

## Influential Factors on Women's Participation in Agricultural Cooperative in the Digital Era

Vijay Kumar Pandey<sup>1,\*</sup>, Abebe Shanko<sup>2</sup> and Meenakshi Kaul<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA, Symbiosis International (Deemed University) Pune, India

<sup>2</sup>Department of Management, College of Business and Economics, Wollega University, Nekemte, Ethiopia

<sup>3</sup>Symbiosis Law School, NOIDA, Symbiosis International (Deemed University) Pune, India

### Abstract

Digitalization has brought ease in managing the operations of organizations in the world. However, education and digital literacy become hurdles for involving marginalized people. The participation of women is crucial for the overall development of humankind. "Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for achieving sustainable development and creating a more just and equitable world"[1]. Indeed, greater women's participation can significantly boost qualitative and quantitative output in all fields. Promoting women's participation in rural areas can significantly impact agricultural economies, including increasing food production and dairy output. However, the participation of women in decision-making, particularly in rural areas, is often limited. This paper focuses on Identifying and analyzing the factors that prevent women from playing a more significant role in rural economies, which is an essential step towards promoting women's economic empowerment and achieving more equitable and sustainable development outcomes in the digital era. The study's finding suggests that education levels, lack of adequate training, and household work are key factors that limit the participation of women.

**Keywords:** Women participation, farmers' multipurpose cooperative, constraining factors, cooperative management, Ethiopia

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\*Corresponding author. Email: vijay@symlaw.edu.in

### 1. Introduction

Depending on the task, women contribute significantly to rural economies, ranging from 30% to 95%. However, women often do not receive fair recognition for their contributions, even in advanced economies and democratic settings[2]. The reason could be that women need help with the fast-changing digital technology. Still, women's enrollment in Science and technology-related subjects in higher education is lesser.

Women comprise more than 50% of the world's agricultural labour force and play a critical role in food production systems[3]. They play a critical part in agriculture, and the production of food and family labour is essential for farming and raising rural living standards[4]. However, it is essential to recognize that the

global food system is complex and involves many actors and factors beyond women's labour in agriculture. While women's contributions are significant, feeding the world requires a collaborative effort from all sectors of society.

Each member of society's active participation leads to the developing and implementation of participatory programmes. Members' participation in specific development programmes results in participatory development. In rural areas, Programs that focus on individual development, cooperatives, women's growth, agricultural extension, and overall community development are essential for upgrading the quality of life. Programs focusing on increasing agricultural productivity, promoting sustainable farming practices, empowering women, and supporting overall economic growth and development in rural communities can have multiple benefits. For example, they can help increase food production, improve food security, reduce poverty,

promote gender equality, and support sustainable development. Such initiatives can also have positive spill-over effects on other sectors of the economy, such as health, education, and infrastructure, contributing to the overall well-being of rural communities. Women's participation in programs that aim to improve the quality of life in rural areas is crucial.

Involving individuals, families, and communities in programs and initiatives related to their health and welfare is essential for empowering them to take ownership of their well-being[5]. Women's engagement in development programs can significantly impact their ability to contribute labour, materials, and money to support the initiative. When women are actively involved in decision-making and planning, they can help to identify and prioritize the most pressing needs and develop appropriate solutions that are relevant and effective for their communities.

In many developing countries, cultural and social norms prioritize men's leadership and decision-making roles over those of women. Women in many developing countries are often relegated to low-paying jobs that are repetitive and monotonous, such as agriculture, domestic work, and factory work. These jobs are often physically demanding and require extended work hours, leaving women with little time and energy for other activities such as education, training, or civic engagement [6].

Many societies in developing countries are patriarchal, with social and cultural norms prioritizing men's rights and privileges over women's. In addition, women's work is often undervalued and underpaid, contributing to their economic marginalization and reducing their sense of dignity and self-worth [2]. In patriarchal societies, women's rights and empowerment are limited. Women may need access to resources, such as land, credit, and technology, which can make it difficult for them to pursue economic opportunities or improve their living standards.

Yes, that is true. Women comprise almost half the world's population, and their contributions are critical to sustainable development. By involving women in all aspects of society, including the economy, politics, and decision-making processes, we can ensure that their unique perspectives and needs are considered and that they have an equal opportunity to contribute to their communities and societies. Despite progress in recent years, women still need to overcome significant barriers to full participation in rural economies and communities. These barriers can include limited access to resources such as land, credit, and education, as well as social norms and cultural attitudes that limit women's participation in decision-making and economic activities.

