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## CONTENTS

<b>Sr. No.</b>	<b>TITLE &amp; NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)</b>	<b>Page No.</b>
1.	<b>A STUDY OF SERVICE MARKETING MIX IN PRIVATE HOSPITALS</b> <i>SUHAS C. MARATHE &amp; DR. H. M. THAKAR</i>	1
2.	<b>DEREGULATION OF PETROL AND DIESEL PRICES AND THE RESULTANT ISSUES IN MADURAI DISTRICT</b> <i>P. ZAHIR HUSSAIN &amp; DR. A. ABBAS MANTHIRI</i>	7
3.	<b>ROLE OF HOMESTAYS IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF VILLAGE TOURISM IN WAYANAD DISTRICT</b> <i>K. C. ROBBINS &amp; DR. DILEEP M.R.</i>	11
4.	<b>A STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TAIWAN SEMICONDUCTOR PRODUCTIVITY AND MACROECONOMIC FACTORS</b> <i>CHENG-WEN LEE &amp; TSAI-LUN CHO</i>	16
5.	<b>ASSESSMENT OF THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA</b> <i>ONUGU CHARLES UCHENNA, OKAFOR IFEOMA &amp; AGBASI OBIANUJU</i>	21
6.	<b>OPTIMAL EFFICIENCY OF INNOVATIVE DESIGN FOR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT</b> <i>CHENG-WEN LEE &amp; BING-YI LIN</i>	27
7.	<b>AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF COIR CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES: A CASE STUDY EAST AND WEST GODAVARI DISTRICTS OF ANDHRA PRADESH</b> <i>DR. G. NAGARAJA</i>	35
8.	<b>GENDER PREFERENCES IN BRAND COMMITMENT, IMPULSE AND HEDONIC BUYING IN THE PERSONAL CARE SECTOR IN PUNE</b> <i>DR. PRADNYA CHITRAO, SANCHARI DEBGUPTA, SATISH TEJANKAR, SONU KUMARI &amp; AMIT KUMAR SINGH</i>	42
9.	<b>FINANCIAL ANALYSIS OF PAPER INDUSTRY IN TAMILNADU: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY</b> <i>DR. P. RAJANGAM &amp; DR. P. SUBRAMANIAN</i>	47
10.	<b>GREEN CSR PRACTICES: HR AND SCM - A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE: A CASE STUDY BASED REVIEW OF COGNIZANT</b> <i>PRADNYA CHITRAO, ARCHANA KOLTE &amp; BHAGYASHREE DESHMUKH</i>	52
11.	<b>IMPACT OF MACROECONOMIC VARIABLES ON PROFITABILITY OF LISTED GOLD LOAN COMPANIES IN INDIA</b> <i>KETAN MULCHANDANI, KALYANI MULCHANDANI &amp; MEGHA JAIN</i>	56
12.	<b>THE REASONS FOR FACULTY ATTRITION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS PROVIDING UG COURSES AND THEIR RETENTION STRATEGIES (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELF-FINANCING COLLEGES IN THE CITY OF BANGALORE)</b> <i>PUSHPA L</i>	62
13.	<b>A PROFILE OF THE GIRL CHILD IN INDIA</b> <i>VINITA VASU</i>	70
14.	<b>WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN MGNREGA IN INDIA</b> <i>DR. AJAB SINGH</i>	72
15.	<b>A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF BRAND AMBASSADOR ON BUYING BEHAVIOR OF CONSUMERS OF CYCLE PURE AGARBATHIES: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MYSURU CITY</b> <i>ABHISHEK M &amp; SRI RANJINI S</i>	78
16.	<b>INVESTORS PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS MUTUAL FUND INVESTMENTS IN TRUCHIRAPPALLI DISTRICT</b> <i>R. KATHIRVEL &amp; DR. S. P. DHANDAYUTHAPANI</i>	82
17.	<b>IDENTIFY THE NEED FOR DEVELOPING A NEW SERVICE QUALITY MODEL IN TODAY'S SCENARIO: A REVIEW OF SERVICE QUALITY MODELS</b> <i>ANKIT AGARWAL &amp; GULSHAN KUMAR</i>	86
18.	<b>IMPACT OF FDI IN SERVICE SECTOR ON ECONOMIC GROWTH OF INDIA</b> <i>RAHUL YADAV</i>	94
19.	<b>FINANCIAL OBSTACLES AND DISPUTES FACED BY STEEL INDUSTRIES OF INDIA</b> <i>PARAG RAY &amp; DURGAPRASAD NAVULLA</i>	99
20.	<b>CORPORATISATION OF GOVERNMENT: CORPOCRACY</b> <i>PREETI KANCHAN PATIL</i>	104
	<b>REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK &amp; DISCLAIMER</b>	107

