

## **Factors Affecting Success of Agricultural Marketing Cooperatives in Becho Woreda, Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia**

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The main purpose underlying this study is to investigate factors involved in the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives (AMCs) from member's perspective in Becho Woreda, South West Shoa, Oromia Region. For the sake of achieving the objectives of this study, the study utilized cross-sectional survey and responses were elicited from two hundred twenty (220) respondents who were drawn from the target population using two-stage random sampling procedure. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 officers' and cooperative leaders of AMCs. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools. Besides, the qualitative data collected were analyzed using descriptive narrations through concurrent triangulation strategy. The empirical study identified six major factors for the success of AMCs which include: member participation factor, member commitment factor, structural factor, communication factor, managerial factor, external factor. The results showed that, participation in cooperative governance, mutual trust; membership homogeneity; communication medium; interpersonal skills and market access are the highly influential factors for the success of AMCs. The study has suggested cooperative promoter, government, and prospective members should prioritize those factors that have greater impact on their success than do others i.e., commitment of members and their participation.

*Key Words:* Agricultural Cooperatives, Oromia, Members, Success Factors

### **Introduction**

Human beings greatest socio-economic achievements have merely become possible through community participation and group collaborative work. Cooperatives account as one the different legal forms of mobilizing communities' and directly involved into activities supporting to the development of economy of any country. Worldwide, co-operatives remain strong social and economic forces, with the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) reporting over 1 billion people are members of co-operatives, providing over 100 million jobs. The international representative body for co-operatives, ICA defined a co-operative as: an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations, through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise (ICA, 1995). According to Digby (2003) agricultural marketing cooperative is a system in which a group of farmers join together in order to carry out part or all of the processes involved in bringing the produce from the producer to the consumer or users. In Ethiopia also, currently cooperatives are

recognized as an important instrument for socioeconomic improvement of the community.

It is generally believed that successfully managed agricultural cooperatives have great potential in rural development in general and agricultural development in particular. The concept success does not have single definition and a mixture of definitions has been used, in order to determine the success of cooperatives enterprise. For instance, Bruynis et al. (2007) define success in terms of longevity, business growth, profitability, and members' satisfaction. Sexton and Iskow (2005) measure success based on self-evaluation. Ziegenhorn (2003) understands success of networks in terms of their survival. Moreover, Amini and Ramezani (2006) found members' participation in cooperative administration to be a major contribution to cooperatives' success.

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In Ethiopia, currently with varying degrees of success, agricultural cooperatives are longstanding and widespread throughout the country (Bernard et al., 2010; Bernard & Spielman, 2009, & Tiegist, 2008). The recently established Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA) has also been embarking on a major policy drive for successful development of farmers' marketing cooperatives as a way to increase the commercialization of smallholder agriculture and the improvement of rural livelihoods. The factors of success exist in different cooperatives and what matters is how co-operatives recognize this on an ongoing basis. A number of studies have examined various key issues contributing to success and failure of agricultural cooperatives.

For instance, Hakelius (2009) notes that fundamental factors for any cooperative society include its members and active member's participation and commitment to the cooperative are integral for its success. The attitude people hold towards their cooperatives is posited to affect their patronization behavior, which is vital for the success of cooperatives.

Although a number of studies have examined various key issues contributing to success of agricultural cooperatives, recent studies has pointed out that there is heterogeneity in the literature with regard to cooperative success factors (Bravo-Ureta & Lee, 2006; Meyer, R., & Larson, D., 2007; Jensen, 2007; Wadsworth, 2002; Lind & Åkesson, 2005; & Zeuli, 2005). Furthermore with diversity in method as well as subject matter, understandably from country to country (Azadi & Karami, 2010), a growing body of literature seeks further studies on members attitude towards cooperatives. Therefore, this study aims show member's attitudes/perception towards influential success factors of agricultural marketing cooperatives in Becho Woreda, Oromia regional state.

## Literature Review

### Overview to Agricultural Cooperatives

International Cooperatives Alliance (1995) defines a cooperative as "*An autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise*".

Cooperatives in general have their own guiding principles and value concepts, such as self help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, solidarity, honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. The guiding principles of cooperatives have been developed since 1937, i.e., the first Rockdale cooperative principles. Unlike the private, public, or voluntary sectors, almost all cooperatives around the world are guided by the same seven principles: - voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training, and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community (Henry, 2005).