In the context of the farmers' multipurpose agricultural cooperative society in the Wellega Province Region of Ethiopia, it is crucial to identify and analyze these barriers to women's participation. By understanding the specific challenges women face in this context, it may be possible to develop targeted interventions and policies that can help overcome these barriers and promote women's empowerment and participation.

Factors hindering women's participation in the cooperative society could include gender-based discrimination, lack of access to resources and training, limited participation in decision-making, and cultural attitudes that limit women's roles and opportunities. By exploring these factors in greater depth, it may be possible to develop strategies and policies to promote greater gender equality and empower women to participate fully in rural economies and communities.

## 2. Literature Review

In Africa, women comprise 54% of the total population, producing 55.4 % of the continent's assets and responsible for approximately 78% of the agricultural output[7].

Notwithstanding their contribution to Africa's economy, women are at a significant disadvantage vis-à-vis their male counterparts. They are underrepresented as employees, members and leaders in almost all spheres of activity. The low representation of women in cooperatives in Ethiopia is a concern, as cooperatives can provide significant economic and social benefits to their members, including increased access to markets, finance, and information. Addressing the gender gap in cooperatives requires targeted efforts to promote women's participation and leadership. This could involve providing training and support to women to develop their skills and confidence, creating policies and programs to promote gender equality in cooperatives, and addressing the cultural and social barriers that may prevent women from joining and participating in these organizations. Such efforts can help unlock women's potential in Ethiopia and contribute to the country's overall development[8]. Further, women account for 40% of employees and an almost negligible percentage of managerial positions in agricultural cooperatives in Kenya [9].

Although women contribute significantly to food production in Africa, the share of agricultural inputs and services they receive is meagre. Women produce 80% of Ethiopia's food, yet they receive just 7% of extension support and fewer than 10% of small-scale farmer loans. Furthermore, only 1% of the land is owned by women. They typically lack access to profitable possibilities such as cultivating cash crops, forcing them to participate in subsistence farming and unpaid agricultural labour [8]. Unfortunately, many Ethiopian working women are indeed employed in the unorganized sector, which includes informal and often low-paying jobs such as prostitution, bartending, housecleaning, and janitorial work. This situation is common in many developing countries where women face significant barriers to formal employment, including limited access to education and training, discrimination, and cultural and social norms that limit their opportunities.

Working in the unorganized sector can leave women vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and health risks, and they may lack access to fundamental labour rights and protections. Therefore, it is essential to create more

opportunities for women to engage in formal and decent work that provides them with fair pay, benefits, and protections.

Efforts to address this issue can include initiatives to improve access to education and training for women, increase their representation in decision-making positions, and create policies and programs that support women's economic empowerment. Encouraging the formalization of informal sectors through regulatory frameworks and support programs can also help to provide better working conditions, social protections, and access to markets for women in the unorganized sector.

Ethiopian society discriminates against women, hindering their progress and preventing them from enjoying the fruits of their labour. Over the years, discrimination has meant that women lag behind men in all fields, affecting their growth and the overall development of Ethiopian society.

Women's participation in cooperatives can influence economic activities and decision-making processes, access resources, and build their skills and confidence. This, in turn, can help to promote gender equity and social inclusion, as well as broader social and economic development. Cooperatives benefit immensely from the participation of women, who represent fifty per cent of the world's human resources. Actively involving women (invisible workforce) and putting them in positions of influence will strengthen the cooperatives economically and politically.

The active participation of women in cooperative movements shall empower them, enhance their decision-making abilities and make them understand the central role cooperatives can play in improving their lives[10]. Managerial positions and membership of committees have the potential to stimulate their minds and foster their overall development. The involvement of women in cooperatives should aim at enhancing their authority, which will, in turn, expand the range of possibilities for them, including opportunities for an independent income, access to productive resource ownership, and greater participation in the nation's economic development.

Joining male-dominated cooperatives and becoming active members comes with challenges for women. The obstacles they face are often daunting. Women have fewer options to join and engage in informal groups due to gender inequality and lower socio-economic levels. Man's influence over women's mobility, socio-cultural norms around domestic labour, and uneven obligations for procreation, productivity, and community service worsen the situation for women.

Gender-based inequalities in access to productive assets and resources significantly hinder women's economic empowerment and development. Women often face discriminatory laws, policies, and cultural norms that limit their ownership and control of assets such as land and property and their access to credit, information, and services. These barriers can prevent women from starting or expanding their businesses, accessing markets and finance, and participating fully in the economy and

society. Addressing these inequalities requires a comprehensive approach involving legal and policy reforms, targeted interventions to support women's entrepreneurship and access to resources, and efforts to shift social norms and attitudes reinforcing gender-based discrimination.