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## ASSESSMENT OF THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examined the participation of Women in Agricultural Cooperative Societies in Anambra State, Nigeria. Data for the study were derived from the four agricultural zones (Aguata, Awka, Anambra and Onitsha) of the state. Three hundred and fifty-six respondents were randomly selected from the zones. Descriptive analytical methods were extensively used. These include frequency distribution tables, percentages and average mean. To determine the extent to which women are involved in the leadership of the cooperatives and also the women's involvement in deciding goals, five points likert scale analysis were employed. For the hypotheses posed, inferential statistics were used to analyse the formulated hypotheses. Hypotheses one and two were tested with paired t-test model. The result revealed that women participate significantly in agricultural cooperative goal setting and decision making process. Finally, the result showed that women were involved significantly in the implementation of activities of the agricultural cooperative societies. Optimal realizations of these objectives were hindered by gender discrimination, poor access to extension services, cultural hindrances; illiteracy and weak educational background e.t.c. In order to overcome these challenges, proper education, skill acquisition and training should be given to women. Again, there should be no discrimination on whom to assume the executive positions, everyone should be given equal opportunity to democratically participate in the management of cooperative business. This will encourage the women and motivate them to superior performance.*

### KEYWORDS

women cooperatives, women participation, agricultural cooperatives, cooperative leadership and decision making.

### INTRODUCTION

The term participation connotes with different meaning at different context. Literally for some to participate means to take part in or to be involved in participation is enabling people to realise their rights to participate in and access information relating to the decision making process which affect their lives (Chambers, 2005).

Participation could also be defined as a direct involvement of marginalised groups in a development process, which aims to build people's capabilities to have access to and control of resources, benefits and opportunities towards self reliance and an improved quality of life (Mellouli; 2003). Participation in extension is the process of communicating among men, women farmers and extension workers during which the farmers take the leading role to analyse their situation, to plan, implement and evaluate development activities. It is a way of helping the disadvantaged people and women to gain access to and control over resources or services such as training farmers tour, inputs, information etc. needed to sustain and improve their livelihood (Rabindra, 2008).

Participation in this study context is the involvement of women farmers in various process and activities (eg training) and decision making and with collaboration and interaction with extension workers. Indicators of participation are just listening active discussion (free communication between extension workers and farmers), bringing in new topics in training, partial discussion (means something talking with extension worker and other group members but hesitant to interact) (Rabindra, 2008).

Furthermore, participation in training aims to bring desirable changes in knowledge and skill of farmers. Training is also believed to bring positive change in farmer's attitudes. Women participation in training means providing women equitable access to opportunities, benefits and resources available in the society. It can be an essential ingredients of women's empowerment. Ensuring women's participation is essential to achieve gender equity in access and control over resources (Mellouli, 2003).

(Gertler, 2010) also explained that participation in cooperative societies are practical vehicles for cooperation and collective action as well as building up and reinforcing community which are crucial to sustainable development.

In addition, rural women participation in all aspects of cultivation including weeding, thinning, applying fertilizers, harvesting and sales of farm produce (Sabo, 2003). (Okunade, 2007) opined that women have been found to be responsible for the production of the agricultural products to sustain the population. She maintained that women are producers of agricultural produce and also actively involved in rural and agricultural development-projects, carrying out different activities women farmers play important roles as producers of foods, managers of natural resources, income earners and caretakers of household food and nutrition security (Lily and Sheryl, 2001). They are responsible for ensuring that adequate food supply are available and their families have access to enough income to purchase food if they do not grow it themselves. It has been assessed that 50% of the food in the country is produced by rural women (Auta, Abubakar and Hassan, 2000).