Agricultural marketing cooperatives are set up in order to market and sell the marketable surpluses produced by its members such as cereals, vegetables, oilseeds, coffee, livestock, and fish produces when prices are better for their maximum benefit. So marketing co-operative is a beneficial system in which a group of farmers join together in order to carry out part or all of the process involved in bringing the produce from producers to consumers (Woldu, 2007). As far as market development is concerned, it has been evident that agricultural marketing cooperatives have been responsible for introducing the exchange economy in remote rural areas in Africa. By doing so, co-operatives have been responsible for developing modern markets in rural areas, where. The co-operatives provide a ready market for farmers' crops but also absorb transaction costs (Holloway et al., 2000), which would otherwise hinder small farmers from market and production integration.

In Ethiopia, however, the tradition of modern agricultural cooperatives was completely different from the western type of agricultural cooperatives from the initial days of imperial regime to the socialist regime. In those days cooperatives were driven by governments and used as its own instruments. Recently, the government strongly promoted agricultural marketing cooperatives to encourage smallholders' participation in the market (Bernard et al., 2008).

### Member's participation in Agricultural Cooperatives

The strength of a cooperative depends, in part, upon its ability to mobilize its resources and members not only in gaining market share and achieve economic growth, but also in maintaining member commitment, satisfaction and retaining them. Satisfied, highly committed members are more likely to support their cooperative by participating in all cooperative activities. The reverse occurs when

members are unhappy. It is evident that members' *goals*, what they desire from their cooperatives are critically related to why they joined the cooperative in the first place. These goals also affect member *satisfaction* with the cooperative, their *commitment* to it, and their *participation* in its activities (Azadi & Karami, 2010).

Agricultural cooperatives hold much potential for economically weak farmers both female and male to improve their livelihoods through developing their collective and individual capacities. However, in Ethiopia, cooperative membership is generally very low. According to a study based on 2005 data, only 9 percent of smallholders were members of agricultural cooperatives and only 40 percent of rural households had access to cooperatives within their *kebeles* (Bernard and Spielman, 2009).

### **Cooperatives Success factors and measurements**

However, there is no universally accepted definition of success, and business success has been interpreted in many ways. There have been a lot of efforts to provide concise and understandable definitions to success in cooperatives, but not one was capable to come with a definition that can address all the factors which are considered as the basics for the success of cooperatives. Hence, there is no a single definition which is accepted by all researchers and practitioners of the field. However, various mixtures of definitions have been used, in order to determine and measure the success of cooperatives enterprise. For instance, Bruynis et al. (2007) define success in terms of longevity, business growth, profitability, and members' satisfaction. Sexton and Iskow (2005) measure success based on self-evaluation. Ziegenhorn (2003) understands success of networks in terms of their survival. Additionally, Rankin and Russell (2005) defined a cooperative success as one which is "economically successful and hence able to compute with other cooperatives and private sector". According to John (2004), the success of a collective action, such as a cooperative, has been viewed in different perspectives: one being institution- building (sociologists) and the second being economic productive behaviors (i.e. efficiency for economists. Azadi and Karami (2010) measured cooperatives success by employing response from respondents and success score/rate was calculated to represent the average success rate of cooperatives which in turn was categorized as not successful, semi-successful and successful.

In fact, there is no organized framework to comprehensively assess factors influencing the success of cooperatives. Here, the study reviewed the literature aiming at developing a conceptual

framework. Sexton and Iskow (2005) identified three significant critical factors essential for the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives, such as structural, financial and operational. They identified different factors, like voluntary and open membership, accepting non- member business and employing permanent management, correlated with self-understood success. Banaszak (2008) identified four key factors that contributed to cooperatives success, such as leadership strength; group size; business relationship amongst members and a member selection process during the group's formation. From the ongoing literature, the successes of cooperatives have been broadly classified as external and internal to the cooperatives. Hence, the factors for agricultural marketing cooperatives success would in six factors: it can be argued that the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives depends on membership commitment factors, membership participation factors, structural factors, and communication factors, managerial and external factors.

