



EQUITY AND ACCESS IN CO-OPERATIVE MANAGEMENT ENTERPRISES AMONG FARMERS' CO-OPERATORS IN IKWERRE AND EMOHUA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study investigated the relevance of equity and access in co-operative management enterprises among farmers' co-operators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. The study was directed by three research objectives and three research questions about the importance of managerial skills including planning, coordination, and decision-making in promoting social justice, inclusivity, and accessibility to support services in cooperatives. The research found that inclusive planning ensures equitable resource distribution and role assignment, while effective decision-making improves participation, empowers members, fosters collaboration, and resolves conflicts. Data were collected from farmers' cooperatives in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas through a descriptive survey using a questionnaire as the instrument. In order to guarantee prompt access to critical agricultural and technical support services and greatly increase farm production, coordination in particular was proven to be important. According to the study's findings, managerial abilities are essential for fostering fairness, guaranteeing sustainable growth, and fortifying cooperative organisations. Strengthening participative decision-making procedures, increasing planning transparency, coordinating support services better, offering continual managerial training, encouraging cooperation with outside stakeholders, and putting monitoring and assessment systems in place are just a few of the recommendations. These tactics will guarantee the long-term viability of the farmers' cooperatives in the area by fostering more inclusive, equitable, and efficient cooperative management.*

KEYWORDS: Equity and Access, Co-Operative Management Enterprise, Farmers Co-operators, Decision-Making, Planning.



INTRODUCTION

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to reach their common socio-economic needs, aspirations and values through a jointly owned and democratically controlled business or enterprise. According to Dokubo (2024), cooperative enterprise can be effectively managed by defining the aim and objectives, fostering open communication and collaboration among members. To ensure equity and access among members, the management of co-operative include promoting openness, accessibility and accountability in decision-making processes, and ensuring equal sanctification and democratic governance. It is crucial to ensure inclusive membership policies, provide ongoing training to members, and apply good financial management practices (Dama, 2003). Ultimately, creating a supportive and inclusive work culture, cultivating trust and mutual respect among members, also, enhancing social responsibility and sustainable practices can contribute to the success and sustainability of a cooperative enterprise. As affirmed by Phil (2019), by prioritizing the well-being and interests of all members and stakeholders, cooperative enterprises can thrive and achieve their collective goals.

A co-operative society is a type of formal business organization where people of the same interest voluntarily come together to do business in order to improve their standard of living in accordance with the co-operative principles. Phil (2019) ascertained that, co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity in the tradition of their originators. Co-operative members believe in ethical values of honest, openness, social responsibility and helping one another.

Equity and access in co-operative management involves co-operators notifying themselves with the universally accepted guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practices. National Cooperative Business Association (NCBACUSA, 2024) outlined co-operative principles that characterized equity and access in co-operative management to be voluntary and open membership, democratic membership, member economic participation autonomy, and independence education, training and information, co-operation among co-operatives and concern for community. Success and efficiency in the management of co-operative business organization depends on the abilities and attitude of all co-operators. As opined by Dokubo (2021), equity and access in management of co-operatives entails each member of a co-operative gains from the service rights based on their level of patronage. Cooperative organizations should treat all members fairly without any form of favouritism. Equity and access are vital in creating a harmonious relationship among all members. Harmonious relationships should exist between the president, secretaries, treasures, other co-operators and committee members of both primary and secondary co-operatives as well as the general public who are potential members and secondly the co-operative field officers who are the employed staff of the co-operative movement. These different categories of co-operative members need equity and access in the management of cooperatives. Phil (2019) ascertained that, managing co-operative involves working with human resources, relating within and outside the firm, evaluating competitor's actions and setting modernity. Those processes are more complex and include both an art and a science, which cannot be done by only the board of directors.