The main issues are gender bias in local government, low cooperative membership, societal mores that discourage participation, and lack of access to essential resources [11]. The difficulties women face impact how they participate in current cooperatives and establish new ones.

The current cooperative framework's most pressing gender challenges include women's low participation rates and underrepresentation in leadership and decision-making. Traditional African societies show a preference for men, giving them unfettered access to rights and privileges. Existing social and political structures do not offer women other access to production resources, agricultural inputs and credits. Moreover, women have few or no opportunities to participate in decision-making [12].

In Ethiopia, women occupy the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy. Men dominate the highly traditional and religious Ethiopian society, relegating women to a subordinate position. As a result, women confront many challenges, including feminization of unemployment and poverty, a lack of appropriate financial resources, unequal opportunity, and limited access to education. More often than not, women do not get to choose a profession and find themselves burdened with domestic tasks and social responsibilities.

Added to these disadvantages is the spectre of violence against women and some traditional harmful practices that pose significant challenges to them. The socio-economic barriers for women are formidable and impede their progress.

It is also the fact that still women hesitate to take science and technology related subjects. In the rural cooperatives as well having the knowledge of digital technology will ease the operations and hence candidates conversant with the digital technology are having edge. Given the previous backdrop, the study aims to assess the factors influencing women's membership in farmers' multifunctional primary cooperatives specifically in the digital era.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional and exploratory-descriptive research design was used to achieve the study's goal. A focus group research was conducted to understand better the barriers to women's participation in cooperative societies in the digital era. The research area was Ethiopia's Wellega province in the Oromia region.

### 3.2 Data source and type

The study relies on both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data sources are the sample women participating in the farmers' multifunctional cooperative society in the Wellega province of Ethiopia's Oromia region. Secondary data were gathered from public reports of farmers' multifunctional cooperatives' zonal district offices. The questionnaire was designed and presented to the ladies and comprised open and closed-ended questions based on focus group study.

### 3.3 Method of Sampling and Sample Determination

Judgmental sampling was used to select four kebeles and the female participants from the Wellega province of the Oromia region of Ethiopia. While choosing the kebele and then targeted women for the sample selection, the parameters used were extensive experience, adequate expertise, and unique insight knowledge. The total population of the women participating in the four (4) kebeles is 135, where 101 were selected.

The formula to compute the necessary sample size at a 95% confidence level, degree of variability=0.5, was given by [13].

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

Where 'n' is the sample size, 'N' is women's participants in cooperative and (e)<sup>2</sup>estimated error squared. Using the above formula, our total population size (N) of the female participants is 135, and the level of precision (e) is 5%.

$$n = \frac{135}{1+135(0.05)^2} \quad (2)$$

$$= \frac{135}{1+135(0.0025)} = 101 \quad (3)$$

Hence, 101 Samples were proportionally distributed in the selected kebeles.

Accordingly, table 1 reveals the selected kebeles concerning the total population and sample.

**Table 1** Sampled Kebele with a total population.

Sr. No	Kebele	Cooperativ e's name	Total population	Sample taken
1	Harowalo kebele	BurkituJire gna	40	40/101*100 =40
2	HaroGudina Kebele	HaroLalistu	28	28/101*100 =28
3	Agamsa kebele	Agamsa	38	38/101*100 =38
4	Migir kebele	Chancho	29	29/101*100 =29

Source - Office of the Cooperative Societies, Amuru district, Wellega Province, 2022

### 3.4 Method of data collection

Data from primary data sources were collected through the formulation of open and close-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires and the interview questions were prepared based on the literature review and the focus group study. Secondary data were gathered from published reports of the zonal district offices of farmers' multifunctional cooperatives to supplement the original data.

### 3.5 Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data were processed by classifying the data into the homogeneity of the respondents. After processing, the data was analyzed and presented using descriptive techniques such as tables, frequency, per cent and mean. SPSS software version 24 was used for data analysis.

## 4 Result and Discussion

In the study, samples of 101 respondents were identified, and questionnaires were distributed and collected. Ninety-eight respondents responded to the research instrument, while the remaining three did not complete and returned the questionnaire. The 97 per cent response rate is above the recommended threshold.

### 4.1 Education level of the respondents'

Table 2 presents the education level of the participants. Accordingly, concerning the educational status of the respondents, 76(77.5%) of women respondents were educated, 13(13.1%) of women respondents were diploma in computerv holders, and 4(4.1%) of them were from grades 1-8. The remaining 2(2.1%) and 2(2.1%) were uneducated and degree and above degree holders, respectively. From this result, one can conclude that most of the study participants' 76(77.5%) education level was in the category of academic level but did not enhance their education level.

