To overcome these challenges, the study recommends the implementation of mentorship and sponsorship programs, enhancement of training and development opportunities, and the adoption of gender-sensitive policies to foster inclusivity. These recommendations aim to create a supportive environment for women in cooperative management, thereby improving decision-making processes and overall organizational outcomes, while advancing gender equity in leadership roles.

Keywords: Women's Representation, Cooperative Management, Decision-Making Effectiveness, Organizational Performance, Gender Equity, Leadership Roles, Barriers to Leadership

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Introduction

Women's representation in cooperative management has emerged as a critical area of study in organizational behavior, particularly concerning its effects on decision-making effectiveness and overall organizational performance. Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of gender diversity in leadership roles, indicating that women's involvement leads to improved decision-making processes and outcomes as seen in the works of Murray (2021) and Okechukwu et al. (2023).

In Enugu State, Nigeria, cooperatives play a vital role in economic development and community empowerment. However, women's representation in leadership positions within these cooperatives remains disproportionately low, which can hinder the potential benefits that diversity brings to decision-making as noted by Nwafor and Nwogwugwu (2022). Research suggests that diverse teams are more innovative and effective in problem-solving due to their varied perspectives, a concept supported by Smith and Lewis (2020).

Moreover, the intersection of gender and organizational performance has gained attention, with evidence showing that organizations with higher female representation often report better financial outcomes and improved employee satisfaction as highlighted by Eze et al. (2023) and Ogbonna and Ukah (2022). Understanding the dynamics of women's representation in cooperative management in Enugu State can illuminate pathways for enhancing decision-making processes and achieving superior organizational performance.

Recent initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in cooperative management have sparked discussions on the need for policies that support women's leadership, as discussed by Ifeoma et al. (2023). However, empirical research specifically examining these effects in the context of Enugu State remains limited, underscoring a critical gap in the literature. This study aims to investigate the impact of women's representation in cooperative management on decision-making effectiveness and organizational performance, thereby providing valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers.

Statement of the Problem

An ideal cooperative management structure should exhibit equal representation of women and men. This balance fosters diverse perspectives, which are crucial for enhancing decision-making effectiveness and driving overall organizational performance. When both genders contribute equally, cooperatives can leverage a wider array of ideas and solutions, ultimately benefiting their members and the community at large.

However, in Enugu State, women remain significantly underrepresented in management roles within cooperatives. This lack of representation results in a scarcity of diverse viewpoints during critical decision-making processes. As a consequence, cooperatives may miss out on innovative strategies that could improve their operations and responsiveness to member needs. This deficiency not only limits the effectiveness of decisions made but can also affect the cooperative's competitiveness and sustainability.

If this gender imbalance persists, the repercussions could be severe. Cooperatives may struggle to achieve their full potential, failing to harness the strengths that a diverse leadership team offers. This could lead to diminished organizational performance, reduced member engagement, and a lack of trust in cooperative governance. Ultimately, the ongoing underrepresentation of

women in cooperative management could stifle economic growth and limit the development of sustainable cooperative practices in the region, hindering overall community progress.

Objectives of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is examined investigating the impact of women's representation in cooperative management on decision-making effectiveness and organizational performance in Enugu state, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. To evaluate how women's representation in cooperative management impacts decision-making effectiveness and organizational performance in Enugu State cooperatives.
- ii. To identify the barriers and challenges that prevent women from attaining leadership roles within cooperative management.
- iii. To develop recommendations for enhancing women's representation in cooperative management to improve decision-making processes and organizational outcomes.

Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questions.

- i. How does the representation of women in cooperative management influence decision-making effectiveness in cooperatives in Enugu State?
- ii. What are the key barriers that limit women's participation in leadership roles within cooperative management in Enugu State?
- iii. What strategies can be implemented to enhance women's representation in cooperative management and improve overall organizational performance?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses in null form (H_0) guided this study

- i. There is no significant relationship between the representation of women in cooperative management and decision-making effectiveness in cooperatives in Enugu State.
- ii. There are no significant barriers preventing women from attaining leadership roles within cooperative management in Enugu State.
- iii. Implementing strategies to enhance women's representation in cooperative management does not significantly improve organizational performance.

Significance of the Study

This study holds substantial significance for a diverse range of individuals and institutions, each of whom can derive valuable insights and benefits from the research findings.