(Rahman, 2008) opined that women in agriculture (WIA) in Nigeria were developed in an attempt to address the gender – related deficiencies within the existing extension programmes. This was launched to improve the accessibility of women to agricultural extension services. This was done within the existing state of agricultural extension programme.



However, (Bill and Melinda, 2008) argued that women comprise the vast majority of small holders and in most sub-Saharan African and South Asia. Women are afforded less status than men, have less access to resources and have greater responsibilities given their dual reproductive and productive roles in rural households. In Anambra State, there are many cooperative societies. But to date, no known research work on their participatory attributes of women in agricultural cooperatives is available. Hence, it is the intention of this study to close this gap.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Women bear the brunt of domestic responsibilities including the nurture and care of children and the elderly. Women are solely responsible and face great pressure on all sides; violence and abuse in many forms are part of the daily experience of many women (Friedrick, 2010).

Women play a vital role in advancing agricultural development and food security. They participate in many aspects of rural life in paid employment, trade and marketing, as well as many unpaid activities, such as tending to crops and animals, collecting water and wood for fuel, and caring for family members (FAO, 2011). Women also manage household consumption and food preparation. But women face many constraints in the multiple activities they pursue, less land ownership, access to credit, extension and other service and ability to hire labour (Doss, Cherly, Caren and Camen, 2008). Too often these constraints as well as women's current and potential contributions to agricultural production go unrecognised.

Survival of the agricultural cooperatives depend on efficient management and organisational leadership which is very vital or the realisation of their goal. Some women have the traits for effective leadership which include, intelligence, courage, initiative and self confidence. But studies have shown that in agricultural cooperatives women have limited opportunities to participate in leadership positions (Aregawi et al, 2013). Moreso gender discrimination within agricultural cooperative and other societal structures tend to privilege male farmers interest. Evidence has shown that greater attention is being paid to ensure that agricultural policy is gender sensitive and address barriers to women's equal participation in leadership and also benefit in rural producer group and agricultural cooperative societies (FAO 2011, World Bank 2009, USAID 2012).

Pakrash (2003) reports that women participation in agricultural cooperatives is very low even when they have strong influence on them through the heads of the household. Certain obvious barrier restricts their direct and formal entry and participation in agricultural cooperative activities. Moreso, only very few serve as board of directors. According to him their simple and clear perception is that the administrative and decision making domain rests with the menard (women do not wish to over burden themselves with financial responsibilities in case something goes wrong with the cooperative society. They of course contributed significantly in farm operations.

However, (Emily, 1999) opined that though women take active role in agricultural production, processing and marketing of food products, their identity as farmers is highly contested within the agricultural development framework, yet (they are not recognised in farm decision making. In addition, women's access to land, technology and decision making power is critically impeded (Emily, 1999). Unless these structural and cultural barriers are actively addressed, agricultural development in the rural area will not be fully achieved. In Anambra State there are many cooperatives where women full participate in activities of cooperatives and also occupy reasonable positions. But to date, there is no documented work on the participatory attributes of women in the state. as such, there is necessity to determine the level of implementation in activities of the cooperatives especially their extent of their involvement in goal setting and decision making process in agricultural cooperative in Anambra State, Nigeria. Thus, the intention of this study is to close this gap, as the study focuses on the participation of women members of agricultural cooperatives in Anambra State, Nigeria.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of the study is to assess the participation of women in agricultural cooperative societies in Anambra State.

The specific objectives are to

- (i) determine whether women are involved in the leadership of the cooperatives.
- (ii) assess the depth of involvement of the women in deciding the goals of the cooperatives.
- (iii) determine the degree of participation of women in implementing the activities of the cooperatives.
- (iv) examine challenges women do face towards effective participation in the cooperatives.

## HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

H<sub>01</sub>: Women do not significantly participate in goal setting and decision making in agricultural cooperatives in Anambra State.