### **Methodology**

This study employed the blend of both descriptive and explanatory research in a cross sectional design. For the purpose of investigating the member's attitudes towards cooperatives and its relation with success, this study draws on empirical evidence from the 2013 survey covering 220 respondents of five affiliated primary marketing cooperatives in woreda taken proportionally. Additionally, semi-structured interview with cooperative leaders, some officers of woreda cooperative promotion office and NGO representative were conducted to supplement data that have been collected via questionnaires. Thus, respondents were selected using a two-stage random sampling. For analysis purpose, the simple statistical tools like, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Degree of Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Success**

In this study, "success", is defined as the function of maximizing different developmental goals; i.e. "Service offerings", and "members' satisfaction" that could potentially be gained by the cooperatives services (John W, 2009; Bruynis et al., 2007 and Esman & Uphoff, 2010). In Low- and Middle-Income Countries those factors are clear indicators of a cooperative's long-term business success, where

cooperatives are still underdeveloped (USOCD, 2009).

In other word, a successful cooperative should be able to: increase the “service offerings” of the members and then enhance the “satisfaction” among

the members. In view of this, for this study, the members were asked to evaluate the degree of their society success against mentioned developmental goals “service offerings”, and “their satisfaction”. The results obtained are presented hereunder:

Tale 1: Evaluating the degree of Agricultural Marketing Cooperatives Success

	Level of success	Frequency	Percentage
Responses	Very low	20	9.1
	Low	41	18.6
	Medium	85	38.6
	High	50	22.7
	Very high	24	10.9
	Total	220	100.0
	<i>Mean</i>		3.88
	<i>Standard Deviation</i>		1.101

About 73% of the members have assessed the success of the co-operatives in reaching the three developmental goals as being moderate, high and very high. The mean value of 3.88, in the same vein also indicates that, on average the success rate of agricultural marketing cooperatives is approximates to high level of success. Therefore all together, members of agricultural marketing cooperatives in the study area perceived their cooperatives have fairly much success in increasing the service to members in several activities and enhance members’ satisfaction.

#### Factors affecting Success of Agricultural Cooperatives (Members perception analysis)

The results obtained from indicators: commitment, participation, and structural, communication managerial and external factors as the influential success factors of agricultural marketing cooperatives are presented in the following discussion.

There are a number of factors for the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives which

associated with different factors. This part explains the descriptive statistics calculated on the basis of the factors that influencing success of agricultural marketing cooperatives. The results of descriptive statistics of these factors were elicited below.

#### Commitment Factors

Commitment is considered important for the success of any cooperatives. According to Fulton and Giannakas (2007), member commitment is “of vital importance to the organization and to the well being of the members – as membership commitment wanes, the financial and organizational health of the organization and with it its ability to provide goods and services to the members becomes difficult.” Accordingly, for this study, respondent members were asked to indicate the degree of influence of the mentioned success factors concerning commitment factor in their cooperative success and their response is presented hereunder:

Table 2: Commitment factors for the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives

Item	Grand	
Commitment factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Good individual motivation and drive	3.89	1.030
Mutual trust among cooperative members	4.09	.850
Commitment to shared goals	3.73	1.177
Cooperative education of members	3.14	1.179
Willingness of members to provide equity capital	4.05	.880
Willingness to exchange private information with the cooperative firm	3.33	1.160
Willingness to serve in a different cooperative committee	3.24	1.178

As shown in Table 2 the mean and standard deviation for the different commitment factors were computed. The table shows that mutual trust among cooperative members and willingness of members to provide equity capital has rated as highest influence on cooperative success with a mean score of 4.09 and 4.05 standard deviation of .850 and .880 respectively. This is followed by good individual motivation and drive, commitment to shared goals and willingness to exchange private information with the cooperative firm with the mean score of 3.89, 3.73 and 3.33 and standard deviation of 1.030, 1.177 and 1.160 respectively.

Lastly, it indicates that the willingness of members to serve in a different cooperative committee and their education is moderately important to the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives with the mean score of 3.24 and 3.14 and standard deviation of 1.178 and 1.179 respectively. It is evident from the analysis that most of the sample members have given highest importance to the factors like members mutual trust, willingness of members to provide equity capital and good individual motivation and drive. Therefore, we can consider those factors as main success factors for agricultural marketing cooperatives.

According to the interview result, majority of the interviewee pointed that success of cooperatives is highly depend on the members willingness to provide capital, in doing so they must have mutual trust among themselves and cooperative management and other commitment factors comes later.

This finding is supported by several studies. Hansen et al. (2002), Costa (2003) and Cook (2005) found that trust among members and trust between members and the management of the agricultural cooperative are important predictors of group cohesion, tends to be more committed to the success of cooperative.