To achieve the co-operative goals, all hands must be on deck. All the stakeholders must be involved in the management processes, which is often separated into the functions of, planning, organizing, staffing, as presented in the management of a cooperative. While the board of directors has the primary responsibility for strategic planning, the manager typically works in



conjunction with the board, recommending strategies and evaluating alternatives. Concerning meeting quorum, no business is carried out at any general meeting unless one quarter of the co-operators or delegates of a cooperative is present to form a quorum. As further stated by Dokubo (2020), the most effective way to enhance the cooperative movement is by all members collaborating together to realize the organizational goal, in the areas of planning, identification of felt needs, decision-making, mobilization, execution of projects, monitoring and evaluation and utilization. Also, for equity and access to prevail in cooperative sector all members find outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and to all other co-operators, poverty level of members is reduced by cooperatives making loans available to them to expand their businesses, increase their profit margins and accumulate some savings in their accounts. As further affirmed by NCBACLUUSA (2024), to ascertain equity and access in cooperative management, permission is given to individual co-operators to utilize resources, make decisions, perform tasks within the cooperative framework, signifying that the individual co-operators have control over the cooperative's activities and operations.

Effective equity and access in cooperative management guarantees that duties are distributed fairly among members, fostering clarity, accountability, and involvement in decision-making processes. By carefully stating and regulating equity and access rights such as; decision-making in ensuring inclusivity, planning in ensuring Social Justice and coordinating in ensuring availability of support services among co-operators in cooperative management, cooperatives can promote collaboration, increase efficiency and enhance the overall functioning of the cooperatives. Relevance of decision-making in ensuring inclusivity among co-operators in decision-making is one of the most relevant factors in any given organization, decision-making is relevant as it promotes diversity of thought, enhances creativity and fosters a sense of belonging and inclusivity within the co-operative organization. According to Rivers Software (2024), tools of inclusive decision-making include open communication, active listening, valuing - diverse perspectives and creating a safe -space for sharing ideas. Co-operatives can create a culture of inclusivity by promoting diversity and inclusion initiatives, providing training on senseless bias, and fostering a supportive and respectful work environment.

To achieve these key elements of inclusive decision-making, the following principles need to be adhered to: - co-operators expect their managers to foster an environment where everyone is empowered to participate in decision-making and in any other activity that will foster growth and development of the organization through setting guiding practices for meetings that allow for divergent thinking, encourage alternative perspectives and using preferred strategies to engage introverts. To create mutual understanding: - To achieve inclusivity in decision-making, Clark (2024), affirmed that each co-operator must be able to understand and think about another's point of view because assessing situations and challenges from multiple points of view creates a greater opportunity for innovation. This means that, the managers need to set the tone for conversations that value and seek out diversity of thought. To develop inclusive solutions: - There is always a drive to solve problems quickly, but in ensuring inclusivity in decision-making it is relevant to remember that brain storing is not a one-man process. The managers need to avoid the urge to critique ideas as they are presented, because if they do, it can cause other co-operators to feel less comfortable in sharing their ideas. Inclusive decision-making in cooperative management allows marginalized co-operators or the introverts to have a voice and actively participate in decision-making processes. Inclusive decision-making helps in fostering diversity and create a sense of belonging among co-operators.



Relevance of planning in ensuring social justice among co-operators plays a crucial role in cooperative management, by establishing a well-thought-out plan, cooperatives can set clear goals and objectives that, priorities fairness, equality, and inclusivity (Robin 2023). Effective planning helps cooperatives in identifying crucial challenges and implementing methods to address them, thereby promoting a more just and equitable environment within the cooperative through strategic planning. Cooperatives can allocate resources efficiently to members, promote transparency in decision-making processes, and ensure that the benefits are shared equitably among all members. According to Robin (2023), planning enables cooperatives to proactively address issues related to social justice, such as diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities, thus creating a more sustainable and socially responsible cooperative management system. In essence, planning plays a fundamental role in laying the foundation for social justice within cooperative management by promoting transparency, accountability, and fairness in all operations and decision-making processes. Planning can aid cooperatives to ensure that every member of the cooperative is provided reasonably opportunities and that their rights are protected and they are provided adequate support to improve their lives.