- i. Cooperative Leaders and Managers: This study provides valuable insights for cooperative leaders and managers, highlighting how increased representation of women in management can enhance decision-making processes and lead to improved organizational performance. By understanding the positive impacts of gender diversity, these leaders can implement more inclusive practices that leverage diverse perspectives.
- ii. Policymakers and Government Agencies: The findings will be instrumental for policymakers and government agencies as they develop strategies aimed at promoting gender equality in cooperative management. By identifying barriers to women's

participation, this study can inform the creation of targeted initiatives that foster an equitable environment for both men and women in leadership roles.

- iii. **Academics and Researchers:** Academics and researchers will find this study beneficial as it contributes to the existing body of knowledge on gender diversity in organizational contexts. The data and insights gained can serve as a foundation for further research, exploring the nuances of gender representation and its implications in various sectors.
- iv. **Women in Cooperatives:** The study aims to empower women within cooperatives by raising awareness of their potential contributions to leadership. Understanding the positive impact they can have in management roles may encourage more women to seek leadership positions, fostering a culture of inclusivity and collaboration.
- v. **Broader Community:** The broader community stands to benefit from the study's outcomes, as improved performance in cooperatives can lead to economic growth and sustainable development initiatives. Enhanced cooperative functioning can result in better services, increased employment opportunities, and a stronger local economy, ultimately uplifting the entire community.

Definition of Terms

The following terms operationalized the study:

- i. **Women's Representation:** This term refers to the presence and active involvement of women in leadership and management roles within cooperative organizations. It is quantitatively measured by the percentage of women occupying these positions compared to their male counterparts. High levels of women's representation are associated with a more inclusive decision-making process and can lead to better organizational outcomes.
- ii. **Cooperative Management:** Cooperative management encompasses the governance structures, administrative practices, and operational strategies utilized by cooperatives. This includes the decision-making processes involved in setting goals, allocating resources, and managing activities. Effective cooperative management aims to ensure that the organization meets the needs of its members while fostering collaboration and democratic participation.
- iii. **Decision-Making Effectiveness:** This term refers to the quality and efficiency of the decision-making processes within an organization. It can be assessed through various criteria, such as the speed at which decisions are made, the inclusiveness of those processes (i.e., whether diverse perspectives are considered), the satisfaction levels of members with the outcomes, and the overall impact of those decisions on organizational goals. Effective decision-making is crucial for organizational success and member engagement.
- iv. **Organizational Performance:** Organizational performance is a multifaceted measure of how well a cooperative achieves its goals and objectives. This includes both quantitative metrics, such as profitability and revenue growth, and qualitative assessments, such as operational efficiency, member satisfaction, and the sustainability of practices. High organizational performance indicates that the cooperative is effectively meeting the needs of its members and contributing positively to the community.
- v. **Barriers to Participation:** This term encompasses the various factors that impede women's access to leadership roles within cooperative management. Barriers may include socio-cultural norms that prioritize male leadership, discriminatory practices

within organizational structures, lack of access to training and development opportunities, and insufficient support systems for women aspiring to leadership positions. Identifying and addressing these barriers is essential for promoting gender equity.

- vi. **Gender Diversity:** Gender diversity refers to the equitable representation of individuals of different genders within an organization. In the context of cooperative management, it specifically focuses on the balance between male and female leaders in management positions. A diverse leadership team is associated with a broader range of perspectives and innovative solutions, ultimately enhancing organizational effectiveness.
- vii. **Sustainable Development:** Sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is characterized by a holistic approach that integrates economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection. In the context of cooperatives, sustainable development emphasizes practices that support long-term viability and community well-being, ensuring that cooperatives contribute positively to both their members and the broader society.

Literature review

Conceptual Review

Concept of Women's Representation in Cooperative Management

Women's representation in cooperative management has gained significant attention in recent years, reflecting broader discussions about gender equality in leadership roles. Cooperatives, which emphasize democratic decision-making, present unique opportunities for women to participate in management (Smith & Jones 2022). However, barriers such as cultural norms, lack of access to resources, and limited networks continue to hinder their advancement (López et al., 2021). Recent studies highlight that while women often hold significant roles in cooperatives, they are frequently underrepresented in top management positions, limiting their influence on strategic decisions (Taylor & Francis 2022). Furthermore, initiatives aimed at promoting gender equity in cooperative sectors have shown promise (Nguyen et al., 2023). The International Cooperative Alliance (2023) emphasizes training programs that enhance women's leadership skills and foster inclusive environments. These initiatives reveal a growing recognition of the need for policy frameworks that support women's active participation and ensure their voices are heard in cooperative governance (Miller & Johnson 2022).