H<sub>02</sub>: Women do not significantly participate in implementation of activities in agricultural cooperatives in Anambra State.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

The term participation connotes with different meaning at different context.

Literally, for some to participate means to take part in or to be involved i, participation is enabling people to realise the rights to participate in and access information relating to, the decision making process which affect their lives (Chambers, 2005). Participation could also mean a direct involvement of marginalised groups in a development process, which aims to build people's capabilities to have access to and control of resources, benefits and opportunities towards self reliance and an improved quality of life (Mellouli, 2003). But participation in this study context is the involvement of women farmers in various process and activities (eg training) and decision making and with collaboration and interaction with extension workers.

## WHY PARTICIPATION

In view of (Woidegebiel, 2009), he stated that participation in agricultural cooperatives ensures sustainable food security and contributes growth and development endeavour of the region. Veerakumaran (2005) said that participation can serve as fundamental tool for sustainable food security at household level. Further posited that participation in agricultural cooperatives is the best institutional intervention for attaining food security in any country.

There are other reasons for participation according to Naika and Siddaramaiah (2006). They are: for management of skills, mobilization of community, conflict resolution and institution building among extension personnel.

- People's participation increases the actual benefit to the beneficiaries.
- It decreases the dependence of people on government to make the public self-sustaining.
- It makes possible for the mobilization of local sources.
- Implementation of projection at micro level

## COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE

Cooperative governance is defined as a set of internal and external mechanisms and controls enabling the members to define and ensure attainment of cooperative objectives, securing their continuity and cooperative principles (Brasilia, 2008).

Good governance is now accessed as vital to achieving Millennium Development goals and as a pre-condition for sustainable economic growth. Ensuring better governance of cooperative, financial institutions and markets are increasingly recognised for developing countries despite the limited number of firms there with widely traded shares (Oman and Bieme, 2005). However, until now little attention has been paid to the governance needs of other institutional form of business such as cooperatives despite their considerable presence in many developing countries. The cooperative sector as a whole remains poorly understood and its specific governance challenges remain as yet largely unexplored (Shaw, 2006).

Brasilia (2008) stated that the main function of cooperative governance practices is to ensure that executive pursue the goals determined either by owners or by those responsible for strategic decisions and not their own goals. More, individuals in charge of preparing and conducting strategic issues shall monitor the behaviour of those who carry it out, exemplified by a board of administration, monitoring the management and acquiring transparency in information and accountability.

Ijamn (2003) opined that there are some conditions that are necessary for successful agricultural governance.

- Cooperatives are member-driven, member controlled and member responsive organisation.
- Cooperatives are efficiently managed by experienced, trained and professionally qualified staff under the supervision and control of democratically elected boards of directors.
- Principles of accountability and answerability role model, ethical behaviour and good governance are employed.
- Adherence to the @joint use@ concept eg joint marketing, joint purchasing, joint use of capital, joint use of facilities if cooperatives have integrated their operations with the needs of their member-households.

## DECISION MAKING IN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES

Arigbo and Ifenkwe (2000) opined that taking adequate and timely decision by a farmer or group of farmers is a good farm management practice necessary for increased food production. This ensures that the right things are done in the farm at the right time. Women have been the major food producers in rural communities especially in the African regions (Arigboant Ifenkwe (2003) quoting African farmer, 1994). Consequently, they (women) are required to be at the forefront in taking various farm decisions. Despite women's key role in agriculture and development, pressure must still be mounted to ensure that government, economic planners and donor institutions place a high priority on bolstering women farmers.

Jibowo (2000) posited that in Nigeria, and most developing part of the world, the father is the key actor in the agricultural decision making process, but the mother influences approves or at least agrees with these choices before it could be pursued with cooperation of other members of the family.

Akinwuni (2006) and Dada (2004), in research in Osun State, found out that the women participated more in household decision making and in communities where women were denied participation, they would eventually participate as they get older, though this is inversely related to farm size.

## PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES

Rural women participate in all aspects of cultivation including planting, weeding, thinning, apply in fertilizer, harvesting and sales of farm produce (Sabo 2003). In Nigeria, many programmes have brought about remarkable changes in the lives of the rural women. Programmes like Better life for Rural Women which was initiated in 1987. The programme succeeded in having the attention of the authorities and the society in general to the plight of rural women and sort out measures to bring about favourable changes in their lives. The programme made a giant stride in different sectors such as health, education, social welfare, agriculture and cooperatives. However, the programme was terminated in 1993 (Sabo, 2007).

In furtherance, family support programme encourages agricultural pursuit in the family which will improve small scale household production and development of cottage industries. The programme focused on specific areas as social needs of the society and how best this could be addressed through social welfare programme especially in the areas of health, education and income generation were the core focus of this programme (Nasiru, 2004). However, women farmers play important role as producers of food, managers of natural resources, income earners and care takers of household food and nutrition security were also accommodated by the programme (Quinsubing et al; 2004). The programme had the responsibility of ensuring that adequate food supplies are available and their families have access to enough income to purchase food if they do not grow it themselves (Lawal, 2004). It is estimate that 50% of the food in Nigeria is produced by rural women. The women in agriculture (WIA) programme in Nigeria was developed in an attempt to address the gender related deficiencies within the existing extension programme. This was launched to improve the accessibility of women to agricultural extension services (World bank, 2000). This was done within the existing state agricultural extension programme. They were intended to provide practical insight on how to change extension services to meet the need of women farmers in rural areas.

Women participation in agricultural cooperative societies play important roles in agricultural activities both at the on-farm and off-farm levels (Oguoma, 1994).

## METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Anambra State, Nigeria. It covered the agricultural cooperative societies in the state. the state derives its name from the River, the largest most southerly, left bank tributary of the River Niger. The state capital is Awka. The economic activities in the state are mostly agriculture. The administrative structures of agricultural development in the state are four agricultural zones. They are Aguata, Anambra, Awka and Onitsha agricultural zones. The total number of registered and active agricultural cooperatives as confirmed by the authority in the zones is 1204 with total membership strength of 15990 which constitute the population. Multistage sampling technique was adopted. Then, in order to have optimum representation of the population, Taro Yamane formular was used to get the manageable sample size which is 356 respondents. Therefore 356 questionnaires were designed and randomly distributed but only 287 were duly filled and returned.

Data gotten from the respondents were analysed with both descriptive and inferential statistics model. The descriptive statistics used include, percentages, frequency distribution table, average mean and five point likert scale measured with conventional threshold of 3. The hypotheses were tested with paired T-test model. As such the results were presented as follows

## DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

### WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN LEADERSHIP

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES ON WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP

S/No	Cooperative Leadership Position	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Decision
i.	President	2.42	Not Involved
ii.	Vice President	3.78	Involved
iii.	Secretary	3.06	Involved
iv.	Management Committee Member	4.31	Involved
v.	Treasurer	3.68	Involved
vi.	Provost	2.65	Not Involved
vii.	Subcommittee member	3.39	Involved
viii.	Welfare committee member	3.17	Involved
ix.	Financial Secretary	3.20	Involved
	<b>Grand Mean (<math>\bar{X}</math>)</b>	<b>3.296</b>	<b>Regular</b>

Source: Field Survey, September, 2015

From the table 1 above with threshold of 3.0 (i.e variable > 3.0 is negative while  $\leq 3.0$  is positive) from 5 point scale analysis. The grand mean ( $\bar{x} = 3.296$ ) indicated that women are regularly involved in the majority of the leadership position available in the cooperative society. But, they are not regularly involved in president position of leadership. The table also shows that the women of the area are empowered enough to occupy majority of the executive position in the cooperative, since women occupy most of the executive seats, they are likely to participate actively in the business of the cooperatives.