Women's comparatively low involvement rate in cooperatives and their contribution to cooperative success may impact their lack of education.

**Table 2.** Respondents' Level of Education

S. No	Education Level	Frequency	Per cent
1.	Uneducated	2	2.1
2.	Educated	76	77.5
3.	Grade 1-8	4	4.1
4.	Grade 9-12	1	1.1

5.	Diploma in computer science	13	13.1
6.	Degree and above	2	2.1
7.	Total	98	100.0

Source: Own survey, 2022

## 4.2 Respondents' Family Size

The average family size of female responders may be a significant demographic factor influencing female cooperative involvement. Women with larger families may have more caregiving and household responsibilities, limiting their time and ability to engage in cooperative activities. The heavy domestic workload that women often face, especially in rural areas, can significantly hinder their participation in cooperatives and other community organizations. As family sizes increase, women's caregiving and household work responsibilities can limit their time and energy to engage in activities outside the home. These responsibilities can also affect women's participation in agricultural work and other income-generating activities. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves policies and programs to support women's reproductive and caregiving work, including access to water, sanitation, and health services, as well as targeted efforts to promote women's leadership and participation in community organizations. Such efforts can create more supportive and enabling environments for women to engage in cooperatives and other forms of collective action, leading to their economic empowerment and overall development.

**Table 3.** Family size of the respondents

S. No	Family size	Frequency	Per cent
1	1 to 4	20	20.4
2	5 to 8	41	41.8
3	9 to 12	37	37.8
4	>12	0	0
Total		98	100.0

Source: Own survey, 2022

According to table 3, 41 women respondents, or 41.8% of the total, had families of 5-8 members, 37 women respondents, or 37.8% of the total, had families of 9–12 members, and the remaining 20 women respondents, or 20.4%, had families of 1-4 members. The majority of female respondents in the study area, 41 (41.8%), had families with children aged 5-8, exposing them to the labour of the house and the pressure of carrying out domestic responsibilities. Therefore, the respondents' family size may impact how much they participate in cooperative organizations.

## 4.3 Respondents' membership period

The respondents' length of membership period is shown in Table 4. Accordingly, 46 (46.9%) of female respondents reported that their membership was between 1 and 5 years, and 40(40.9%) replied that their cooperative membership was less than one year. The remaining 12(12.2%) respondents responded that their membership in the farmers' cooperative was between six and ten years old. From this, one can conclude that most of the respondents in the study area belong to recent joiny to the cooperative, i.e.46(46.9%).

**Table 4.** Respondents' membership period

S. No	Years	Frequency	Per cent
1	<1 year	40	40.9
2	1-5	46	46.9
3	6-10	12	12.2
4	>or=10	0	0
	Total	98	100.0

Sources: Own survey, 2022

## 4.4 Membership and Participation in Cooperative

According to "Proclamation No. 147/98's Article 1 Sub-Article 2 of the Negarrit Gazette of Ethiopia", a cooperative society is a group of people who work freely to solve and manage each other's economic and social problems. By this notion, respondents were asked to give their opinions on whether they completely understood the function of cooperatives in raising the economic level of society in order to become members. Understanding how women learn about cooperatives is vital to increasing their participation. Women may need more access to information about cooperatives and their benefits, which can limit their awareness and participation. It is essential to identify the most effective channels for disseminating information about cooperatives to women, such as community meetings, radio programs, or social media, and to ensure that information is accessible and tailored to women's needs and preferences. This can improve women's knowledge and awareness of cooperatives and their potential benefits, encouraging more women to participate and benefit from these organizations.

Accordingly, table 5 shows that 55(56.2%) of respondents reported encouragement from cooperative society motivates them to become a member, and 25(25.5%) of respondents replied that they became cooperative members of their interest after searching and getting information about the benefits cooperative. The remaining 18(18.3%) respondents responded that they became members of farmers' agricultural multipurpose cooperatives due to influence from their neighbours. From the result, the role of advertisement by the

cooperative society to motivate female participants in the study area to become members is excellent compared to other means. Therefore, they should keep up their current performance on encouraging members and work on awareness creation to increase the number of their members further.