### Participation Factors

The activities that include member participation in a cooperative society include attending meetings; serving on committees; involving in recruiting others; and patronage (Osterberg & Nilsson, 2009). In view of that, respondents were asked to indicate the degree of influence of the mentioned success factors concerning member participation factor in their cooperative success. And the data collected from the respondents is presented hereunder:

Table 3: Participation factors for the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives

Item	Grand	
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Participation factors		
Participation in technical training	3.94	.947
Participation in cooperative governance	4.10	.840
Participation to vote in general meeting and election	3.02	1.143
Influencing the decisions in the society	4.05	.826
Attend every meeting of the society	3.12	1.253

As the mean scores and standard deviations of participation factor is clearly seen from the above table, participation in cooperative governance, influencing the decisions in the society and participation of members in technical training are almost rated as highly influential factor in the society success with mean score of 4.10, 4.05 and 3.94 and standard deviation of .840, .826 and .947 respectively.

This result is supported by the findings of several studies in which participation of members in cooperative governance is certainly an important part of the success of cooperatives (Osterberg & Nilsson, 2009; Amini & Ramezani, 2006).

### Structural Factors

Structural factors are the features of a cooperative which often define form and the member composition of a cooperative. In other words, they show how different cooperative society is operate alone or configured. Accordingly, the respondent members were asked to indicate the degree of influence these mentioned success factors concerning structural factor have in their society success. And the response is presented in table hereunder:

Table 4: Structural factors for the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives

Item	Grand	
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Structural factors	4.15	1.004
Member homogeneity	4.04	.983
Members cooperation	2.77	.934
Large number of workers	3.54	1.128
Availability of well structured facilities	3.98	1.079
Practice of sharing experiences of other successful cooperatives	3.57	.883
Good relationship with other cooperatives		

As shown in above table, from those six structural factors, member homogeneity, members' cooperation and practice sharing experiences of other successful cooperatives are the main success factors in regard to the structure of cooperatives. It shows a mean score of 4.15, 4.04 and 3.98 with a standard deviation of 1.004, .983 and 1.079 respectively. And good relationship with other cooperatives (mean = 3.57) and availability of well structured facilities (mean = 3.54) are structural factors that have rated moderately high to the success of marketing cooperatives.

Different studies are in line with this result by considering that, with increasing the heterogeneity of the membership, the contribution of members to the

success of their cooperative seems to be declining (Hansmann, 2006).

### Communication Factors

In much of the literature on developing and maintaining a successful cooperative business, incorporating effective member-owner communications is considered as one of the key success factor. Accordingly, for this study, members were asked to indicate the degree of influence of the mentioned success factors concerning communication factor in their society success. And the table below presented their response:

Table 5: Communication factors for the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives

Item	Grand	
	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Communication factors</b>		
Members access to timely and worthwhile information	4.08	.790
Communicate member-owner responsibilities and benefits	2.45	1.450
Communication of related industry news and market trends	4.05	.895
Accuracy of messages cooperatives communicate to member	3.86	.984
Provide regular feedback to members to allow them to share in collective successes	3.72	1.044
Good communication medium	4.33	.760

And as above table shows members rated good communication medium, members access to timely and worthwhile information and communication of related industry news and market trends as highly important in terms of its influence on the success of society's with mean score of 4.33, 4.08 and 4.05 and standard deviation of .760, .790 and .895 respectively. And followed by accuracy of messages cooperatives communicate to member-owner and provide regular feedback to members to allow them to share in collective successes with mean score of 3.86 and 3.72 and standard deviation of .984 and 1.044. As pointed out by Keeling-Bond and Bhuyan

(2011), in support of this finding, controlling messages can be managed efficiently through robust communications medium but argues the process demands time and constant attention.

### Managerial Factors

Several managerial factors are certainly an important part of the success of cooperatives. In view of that, for this study, members were asked to rate the managerial success factors and their response is clearly revealed in table hereunder:

Table 6: Managerial factors for the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives

Item	Grand	
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Managerial factors		
Good interpersonal skills of managers	4.11	.935
Good understanding the concept of cooperative	4.08	.940
Good interest of management to work in cooperatives	3.83	.954
Good experience of managers in cooperative	4.00	.755
General business and managerial skills	3.92	1.078
Efficient conflict solving abilities	3.95	.961
Good educational level	4.02	.970

The research results exhibited in the above table vividly indicates that, the most influential managerial factors that have considerably contributed to the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives are good interpersonal skills of managers (mean = 4.11), good understanding the concept of cooperative (mean = 4.08), good educational level (mean = 4.02), and good experience of management in cooperative (mean = 4.00) were rated to have considerable influence on society's success. This is also in line with some studies (Amini and M. Ramezani, 2008; Roy, 2013).