TABLE 2: RESPONSES DISTRIBUTION ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF THEIR COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES

S/No	Expected Goals	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Decision
i.	Cooperative meetings e.g AGMs	4.46	Involved
ii.	Decision on how to improve cooperative income	3.82	Involved
iii.	Decision on where to obtain low interest loan	3.74	Involved
iv.	On how to access training of members	3.62	Involved
v.	To improve access to inputs	3.25	Involved
vi.	To access extension agents service	3.47	Involved
vii.	Conflict resolution	3.06	Involved
viii.	Access government and NGOs aids and agents	2.38	Not involved
ix.	Network with other organizations	2.71	Not involved
x.	Discipline and sanction of default members	3.35	Involved
	<b>Grand Mean (<math>\bar{X}</math>)</b>	<b>3.386</b>	<b>Involved</b>

Source: Field Survey, September, 2015

The result of table 5 above access the depth of women involvement in decision making process (deciding goals) of the cooperatives; with 5 point scale analysis using standard mean ( $\bar{x} = 3.0$ ). Then, the decision rule is that, any expected goal that is less than the standard mean of 3.0 is considered weak and women are not involve in such decision while any expected goal that is greater or equal 3.0 is strong; implies that women are involved in taking such decision in cooperatives. Generally, the grand mean ( $\bar{x} = 3.386$ ) indicates that women are involved in decision making process of their cooperatives societies, except in the aspect of access to government and NGO aids and grants (2.38) and network with other organization (2.71).

**Test of Hypothesis One ( $H_{01}$ )**

Women do not significantly participate in cooperative goal setting and decision making process.

TABLE 3: TO TEST THIS HYPOTHESIS, PARAMETRIC STATISTICS PAIRED T-TEST WAS USED AND THE SUMMARY WAS PRESENTED IN THE BELOW TABLE

	N	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	St. Dev	SE. Mean
Strongly involved	9	201.6	39.0	13.8
Not involved (weak)	9	85.4	39.0	13.8
Difference	9	116.3	11.9	27.5

95% lower bound for mean difference = 64.1

T-test of mean difference = 0

T-value = 0

P-value = 0.002

**DECISION**

Since the P-value (0.002) is significant at 5% level of significance. That is, the P-value is less than 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate was affirmed. This implies that women participate significantly in cooperative goal setting and decision making process.

Therefore, this further strengthened the result of descriptive statistics in table 5 and the researcher concluded that women are involved in the decision making process of their cooperative societies. This result is also in line with the result of Idrisa, Sulumbe and Mohammed (2007); Okafor (2008); and Awotide (2012), as they studied women participation in decision making process of cooperative society.

**WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN IMPLEMENTATION OF COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES**

TABLE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES THE WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN IMPLEMENTATION OF COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

S/No	Cooperative Activities	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Decision
i.	Farm crop production	4.36	Participated
ii.	Processing of farm crops (e.g garri, oil palm)	3.71	Participated
iii.	Credit facilities administration	3.95	Participated
iv.	Harvesting and packaging of farm produce	2.68	Not participated
v.	Monitoring and supervision of cooperative activities	2.83	Not participated
vi.	Regular attendance to cooperative meetings	4.65	Participated
vii.	Patronizing cooperative business	4.37	Participated
viii.	Participation in voting and election	4.59	Participated
ix.	Adoption of technology through extension services	3.06	Participated
x.	Access cooperative education and training	3.21	Participated
xi.	Capital contribution (equity)	4.53	Participated
xii.	Payment of fines and dues	3.38	Participated
xiii.	Regular savings	4.26	Participated
xiv.	Repayment of loan	3.84	Participated
	<b>Grand Mean (<math>\bar{X}</math>)</b>	<b>3.8157</b>	<b>Participated</b>

Source: Field Survey, September, 2015

**Test Hypothesis ( $H_{02}$ )**

$H_{02}$ : Women do not significantly participate in the implementation of activities in agricultural cooperatives.

To test the above statement of hypothesis. The result of descriptive statistics in table 4 above was subjected to test of normality of the data and the result revealed that;

Not participated = 0.237 (normally distributed)

Participated = 0.369 (normally distributed)

Therefore, since the set of data is normally distributed parametric statistics was used. As such, the hypothesis two was tested with T-test and was presented table 5 below.