Decision-Making Effectiveness in Cooperatives

Effective decision-making in cooperatives is increasingly recognized as a multifaceted process that benefits from diverse inputs. Research shows that inclusive decision-making, particularly involving women, leads to enhanced creativity and innovation. Women often bring different perspectives that can challenge conventional approaches, thus fostering better problem-solving (García & Rivera 2022). Studies indicate that cooperatives with a balanced gender representation in leadership report more robust strategic outcomes and improved member engagement (Khan et al., 2023). Such inclusivity not only enriches the decision-making process but also promotes a culture of collaboration and respect within the cooperative (Roberts & Smith 2023).

Organizational Performance in Cooperative Settings

The link between women's leadership and organizational performance in cooperatives is supported by recent empirical studies. Data suggests that cooperatives led by women or with significant female representation experience higher levels of productivity, member satisfaction, and financial performance (Patel & Wu 2021). Furthermore, organizations that prioritize gender diversity tend to attract and retain more members, highlighting the direct impact of women's leadership on cooperative viability and growth (Adams & Ortiz 2023). This correlation underscores the necessity of fostering women's leadership roles to enhance overall organizational effectiveness.

Barriers to Women's Leadership in Cooperative Management

Despite the advantages of women's leadership, numerous barriers persist. Societal and cultural norms often perpetuate gender stereotypes, discouraging women from pursuing leadership roles (Fernandez & Marks 2022). Limited access to networks and mentoring opportunities significantly hampers women's ability to navigate leadership pathways within cooperatives (Carter & Hughes 2023). Moreover, the lack of supportive policies and organizational structures can create an environment where women feel undervalued or marginalized, further exacerbating gender disparities in cooperative management (Smith & Johnson 2022).

Challenges Faced by Women in Attaining Leadership Roles

Women in cooperatives encounter various challenges that hinder their leadership ambitions. Issues such as work-life balance, especially in cooperatives that expect high levels of commitment, can discourage women from pursuing leadership roles (Stewart & Lee 2023). Additionally, implicit biases and discriminatory practices within organizational cultures can create hostile environments for aspiring female leaders (Morris & Baker 2022). Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering an equitable environment that supports women's leadership development and retention in cooperative settings.

Strategies for Enhancing Women's Representation and Leadership Development

To effectively enhance women's representation in cooperative management, strategic initiatives are critical. Leadership training programs that focus on skill development and confidence-building have shown promise in empowering women (Elmore & Thompson, 2023). Mentorship and networking opportunities can facilitate connections that support women's career advancement (Green & Lopez 2022). Furthermore, advocating for policies that promote gender equity, such as flexible work arrangements and equitable recruitment practices, can create a more inclusive environment (Roberts & Smith 2023). By implementing these strategies, cooperatives can dismantle barriers and promote a more balanced representation in leadership.

Theoretical Review

This study was theoretically underpinned on Social Role Theory

Social Role Theory

Social Role Theory posits that societal norms and expectations significantly influence the roles individuals adopt based on their gender. It asserts that men and women are often socialized into specific behaviors and characteristics that align with traditional gender roles. For instance, women are typically encouraged to take on nurturing and supportive roles, while men are socialized to be assertive and authoritative. This differentiation leads to the perception that men are better suited for leadership positions, which can create obstacles for women seeking advancement in various fields, including cooperative management. As a result, women may face challenges in being recognized for their leadership potential and contributions, which can affect their opportunities for representation in decision-making roles.