### External Factors

External factors are defined in this study as those traits which can be found not inside but outside of a cooperative and influence the success of cooperative. Such external factors can influence the cooperative functions in different direct and indirect ways. Thus, for this paper, respondents were asked to indicate the degree of influence of these mentioned external factors in their cooperative success and their response is presented hereunder:

Table 7 External factors for the success of agricultural marketing cooperatives

Item	Grand	
	Mean	Std. Deviation
External factors		
Good market access	4.25	.739
High number of cooperatives in the area	2.73	1.231
Good infrastructural development level of the area	4.16	.804
Government support	3.95	.900
Non-government organization support	3.92	.838

The above table 7 clearly illustrates the results of the mean comparison between different external factors. And the detailed analysis of the mean values of the 5 external factors, the majority of respondents perceived that good market access (mean = 4.25) and good infrastructural development level of the area (mean = 4.16) has contributed most significantly to the success of the society's as compared to the other external factors. In addition, the respondents believed that support offered by government and non-government organization have moderately high contributor for the success of the society with mean score of 3.95 and 3.92 respectively. This finding is supported by Prakash (2003) who found that agricultural cooperatives, to

be more effective, it need high levels of market accessibility.

### Comparison of Factors

Even though, all the commitment, participation, structural, communication managerial and external factors influence the success of any agricultural marketing cooperatives, this does not necessarily mean that all factors have equal influence on the success. In view of that, finally like other sub factors, the respondent members were asked to indicate the degree of influence of the mentioned success factors in their cooperative success. And the following table 8 clearly compares the overall influence of all key factors discussed in detail above.

Table 8: Comparison of the major factors

No.	Factors	Grand Mean	Grand Std. Deviation	Rank of Severity
1	Commitment Factor	3.88	1.033	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2	Participation Factor	3.94	.909	1 <sup>st</sup>
3	Structural Factor	3.48	.963	5 <sup>th</sup>
4	Communication Factor	3.54	.986	4 <sup>th</sup>
5	Managerial Factor	3.86	.906	3 <sup>rd</sup>
6	External Factor	3.25	1.088	6 <sup>th</sup>

As shown in table above, participation (mean = 3.94), commitment (mean = 3.88) and managerial (mean = 3.86) factors has the biggest potential to influence the success of agricultural marketing cooperative followed by communication (mean = 3.54), structural (mean = 3.48) and external (mean = 3.25) factors. In another words, the result shows that participation, commitment and managerial factors are perceived as the top three most significant factors that influence the success of AMCs as compared to other factors in the selected area.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The study was conducted using six major groups of variables, namely member commitment, members' participation, communication, managerial factor, structural and external factors. It is found that mutual trust among member, willingness of members to provide equity capital and good individual motivation and drive of member commitment factors and member's participation in cooperative governance, influencing the decisions in the society and participation of members in technical training are the most influential factors for the success of AMCs. Moreover, the communication medium, members access to timely and worthwhile information, communication of related industry news and market trends, accuracy of messages cooperatives communicate to member, interpersonal skills of managers, homogeneity of membership in cooperative, and good market access have identified as considerably contributing to the success of cooperatives.

Based on the empirical results of this study the researchers provide the following recommendations with regard to the success factors of agricultural marketing cooperatives:

- > Since it is confirmed that the members' participation is really important contributor to

cooperative success, the cooperative leaders, promoters and other stakeholders (organizations or individuals which in one way or another can affect the growth of cooperative) should attract and encourage the members' participation in decision-making in regard to cooperative affairs will definitely benefit these cooperatives.

- > Cooperative education and training should carry on as a continuing process even after the members move into the cooperative.
- > The study has suggested present and future cooperative promoter, government, prospective members and other stakeholders to take those identified influential success factors into consideration while they organize cooperative, making policies and strategies for cooperatives. In addition, since cooperative firms have very limited resources to solve their problems, it is critical to prioritize those items that have greater impact on their success than do others.

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