TABLE 5: PAIRED T-TEST AND CI (SUMMARY TABLE)

	N	Mean	St. Dev.	SE Mean
Not participate	14	182.95	38.70	8.44
Participate	14	104.05	38.70	8.44
Difference	14	78.9	77.4	16.9

95% lower bound for mean difference	=	49.8
T-test of mean different	=	(0 VS > 0)
T-value	=	4.67
P-value	=	-0.000

**DECISION**

The T-test result revealed that T-value (4.67) is significant at 5% level of significance, Since the P-value (0.000) is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate was accepted, this implies that, women do significantly participate in the implementation of cooperative activities.

Moreso, the outcome of this analysis correlate with the result of Rabindra (2008) and Ekesionye and Okolo (2012) where they affirmed the participation of women in activities of cooperatives.

**CHALLENGES AFFECTING WOMEN PARTICIPATION****TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES ON THE CHALLENGES THAT LIMIT WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES**

S/No	Challenges Affecting Women Participation In Agricultural Cooperatives	Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Decision
i.	Poor access to extension services	4.26	Challenge
ii.	Gender inequality (discrimination)	4.58	Challenge
iii.	Cultural hindrances	3.74	Challenge
iv.	Illiteracy and weak educational exposure	3.19	Challenge
v.	Discrimination on taking leadership position	3.82	Challenge
vi.	Wrong timing of meetings	3.41	Challenge
vii.	Lack of productive resources	3.25	Challenge
viii.	Long distance of cooperative meeting venue	3.08	Challenge
ix.	Household responsibilities	3.76	Challenge
x.	Lack of adequate support from husband	3.91	Challenge
xi.	Misconception on domestic and traditional role of women (sex stereotype)	4.08	Challenge
xii.	Economic responsibilities	3.29	Challenge
xiii.	Lack of technological diffusion (production and processing)	3.14	Challenge
xiv.	Poor marketing skills among women	2.38	Not at all
	<b>Grand Mean (<math>\bar{X}</math>)</b>	<b>3.565</b>	<b>Challenged</b>

Source: Field Survey, September, 2015

The 5 point scale analysis result table 9 with the standard mean of 3.0, indicating that any variable equal or greater than 3.0 is a challenge while variable less than 3.0 is otherwise. Therefore, the grand mean ( $\bar{X} = 3.565$ ) revealed that women participation in cooperative activities are being challenged by various factors. These include, poor access to extension services (4.26); gender inequality (4.58); cultural hindrances (3.74); illiteracy and weak educational exposure (3.19); discrimination in taking leadership position (3.82); household responsibilities (3.76), lack of adequate support from their husband (3.93); misconception on domestic and traditional role of women (sex stereotype) (4.08).

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

- (i) The research revealed that women participate significantly in the implementation of agricultural cooperative activities ( $\bar{X} = 3.815$ ).
- (ii) The involvement of women in deciding goals for agricultural production was very high, as the majority of them were part and parcel of formulating expected goals for the cooperatives. As such, this finding from the correlate with the result of other researchers, Idrisa et al (2007). Okafor (2008) and Awotide (2012) as they affirmed that women really participate in cooperative goal setting.
- (iii) Findings also revealed that women participation in cooperative activities were being challenged by ( $\bar{X} = 3.565$ ) various factors which range from poor extension services, sex stereotype, access to productive resources, traditional and cultural hindrances etc.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (i) There is need to give them proper education as this will help to remove some of the barriers to effective participation.
- (ii) Women was not be able to attain their full potentials if they are not given opportunity to occupy the highest position (president) in the cooperative society. Therefore, cooperative leaders and members should not discriminate on whom should be the president of the society, thus everyone should be given equal playing ground to democratically participate in the management of cooperative business enterprise. This would boost the morale of the women and motivate them to superior performance which will be beneficial to the agricultural and cooperative movement.
- (iii) On the part of the women co-operators, they should not relax on their achievement in participating in deciding goals of their society. They should at all times provide ideas that will bring about growth and development to their society. By so doing, their opinion will always be sought, their fellow members and societies will recognise their presence and impacts.

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