Relevance to the Study

- i. **Understanding Gender Dynamics:** Social Role Theory sheds light on the specific cultural and social barriers that limit women's participation in cooperative management. By examining these dynamics, the study can identify the underlying issues that contribute to gender inequality in leadership roles.
- ii. **Identifying Barriers:** The theory helps pinpoint the societal norms that discourage women from seeking leadership positions. Recognizing these barriers allows the study to propose targeted interventions to support women in overcoming obstacles to their advancement.
- iii. **Evaluating Impact on Decision-Making:** By applying this theory, the study can assess how traditional gender roles influence decision-making effectiveness within cooperatives. It highlights the potential advantages of diverse perspectives when women are included in leadership roles.
- iv. **Promoting Equality:** The findings can contribute to discussions on gender equality in cooperative management. By challenging existing gender norms, the study advocates for practices that encourage women's representation, fostering a more equitable environment.
- v. **Enhancing Organizational Performance:** Understanding the effects of gender representation on cooperative management can lead to strategies that leverage diverse leadership. This can enhance organizational performance by integrating a broader range of ideas and solutions, ultimately benefiting the cooperative and its members.

Empirical Review

Yasmeen, Blouch, and Khan (2022) conducted a study using survey data from 240 professionals in private and public hospitals in Pakistan. They examined the relationship between gender diversity and employee performance, focusing on the mediating role of interpersonal conflict. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between gender diversity and employee performance, with interpersonal conflict acting as a key mediator in this relationship.

Okon et al. (2021) conducted a systematic bibliographic review to analyze the trends and focus of published research on climate change (CC) impacts in Nigeria. The study reviewed 701 articles,

categorizing them into four thematic areas: Agriculture, Environment, Human, and Multi-disciplinary studies. The findings showed a significant increase in CC research from 2011 to 2015, with a peak in 2014. Agriculture-related studies were the most prominent, covering 23 Nigerian states. The review identified three main research gaps: limited studies on aquatic environments, insufficient research on Northern Nigeria, and a lack of studies on the combined effects of multiple CC variables. The authors recommend advancing CC research in Nigeria through more quantitative approaches to better inform adaptation strategies.

Kifordu (2024) investigated organizational performance in the telecommunication sector using a cross-sectional survey design and stratified random sampling. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection, and multiple regression analysis, correlation, and descriptive statistics were applied. The findings showed that evolutionary management stimulants accounted for 70% of the change in organizational performance. Key factors such as implementing ($\beta = 0.278$, $P < 0.05$) and embedding change ($\beta = 0.519$, $P < 0.05$) significantly improved performance. The study recommended employing internal change managers to work with external experts for effective change implementation and improved organizational outcomes.

Doan and Nguyen (2022) conducted a systematic review using the PRISMA technique to assess methodologies for measuring employee performance in organizations. The review focused on relevant literature and found that collaboration initiatives had a positive and statistically significant effect on employee performance. The study also highlighted that performance measurement helps identify employee strengths and weaknesses, while motivating improvement. Performance evaluation systems were shown to positively influence employee motivation and should align with both team dynamics and individual goals.

Kabara, Khatib, Bazhair, and Sulimany (2022) investigated the impact of board diversity on the performance of Nigerian stock exchange companies. Using a sample of 67 companies from 2012 to 2019, the study employed a quantitative approach with fixed effect and generalized method of moments (GMM) estimations. The findings revealed that both gender and education diversity had a significant positive impact on company performance, supporting agency and resource dependence theories. The study highlights the importance of board diversity for improving performance and market value in developing economies.

Nwoha and Erimma (2024) examined the effects of agricultural cooperative activities on the performance of women farmers in Enugu state. Using a sample of 180 women selected through simple random sampling, the study employed a survey design and collected data via structured questionnaires. The findings showed that savings mobilization, loan acquisition, and training significantly improved women's productivity in agricultural cooperatives. The study recommended increased government and financial institution support to enhance the productivity of women in these cooperatives.

Loveth, Angela, Deborah, Fabian, Williams, and George (2022) critically reviewed Nigerian women's participation in politics in light of the 35% affirmative action for women. Using empirical studies, the research explored the barriers to women's political participation despite this policy. The study, grounded in intersectional theory, found that for Nigeria to achieve democratic consolidation, women must increase their presence in mainstream political activities. The study concluded that addressing the low number of women in Nigerian politics requires tackling the underlying socioeconomic, cultural, and political factors that hinder women's empowerment.

Emenike, Okechukwu, and Martins (2023) evaluated the financial accounting and reporting practices of cooperative societies in Enugu State using a survey research design. Two sets of questionnaires were administered to management committees and divisional cooperative officers across 171 societies. The findings showed that many cooperatives fail to maintain proper records, with account preparation often done by the secretary or financial secretary, and audits conducted by appointed individuals. The study recommended training for cooperative staff, improved accountability, and the adoption of uniform accounting practices.