**Table 5.** Membership and Participation in Cooperative

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Do you know anything about cooperatives?	Yes	98	100
	No	0	0
If you answered yes, how did you find out?	Own resources	25	25.5
	Neighbour's Influence	18	18.3
	Cooperative society Encouragement	55	56.2
What are the requirements for membership in a cooperative society?	Should be a farmer	24	24.4
	Should have money	13	13.4
	Should have agricultural land	61	62.2

Source: Own Survey, 2022

A Farmer's Multipurpose Primary Cooperative Society (FPCS) membership may benefit rural women, such as access to loans, markets, and other resources that can help their economic empowerment and overall growth. However, as previously noted, women's membership in cooperatives can be limited by various social, economic, and cultural factors, including limited access to information, lack of resources, and competing demands on their time and energy. Efforts to promote women's membership in FPCSs should take into account these barriers and work to create more supportive and enabling environments for women's participation. This can involve targeted efforts to promote women's leadership, access to resources, and engagement in decision-making processes, as well as policies and programs to address social and cultural norms that can limit women's participation and influence in cooperatives.

Accordingly, table 5 indicates that 61(62.2%) respondents replied that having agricultural land is a criterion to become a member, and 24(24.4%) of participants being a farmer is a criterion. The remaining 13(13.4%) participants answered that having money to invest was the criterion for becoming a member. From this result, having agricultural land and being a farmer were the essential criteria to become a member of a farmers' multipurpose primary cooperative society.

### 4.5 Institutional Factors

Eddir, Equib, Mahiber, Senbete, and other sporadically observed social rites were identified as institutional

elements impacting women's participation in cooperatives. The question of whether respondents belonged to social organizations such as Iddir, Iquib, religious organizations, and peasant associations was put to the respondents. As a result, the data in Table 6 shows that 84 (85.7%) of respondents claimed to have taken part in social rituals that were widely observed. Women's membership in cooperative societies would impact their continued commitment and participation in these institutions.

**Table 6.** Effect of Institutional Factors on women's cooperative participation

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Do you participate in social organizations like Iddir and Iquib, as well as organizations for religion and peasants, etc.?	Yes	84	85.7
	No	14	14.2
How involved are you in these social institutions?	Very less involvement	4	4.1
	Less Involvement	15	15.3
	Medium Involvement	8	8.2
	High Involvement	70	71.4
	Very high Involvement	1	1.0

Source: Own Survey, 2022

The study area is home to numerous informal, traditional institutions, including Mahber, Eqqib, Senbete or Iddir, religious institutions, and farmer organizations. Since married women made up most of the respondents in the research area, they handled all of these duties. Their involvement in these social institutions impacted their participation in cooperatives.

The participants were also asked to rate their level of participation in the identified social institutions based on their perception. Consequently, the finding of the study in Table 6 reveals that 70(71.4%) reported high participation in the identified social institutions in the study area, 15(15.3%) of respondents reported low participation, and 8(8.2%) of the participants stated medium participation in the institutions. The remaining 4 (4.1%) and 1 (1.0%) study subjects indicated meagre and high participation in social institutions, respectively. More than 70% of respondents had a high level of informal social participation, according to this data study. These events significantly impact how much they participate in cooperative activities.

## 4.6 Asset ownership of the participants

Land, livestock, and other non-farm enterprises are often the most important economic resources in rural areas and can serve as the backbone of the family economy. However, assessing households' financial position based on these resources can be challenging and requires careful consideration of a range of factors, including local perceptions of wealth and well-being and the social and cultural context in which economic activities occur. Developing standardized standards to describe households' financial position can be time-consuming and requires the involvement of community members to ensure that the measures are culturally appropriate and reflect local perceptions of wealth and well-being. Such initiatives, however, can assist in increasing our understanding of rural households' economic situations, which can guide policies and programmes targeted at helping their economic empowerment and general development.

## 4.7 Farm Land Size

In most emerging nations' rural areas, land is a crucial resource for production. It is essential to the growth of both crops and animals. The timing of the growing season can also have significant implications for agricultural production and rural livelihoods. The summer growing season, which typically runs from May to September in many regions, is when many crops are planted and harvested. The respondents were requested to respond on their farmland size. Table 7 reveals that 44(44.897%) of respondents reported having 2.5-3.0 hectares, and 41(41.836%) study participants stated owning 3.5-4.0 hectares of farmlands. The remaining 10(10.204%) and 2(2.040%) respondents stated their farmland size was 1.5-2 and above 4 hectares, respectively.

**Table 7.** Farm Land size of the respondents

S. No	Categories	Frequency	Per cent
1	0.5-1.0 Hectares	1	1.020
2	1.5-2.0 Hectares	10	10.204
3	2.5-3.0 Hectares	44	44.897
4	3.5-4.0 Hectares	41	41.836
5	Above 4 Hectares	2	2.040
	Total	98	100.0 (Round off)

*Source: Own Survey, 2022*

According to the descriptive findings of the study, women with larger farms cooperate more than those with smaller farms. According to the data above, more than 80% of

female respondents own farms ranging in size from 2.5 to 4.0 acres. Land ownership is an essential indicator of cooperative participants' starting endowment position since the respondent for the survey may need to acquire agricultural items such as fertilizer and superior agricultural seeds from the cooperative society at a fair price.

## 4.8 Livestock Holdings

Farm animals serve many purposes in the agricultural economy. They provide money, drought relief, and animal manure (as organic fertilizer and fuel). Animals are also a status and wealth symbol. Stock claims the sample respondents had many animals, including oxen, cows, sheep, goats, horses, and donkeys.

**Table 8.** TLU – The “Tropical Livestock Holdings”

S.No	Categories	Number	Percent
1	1 - 5	29	29.5
2	6 - 10	51	52.0
3	11 - 15	16	16.3
4	Above 15	2	2.0
	Total	98	100

*Source: Own Survey, 2022*

Respondents were asked to respond on their livestock ownership. Accordingly, the result in Table 8 shows that 51(52.0%) of respondents reported 6-10 TLU, 29(29.5%) of the stated 1-5TLU, while the remaining 2(2.0%) of respondents reported above 15 TLU. From this result, most of the respondents' livestock ownership was 6-10 TLU.

## 4.9 Agricultural Input Use

Respondents were asked whether they used farm input. As indicated in Table 9, 88(89.7) of the participants reported that they have been using farm input, while 10(10.3) of the respondents replied that they are not using farm input. From the result, women respondents widely use commercial inputs in the study area.

**Table 9.** Agricultural Input Use of the Participant

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Did you use farm inputs?	Yes	88	89.7
	No	10	10.3
If you use farm input, then what type of agricultural inputs were used?	Manure/Compost	40	40.8
	Upgraded Seeds	43	43.8
	Pesticides/Insecticide	15	15.4
If you	From own	73	74.5

answered yes to Q1, where did you acquire agricultural inputs?	cooperative		
	Retailers	25	25.5

Source: Own Survey, 2022

Commercial fertilizers, better seeds, and other chemicals were the main inputs used by the respondents. As depicted in Table 9, 40(40.8%) of respondents replied that they are using Manure/compost, 43(43.8%) of respondents reported that they have been using upgraded seeds (wheat, barley and maize), and 15(15.4%) of respondents were reported using pesticides. From the result, one could deduce that more than 80% of women respondents in the study area were using fertilizers and improved seeds.

As far as the farm inputs suppliers are concerned, 73(75.5%) of respondents reported their suppliers were cooperative, while 25(25.5%) respondents reported that retailers were their suppliers of farm inputs.

#### 4.10 Cooperative Education and Training

Cooperative involvement requires members, particularly women, to have a general understanding of cooperatives. Members of cooperatives will understand them better and be more involved if they have more profound knowledge about the cooperative society. By offering cooperative training, cooperative boards, various committees, and members' quality can all be improved. The degree of education, especially adult education, and the success of cooperatives are directly correlated in every nation (ICA, 1963). Women's participation will increase as their knowledge of cooperatives, including cooperative ideals and principles, laws and regulations, rights and obligations, and cooperative affairs, increases—one aspect of women's participation in training and skill development. In line with this issue, the respondents' responses are organized in Table No. 10.

Table 10. Cooperative Education and Training

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Did you ever get cooperative training?	Yes	98	100
	No	0	0
Is the training detailed and enhanced your awareness of cooperative rights and principles?	Yes	80	81.6
	No	18	18.4
If yes to Q1, which institute provides you with cooperative training?	The district level cooperative's	66	67.3
	The district cooperative	10	10.2

If you answered yes, what areas of training and education did you receive?	organization /union		
	Promotion of women's cooperatives	22	22.5
	Cooperative benefit	70	71.4
	Cooperative involvement by women	12	12.2
	The cooperative principle	16	16.4

Source: Own Survey, 2022

Respondents were asked whether they got cooperative training, and 98(100%) replied that they got cooperative training. The information obtained through interviews from some selected interviewees proved that they got rough cooperative training that needs to be more to improve initiation and participation. Regarding the quality and depth of training, 80(81.6%) respondents replied that the training could have better equipped the members with all-rounded knowledge about the cooperative. However, 18(18.4%) study participants reported that the training enhanced their knowledge about their cooperatives. As depicted in Table 10 above, 66(67.3%) respondents reported that they were trained and educated by the district cooperative promoters/organizers, and 22(22.5%) stated that their trainers were women cooperative promoters. The remaining 10(10.2%) respondents replied that the cooperative organization/union trained them. Concerning training, table 10 shows that more than 65% of the training and education about the cooperative was provided by the district cooperative promoters/organizers. However, the women cooperative promoters have to train/educate women with highly all-rounded awareness about the cooperative.