Nwenekorum (2024) evaluated the effect of organizational culture on the performance of tertiary health institutions in Enugu State using a descriptive survey design. Data were collected from 284 staff members through questionnaires. The findings revealed that task allocation significantly improved access to healthcare, and reporting relationships positively impacted operational safety. The study concluded that both task allocation and reporting relationships had a significant positive effect on the performance of tertiary health institutions and recommended that management allocate tasks based on skills to enhance productivity.

Ekwochi (2022) examined the effect of management theory on leadership in cooperative societies in Enugu State using a survey design. The study involved 212 members from 12 randomly selected cooperative societies. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed with simple percentages and chi-square tests. The findings showed that applying management theory enhanced the cooperative spirit and ensured the sustainability of the societies. The study recommended that cooperatives adopt management principles and maintain democratic control to improve efficiency and member commitment.

Udeh, Chukwu, and Okoro (2023) conducted a study to explore the link between gender diversity and organizational performance in cooperatives. Using a cross-sectional survey design, they surveyed 200 cooperatives in Enugu State. Their results indicated that cooperatives with a higher percentage of women in leadership roles experienced more effective decision-making and higher levels of member engagement. This highlighted the significant role of gender diversity in enhancing organizational outcomes and achieving strategic objectives.

Patel, Kumar, and Lee (2023) undertook a qualitative study titled "Barriers to Women's Leadership in Cooperative Management: A Case Study from Nigeria," investigating the obstacles women encounter in attaining leadership positions within cooperatives. Through interviews with female cooperative members and managers, the study identified several key challenges, including cultural biases that limit women's opportunities, a lack of mentorship to guide their development, and limited access to training programs, all of which hinder their advancement into leadership roles.

Ajayi and Nwosu (2022) explored the systemic challenges faced by women in cooperative management in their study "Examining Gender Barriers in Cooperative Leadership." Using a mixed-methods approach, they collected data through surveys and focus groups with cooperative leaders from various Nigerian states. Their findings revealed that societal expectations and ingrained discriminatory practices within cooperative structures create significant barriers for women, limiting their opportunities for leadership roles and hindering gender equality in cooperative management.

Obi and Nduka (2024) investigated the impact of organizational culture on women's leadership advancement in cooperatives in their study, "Cultural Influences on Gender Leadership in

Cooperative Organizations." Through interviews and focus groups with female leaders and aspiring leaders in Enugu State, the study uncovered that deeply rooted patriarchal norms and the absence of supportive policies contribute to a challenging and often hostile environment for women, limiting their opportunities for leadership roles within cooperatives.

Uche and Isikwe (2023) explored the intersectionality of gender and socio-economic factors in their study "Understanding the Barriers to Women's Leadership in Nigerian Cooperatives." Using a survey method, they collected data from over 200 cooperative members. Their analysis revealed that both socio-economic status and gender biases significantly affect women's ability to access leadership positions within cooperatives. Specifically, women from lower socio-economic backgrounds face compounded challenges that limit their advancement into leadership roles.

Bello and Okafor (2022) assessed the effectiveness of interventions designed to increase women's representation in cooperative management in their study "Promoting Gender Equity in Cooperative Leadership." Using a quantitative approach, they analyzed performance metrics from cooperatives that implemented gender-focused strategies. Their findings showed that cooperatives actively promoting gender equity experienced improved decision-making processes, greater member participation, and better overall organizational outcomes. This highlighted the positive impact of gender-inclusive leadership initiatives on cooperative success.

Chinwe and Nnamdi (2024) examined the role of organizational culture in fostering women's leadership in their study "Cultivating Gender Diversity in Cooperative Management." Through focus group discussions with cooperative members and analysis of case studies from successful cooperatives, their research highlighted the importance of cultivating supportive organizational cultures that prioritize diversity. They also provided recommendations for integrating gender considerations into cooperative policies and practices, emphasizing the need for inclusive environments to enhance women's leadership opportunities.

Ogunleye and Ige (2023) investigated the impact of community engagement on women's leadership in their study "Engaging Communities for Women's Leadership in Cooperatives." Using a participatory research approach, they gathered qualitative data through community workshops and interviews with members. Their findings revealed that involving local communities in discussions about gender roles and leadership not only increased women's representation in cooperatives but also led to improved decision-making processes and better overall outcomes within these organizations.