#### 4.11 Women's Status in Cooperative Management and Control

The class system in Ethiopia is example of a social hierarchy that has been historically significant in the country. The class system in Ethiopia is based on income and occupation, with individuals being classified as either urban or rural and assigned to specific classes based on their income and occupation. The class system has had significant implications for economic inequality and access to resources and opportunities, with individuals in higher classes often having greater access to education, healthcare, and other resources.

The class system in Ethiopia have seen significant modifications and reforms in recent decades, and their influence on contemporary society differs depending on factors such as region, culture, and politics. The respondents were requested to share their management

and control status in their cooperative. Their responses are organized in Table 11.

**Table No. 11** Status of Women in Cooperative Management and Control

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Did you take part in the cooperative's activities?	Yes	98	100
	No	0	0
If the answer is yes, then what role did you play in the cooperation,	Committee for Administration	10	10.2
	Committee for Credit	15	15.3
	Board of Management	8	8.2
	Committee for Control	65	66.3

Source: Own Survey, 2022

The result in Table 11 shows that 65(66.3%) of the respondents replied that they had acted as a Committee for control, 15(15.3%) of respondents had reported as a Committee for credit, and 10(10.2%) responded as they acted as a Committee for Administration. The remaining 8(8.2%) respondents responded that they were on the management board. As a result, they could have gotten better positions on the cooperative's management board and administrative committee. This may discourage them and negatively influence women's participation in cooperatives.

#### 4.12 Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors

This section addresses the third study goal: identifying the critical characteristics impacting women's cooperative engagement. Socio-cultural and economic factors generally impact women's engagement in cooperative groups. Women encounter several hurdles in cooperative business groups. These interns have a negative impact on their participation in cooperative activities. Women's cooperative membership is influenced by several crucial elements, including social engagement, women's attitudes, a lack of awareness of cooperatives, information gaps, household load, and a lack of education and culture. The information gathered from respondents about these critical criteria was collected and ranked in Table 12 depending on the extent of their impact on women's cooperative membership.

**Table 12.** The effect of significant factors hindering women's participation in cooperatives.

Items	Categories	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Lack of education	Highly affect	63	64.2	2 <sup>nd</sup>
	Average	21	21.4	
	Low effect	14	14.4	

The workload in the household	Highly affect	68	69.3	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Average	21	21.5	
	Low effect	9	9.2	
Lack of Access to Information	Highly affect	32	32.6	7 <sup>th</sup>
	Average	37	37.8	
	Low effect	29	29.6	
Culture	Highly affect	43	43.8	6 <sup>th</sup>
	Average	33	33.6	
	Low effect	22	22.4	
People's attitude towards Women.	Highly affect	57	58.3	4 <sup>th</sup>
	Average	24	24.4	
	Low effect	17	17.3	
Lack of awareness about cooperative	Highly affect	58	59.3	3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Average	23	23.4	
	Low effect	17	17.3	
Social participation	Highly affect	54	55.2	5 <sup>th</sup>
	Average	26	26.5	
	Low effect	18	18.3	

Source: Own Survey, 2022

The extent to which illiteracy limited women's involvement in cooperatives in the research region was one of the questions posed to respondents. According to the responses in Table 12, 63(64.2%) of respondents claimed significant impact, whereas 21(21.4%) reported average influence. In comparison, the remaining 14(14.4%) research participants reported that a lack of education had little influence on their degree of membership in cooperative organizations. This finding shows that women's participation in cooperatives in the research region may have been improved if they had received more education. Compared to the other components discovered to have an influence, it was the second most crucial barrier preventing women from joining cooperatives.

Similarly, concerning the effect of the workload in the household, 68(69.3%) of respondents reported that workload in the household highly constrains their participation in cooperatives, and 21(21.5%) of study participants responded that the effect of workload in the household was average on their cooperative participation. The remaining 9(9.2%) stated the joint effect of household workload on their cooperative participation. From this result, since women members spend most of their time on different housework, the workload in the household was highly hindering their participation in the cooperative.

The workload in the home is the first factor that prevents women from participating in cooperatives; Table

12 indicates the comparison of the effects of the factors on doing so. When asked how lack of information affected women's engagement in a cooperative society, 37 (37.8%) respondents said it had an average effect, while 32 (32.6%) said it had a strong influence. The remaining 29 (29.6%) study participants reported a low effect of needing more information on their cooperative participation. Compared to the other identified determinants, this factor had the least impact on women's membership in cooperatives.