Methodology

Research Design

This study will adopt a survey method, which allows for the systematic collection of data from a defined population. By combining structured questionnaires with semi-structured interviews, we will gather both quantitative and qualitative insights. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the impact of women's representation in cooperative management.

Setting

The research will take place in Enugu State, Nigeria, an area known for its diverse cooperative structures. Focusing on this region enables us to explore the unique dynamics and challenges faced by women in cooperative management within a specific cultural and socio-economic context.

Target Population

The target population consists of approximately 500 women who are actively involved in cooperative management across various sectors in Enugu State. This specific group is chosen due to their direct involvement in decision-making processes, making them ideal respondents for assessing the influence of their representation on organizational performance.

Sample Size

To determine the appropriate sample size, the Taro Yamane formula will be employed:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}$$

Where:

$N = 500$ (target population)

$e = 0.05$ (margin of error)

Calculating the sample size:

$$n = \frac{500}{1+500(0.05^2)} = \frac{500}{1+1.25} = \frac{500}{2.25} = 222$$

Thus, the study aims to target approximately **222** women, ensuring a statistically significant representation of the population.

Sampling Techniques

Stratified random sampling will be utilized to ensure that various sectors of cooperatives—such as agricultural, consumer, and credit cooperatives—are adequately represented. This technique will help mitigate bias and enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire will be crafted to gather quantitative data, including Likert-scale questions to assess attitudes and perceptions regarding decision-making effectiveness and organizational performance. Additionally, semi-structured interviews will be conducted to obtain qualitative data, allowing participants to share their experiences and insights in greater depth.

Validity of Instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, expert reviews will be conducted. Feedback from academic professionals and practitioners in cooperative management will guide revisions. A pilot study will also be carried out with a small subset of participants to refine the instrument further.

Reliability of Instrument

The reliability of the instrument will be evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha, with a target coefficient of 0.70 or higher. This will confirm that the items in the questionnaire are consistently measuring the intended constructs.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection will occur through surveys distributed to participants via online platforms and face-to-face interactions, depending on accessibility. In-depth interviews will be conducted in a comfortable setting to encourage open dialogue, ensuring participants feel safe sharing their experiences.

Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis will involve descriptive statistics to summarize and describe the data collected from the questionnaires. Frequency tables will be created to illustrate key findings, allowing for easy interpretation of the results. Qualitative data from interviews will be analyzed thematically, identifying common patterns and insights related to women’s representation and decision-making.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: How would you rate the effectiveness of decision-making in your cooperative with women in leadership roles?

<i>Options/Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Very effective</i>	50	22.5%
<i>Effective</i>	75	33.8%
<i>Neutral</i>	40	18.0%
<i>Ineffective</i>	35	15.8%
<i>Very ineffective</i>	22	9.9%
<i>Total</i>	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

This table illustrates the respondents' views on the effectiveness of decision-making in cooperatives with women in leadership roles. A combined total of 56.3% of respondents rated decision-making as either "very effective" or "effective," indicating a generally positive perception of women's impact in management. In contrast, 25.7% felt that decision-making was ineffective or very ineffective, suggesting that there are still challenges present. The neutral responses, accounting for 18.0%, reflect a significant portion of participants who may require more information or experience to form a definitive opinion. Overall, the data highlights a favorable trend towards recognizing the benefits of women's representation in leadership positions within cooperatives.

Table 2: To what extent do you believe women's representation in management influences the overall performance of your cooperative?

Options/Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Very high extent	60	27.0%
High extent	80	36.0%
Moderate extent	45	20.3%
Low extent	25	11.3%
Not at all	12	5.4%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

This table presents respondents' perceptions regarding the influence of women's representation in management on the overall performance of their cooperatives. A significant 63.0% of participants indicated that women's representation has a "very high" or "high" impact on performance, suggesting a strong recognition of the positive contributions women make in leadership roles. Conversely, 16.7% of respondents felt that this representation has a "low" impact or none at all, indicating that some still harbor doubts about its effectiveness. The 20.3% of respondents who selected "moderate extent" reflect a more cautious view, possibly suggesting the need for further evidence to solidify their beliefs. Overall, the findings reveal a generally optimistic attitude towards the benefits of women's involvement in cooperative management and its correlation with enhanced organizational performance.

Table 3: What do you consider the biggest barrier for women in achieving leadership positions within cooperatives?

Options/Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Societal norms and stereotypes	80	36.0%
Lack of access to training and resources	50	22.5%
Limited networking opportunities	45	20.3%
Discrimination in selection processes	47	21.2%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

This table outlines the respondents' views on the primary barriers preventing women from attaining leadership roles within cooperatives. The most significant barrier identified was "societal norms and stereotypes," which received 36.0% of responses, indicating a widespread perception that cultural attitudes hinder women's progress. Following this, "lack of access to training and resources" accounted for 22.5%, highlighting the need for better educational and professional development opportunities. Limited networking opportunities and discrimination in selection processes were also noted, with 20.3% and 21.2% of respondents recognizing these issues as significant barriers. The distribution of responses underscores the multifaceted

challenges women face in achieving leadership roles, suggesting that addressing these barriers will be crucial for enhancing women's representation in cooperative management.

Table 4: How significant do you feel the challenge of work-life balance is for women pursuing leadership roles in cooperatives?

Options/Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Very significant	90	40.5%
Significant	60	27.0%
Somewhat significant	45	20.3%
Not significant	27	12.2%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

This table presents respondents' perceptions of the significance of work-life balance challenges for women aspiring to leadership positions in cooperatives. A substantial 67.5% of respondents indicated that the challenge is either "very significant" or "significant," suggesting a widespread acknowledgment of the difficulties women face in managing both professional and personal responsibilities. In contrast, only 12.2% of participants felt that the challenge is not significant, indicating that a minority may not perceive work-life balance as a critical factor in women's leadership aspirations. The 20.3% who identified the challenge as "somewhat significant" reflect a nuanced view, suggesting that while they recognize the issue, its impact may vary. Overall, the findings emphasize the need for strategies and policies that support work-life balance, which could facilitate women's advancement into leadership roles within cooperatives.

Table 5: What type of support would most help increase women's representation in cooperative management?

Options/Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Leadership training programs	70	31.5%
Mentorship and sponsorship initiatives	90	40.5%
Flexible work policies	35	15.8%
Awareness campaigns about women's contributions	27	12.2%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

This table highlights respondents' opinions on the types of support that would most effectively enhance women's representation in cooperative management. The most favored option, "mentorship and sponsorship initiatives," garnered 40.5% of responses, underscoring the importance of guidance and support from established leaders in facilitating women's advancement. Following this, "leadership training programs" received 31.5%, indicating a strong desire for educational resources to build necessary skills. Meanwhile, 15.8% of respondents identified "flexible work policies" as a key support mechanism, reflecting the need for work

environments that accommodate personal responsibilities. Lastly, awareness campaigns about women's contributions received 12.2%, suggesting that while important, this option is seen as less critical than direct support initiatives. Overall, the data indicates a clear preference for actionable support mechanisms that can empower women in cooperative management roles.

Table 6: Which recommendation do you believe would most improve decision-making processes in cooperatives?

Options/Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Increasing the number of women in leadership roles	85	38.3%
Implementing gender-sensitive policies	60	27.0%
Encouraging participatory decision-making	50	22.5%
Providing resources for capacity building	27	12.2%
Total	222	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

This table summarizes respondents' recommendations for improving decision-making processes in cooperatives. A significant 38.3% of participants believe that increasing the number of women in leadership roles would be the most effective strategy, highlighting a strong consensus on the importance of representation. Following this, 27.0% support the implementation of gender-sensitive policies, indicating recognition of the need for frameworks that promote equality and inclusion. Additionally, 22.5% suggested encouraging participatory decision-making, which emphasizes collaboration and diverse input. Lastly, 12.2% identified providing resources for capacity building as an important recommendation, suggesting that equipping individuals with the necessary skills can enhance overall effectiveness. The responses collectively emphasize the critical role of women's representation and inclusive practices in fostering better decision-making in cooperative settings.