Regarding the influence of culture on women's participation in cooperative society in the study area, 43 (43.8%) of respondents reported a strong influence, and 33 (33.6%) of participants responded with an average influence. The remaining 22 (22.4%) participants stated that this variable had a low influence on their participation in the cooperative. It was placed as the sixth deterrent compared to the other factors that impacted women's participation in cooperatives in the research area. From this result, this factor is not as crucial in negatively affecting women's participation in cooperative society compared to the negative effect of the other identified factors in the study area.

According to the results in Table 12, regarding the impact of lack of cooperative awareness on women's participation, 58 (59.3%) of respondents reported a high effect, and 23 (23.4%) of participants were found to report an average effect. The remaining 17 (17.3%) of women participants responded with a low effect of this variable. Furthermore, the result in the same table shows a comparison of its hindering effect with the identified factors on women's participation in cooperatives. Accordingly, the result reveals that this factor is the third constraining factor of women's participation in cooperative society next to the workload in the household and lack of adequate education.

Based on the information provided, the results in Table 12 suggest that a significant proportion of women participants in the study reported that people's attitudes towards women strongly influence their participation in the cooperative society. Specifically, 58.3% of the women participants reported a strong influence, 24.4% reported an average effect, and 17.3% stated that it had a low effect on their participation. These results suggest that attitudes towards women may play a significant role in determining their level of participation in the cooperative society.

The result influenced women's participation in cooperative society in the study area. The overall effect comparison of this factor with the identified factors in the study area shows that it was the fourth constraining factor.

Lastly, the respondents were asked to rate the influence of women's social participation on women's participation in a cooperative society. The result in Table 12 reveals that 54 (55.2%) of the women respondents reported this factor's strong influence. In addition, 26 (26.5%) of respondents reported an average effect, while the remaining 18 (18.3%) stated this variable's low effect on

their cooperative participation.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the study's findings, we have identified the following critical points which may influence females' participation in Cooperatives:

- Since women spend most of their time at work and home, having a big family may negatively impact their degree of engagement in cooperative societies.
- Since most respondents stated they joined because the cooperative society encouraged them, women promoters in the research area were not raising awareness or pushing women to join cooperatives.
- Having agricultural land and being a farmer were the most essential criteria to become a member of a farmers' multipurpose primary cooperative society.
- Successive involvement and participation of women in different socially celebrated ceremonies in indifferent socially celebrated social ceremonies like Eddir, Equib, Mahiber or Senbete would negatively affect women members' participation in cooperative societies. Training and education about cooperation were not adequate and lacked quality.
- Women members needed better positions like the management board and administrative committee in the cooperative, which is relevant to women's standing in the cooperative's administration and control. This may discourage them and negatively influence women's participation in cooperatives.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the study's significant findings, the following recommendations can be made to enhance the participation of women in cooperative societies.

Women did not receive favourable positions on the management board or any of the administrative committees in the cooperative. This may discourage them and negatively influence their participation.

To promote women's involvement and participation, the primary intervention agencies—the Office of Women Affairs, the Office of Cooperative Promotion, and cooperatives—must take some decisive action. In gender equality, we have more women on corporate boards and are increasing awareness of people's socio-cultural views regarding women.

According to the study's findings, awareness is not reaching rural women, resulting in more participation of urban and educated women than uneducated women.

Therefore, cooperative values and advantages, rights and obligations, and norms and regulations should be the main topics of education and training.

Additionally, given who they are, what they already know, and the purpose of their newly gained information, the training should be pertinent to women's activities. The cooperative should also revise its criteria for becoming a member since most respondents have replied that having farmland is the most critical criterion. Further, family planning in the study area should provide education and training for a balanced family size.

Cooperative societies and the Office of District Cooperative Promotion should work together to spread awareness about the advantages of cooperatives. The male members should also involve themselves in various informal and socially celebrated ceremonies like Eddir, Equib, Mahiber, or Senbete so that females' involvement can be reduced and their involvement and participation can be increased in Cooperatives.

This study highlights the importance of understanding the factors influencing women's decisions to join a cooperative. Women's choices and interests, as well as the influence of their neighbours, are significant factors that need to be considered when promoting a cooperative. Women promoters must create awareness and educate women about the cooperative's benefits and opportunities to increase membership.

It is crucial to identify and address the barriers that prevent women from joining the cooperative and to create a welcoming environment that makes women feel valued and respected. Promoting the positive impact that the cooperative can have on women's lives and their communities can also be an effective way of attracting new members.

The women also should be encouraged to take science and technology related subjects to cope up with the digitalization.

In addition to promoting the cooperative, women promoters can also build relationships with potential members and offer support and guidance as they navigate the process of joining and participating. This helps build trust and a sense of community among members, which is essential for the cooperative's long-term success.

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