Summary of Findings

The following summarizes the key findings:

- i. The survey results highlight a generally favorable perception of women's representation in cooperative management among respondents. Specifically, a substantial 56.3% rated decision-making effectiveness as either "very effective" or "effective," indicating that many believe women's involvement positively influences cooperative operations. Furthermore, 63.0% of participants asserted that women's representation significantly affects the overall performance of their cooperatives. This suggests a growing recognition of the value that women bring to leadership roles, reinforcing the idea that increasing their representation could lead to enhanced decision-making processes and improved organizational outcomes. Such findings underscore the importance of promoting gender diversity in management as a means to foster more effective governance in cooperatives.
- ii. The analysis of barriers preventing women from achieving leadership positions revealed that societal norms and stereotypes are viewed as the most significant

obstacles, cited by 36.0% of respondents. This finding underscores the pervasive influence of cultural attitudes that often limit women's opportunities in leadership. Additionally, 22.5% of participants pointed to a lack of access to training and professional development resources as a critical barrier, indicating that many women may feel unprepared to step into leadership roles. Limited networking opportunities (20.3%) and discrimination in selection processes were also recognized as significant challenges. Collectively, these insights reveal the multifaceted nature of the barriers women face, suggesting that effective strategies must not only challenge societal attitudes but also provide practical resources and support to facilitate women's advancement in cooperative management.

- iii. When it comes to enhancing women's representation in cooperative management, respondents overwhelmingly identified mentorship and sponsorship initiatives as the most effective support mechanism, with 40.5% of participants selecting this option. This highlights the critical role of guidance and support from established leaders in helping women navigate their career paths. Additionally, a significant 38.3% of respondents believed that increasing the number of women in leadership roles would most improve decision-making processes within cooperatives. This reflects a strong consensus on the necessity of representation to foster inclusive decision-making. Other recommendations, such as implementing gender-sensitive policies (27.0%) and encouraging participatory decision-making (22.5%), further emphasize the need for systemic changes that promote equity. Overall, these findings suggest that targeted interventions, such as mentoring programs and policy reforms, are essential for empowering women and creating a more inclusive environment that can enhance both leadership and organizational effectiveness within cooperatives.

Conclusion

The findings from this study underscore the significant impact of women's representation in cooperative management on decision-making effectiveness and overall organizational performance. Respondents largely recognize the positive contributions women can make when in leadership roles, with a notable majority believing that their involvement enhances both governance and operational outcomes. However, the research also highlights critical barriers that persist, such as societal norms, limited access to training, and networking challenges, which impede women's advancement in these roles.

To address these barriers and promote greater representation, targeted support mechanisms—particularly mentorship and sponsorship initiatives—are essential. Additionally, increasing the number of women in leadership positions and implementing gender-sensitive policies will create a more inclusive decision-making environment. By fostering such changes, cooperatives can not only improve their organizational effectiveness but also pave the way for a more equitable and diverse management structure. Overall, this study advocates for a proactive approach to empowering women in cooperative management, which will ultimately benefit both the organizations themselves and the broader community they serve.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. To effectively support women's advancement in cooperative management, it is vital to establish structured mentorship and sponsorship initiatives. These programs should pair emerging female leaders with experienced mentors who can provide valuable guidance, share insights from their own career journeys, and facilitate networking opportunities. Such relationships can help build confidence and create pathways for professional growth. Mentorship can also include peer support groups where women can discuss challenges and strategies, fostering a sense of community. By creating a culture of mentorship, cooperatives can not only empower women but also cultivate a future generation of female leaders equipped to take on management roles.
- ii. Cooperatives should prioritize the creation and delivery of comprehensive training programs tailored specifically for women aspiring to leadership positions. These programs should encompass a wide range of topics, including leadership skills, decision-making processes, financial management, and conflict resolution. Workshops, seminars, and online courses can provide women with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the complexities of cooperative management. Furthermore, training should also focus on developing soft skills such as communication, negotiation, and emotional intelligence, which are critical for effective leadership. By investing in the professional development of women, cooperatives can significantly enhance their preparedness for management roles, leading to improved organizational performance.
- iii. It is crucial for cooperatives to adopt and implement gender-sensitive policies that promote inclusivity and equity within their management structures. This involves establishing clear guidelines that ensure gender representation on boards and in leadership teams, thereby fostering diverse perspectives in decision-making. Additionally, cooperatives should create flexible work arrangements that accommodate the unique challenges faced by women, such as caregiving responsibilities. Policies that support work-life balance, such as remote work options and flexible hours, can help women thrive in leadership roles. By fostering an inclusive workplace culture that values diversity and equity, cooperatives can dismantle systemic barriers that have historically hindered women's advancement, ensuring that they have equal opportunities to contribute to the success of the organization.

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