Cooperative management requires effective planning to ensure social justice, which also entails that resources are utilized efficiently, goals are achieved, and members work together harmoniously. As affirmed by Josephson (2022), effective planning in ensuring social justice in cooperative management involves setting objective, identifying key tasks, allocating resources, establishing timelines and monitoring progress. Through planning, cooperatives can ensure social justice, anticipate challenges, make strategic decisions, and enhance overall performance. It also helps in creating a clear road map for the cooperative's success, fostering coordination among members, and maximizing productivity. In essence, planning plays a pertinent role in ensuring social justice by guiding actions, promoting accountability, and facilitating successful outcomes. Relevance of coordination in ensuring the availability of support services among co-operators in cooperatives management is essential for establishing a seamless operation within the cooperative by aligning various functions and activities. As ascertained by Gautam (2020), effective coordination helps in optimizing resources, streamlining processes and enhancing overall efficiency. By coordinating different support services such as: finance, administrative services, marketing, and technical assistance, cooperatives can ensure smooth operations and meet the needs of their members effectively. Coordination also helps in identifying gaps or redundancies in support services and allows for prompt adjustment to better serve the cooperative.

As stated by Gautam (2020), coordination promotes collaboration among farmers co-operators and fosters a sense of unity and common purpose. Coordination facilitates communication, information sharing and decision-making processes, which are vital for providing timely and relevant support services to co-operators. Coordinated efforts enable cooperatives to respond swiftly to challenges or changes in the operating environment, ensuring resilience and adaptability (Career Guide, 2014). The relevance of coordination in ensuring the availability of support services cannot be overemphasized as it enhances the overall performance and sustainable growth of cooperatives by creating synergy and enhancing the impact of support services. Ultimately, strong coordination in cooperative management leads to improved service delivery, member satisfaction, and long-term success for the cooperative entity. Coordination in co-operative management is important as it strengthens team spirit, provides direction, exhibits leadership, fosters partisanship and produces better outcomes by avoiding waste and minimizing conflicts within the co-operatives. The principal analysis for coordination in co-



operative management is that, the co-operatives are interdependent as they rely upon each other for data and resources to conduct their own activities and as it also combines the efforts of the co-operatives members to achieve the set goals of the cooperatives.

Statement of the Problem

Co-operatives have become larger, more broadened, and integrated to match similar advances in the marketplace. Before now, local cooperative managers not only supervised operations, but also maintained accounting records waited on customers and swept floors farmers. Farmers provide their member with inputs for agricultural production, including seeds fertilizers, fuel, and machinery services. International year of cooperatives (2012) confirmed that marketing cooperatives are established by farmers to undertake transportation, packaging, pricing, distribution, sales and promotion of farm products both crop and livestock. Farmers also largely rely on credit cooperatives as a source of financing for both working capital and investment. Farmers' cooperatives give small agricultural producers opportunities and a wide range of services, including improved access to markets, natural resources, information, communications, technologies, credit, training and warehouses. In addition to providing members with training in farm practice, marketing and extension service farmers cooperatives also finance the education of members, and see to the need of the people in the communities where the cooperatives operate. As observed by Dokubo and Wami (2021), managers of farmers cooperatives in Emohua and Ikwerre Local Government Areas operate on prejudice and injustice in carrying out co-operative's activities, other co-operators are denied access to the benefit accrued from the cooperatives such as providing members with trainings in farm practice marketing and extension service. It was also observed that the farm managers lack managerial skills in the operation of co-operatives, such as planning, organizing and coordinating. Therefore, the study sought to investigate the managerial styles adopted by the farm managers in Emohua and Ikwerre local government areas of Rivers State, Nigeria to ensure equity and access in cooperative management enterprise.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relevance of equity and access in co-operative management enterprise among farmer's co-operators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to:

1. investigate how decision-making as a managerial skill can ensure inclusivity among farmers' cooperators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. ascertain how planning as a managerial skill can ensure social justice among farmers' cooperators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria.
3. Affirm how coordination as a managerial skill can ensure availability of support services among farmers' cooperators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria.



Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relevance of decision-making as a managerial skill in ensuring inclusivity among farmers' cooperators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. What is the relevance of planning as a managerial skill in ensuring social justice among farmers' cooperators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria?
3. What is the relevance of coordination as a managerial skill in ensuring availability of support services among farmer cooperators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survive research design. The population of the study was 491 farm managers and co-operators in 9 farmers' cooperative societies in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. This consisted of 5 farm managers and 222 cooperators in 5 farmers' cooperative societies in Ikwerre Local Government Area, 4 farm managers and 260 cooperators in 4 cooperative societies in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State. The sample of the study was 104 farm managers and co-operators in 9 farmers' cooperative societies in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, comprising of 44 co-operators and 5 farm managers in 5 farmers' cooperative societies in Ikwerre Local Government Area and 51 cooperators and 4 farm managers in 4 farmers' cooperative societies in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigera. The study used proportionate sampling technique to get the sample size of the co-operators using 20% and census population was adopted to get the sample size of the managers since their population was small and manageable. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled, **Access and Equity in Cooperative Management Enterprise Among Farmers' Co-operators Questionnaire (EACMEFCQ)**. Responses of the questionnaire were rated on a four-point rating scale of strongly, agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and strongly Disagree (SA) face and content validity of the instrument was determined by expert's judgement in measurement and evaluation. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha method. Reliability coefficient of 0.80 and 0.78 were obtained for the various clusters of the instrument. The collected data were analysed using the mean, standard deviation. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation.



RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the relevance of decision-making as a managerial skill in ensuring inclusivity among farmers' co-operators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Analysis on Relevance of Decision-Making as A Managerial Skill in Ensuring Inclusivity Among Farmers' Co-operators

RQ1	Statements	Ikwerre LGA Co-operators			Emohua LGA Co-operators		
		$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	I believe that inclusive decision-making processes increase the participation of all members in our cooperative	2.92	0.93	Agree	2.69	0.71	Agree
2	Involving diverse voices in decision-making leads to more effective solutions for our cooperative's challenges.	3.07	1.03	Agree	2.82	0.69	Agree
3	Decisions made within the cooperative are equitable and consider the needs of all members, regardless of their background.	2.78	1.01	Agree	2.75	0.75	Agree
4	Participating in decision-making empowers me and other members to contribute more actively to the cooperative.	2.76	1.19	Agree	2.82	0.87	Agree
5	The decision-making processes in our cooperative are transparent, ensuring that all members understand how decisions are made.	2.95	0.90	Agree	2.76	0.71	Agree
6	Effective decision-making skills among leaders foster trust and collaboration among cooperative members	2.84	1.01	Agree	2.76	0.83	Agree
7	Good decision-making skills among managers help to resolve conflicts that may arise within the cooperative.	2.82	0.97	Agree	2.92	0.72	Agree
8	Members have equal access to information needed for decision-making, ensuring that everyone can contribute effectively	3.02	0.82	Agree	2.63	0.62	Agree
9	Our cooperative has mechanisms in place to gather feedback from all members on decisions that affect them	2.78	0.92	Agree	2.74	0.98	Agree
10	Training programmes on decision-making skills are essential for enhancing inclusivity among members of our cooperative	2.89	0.97	Agree	2.82	0.68	Agree
	Grand Mean	2.88	0.98	Agree	2.77	0.76	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows that Ikwerre LGA co-operators responses on items 1-10 gave mean scores that ranges from 2.76-3.02 with corresponding standard deviations (SDs) of 0.82-1.19 respectively. Their aggregate responses gave a grand mean of 2.88 which is greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 and this implies a positive response. For co-operators in Emohua LGA, their responses on items 1-10 gave mean scores that ranges from 2.69 to 2.82 with corresponding SDs that ranges from 0.69-0.98, and a grand mean of 2.77 which is also greater than 2.5 criterion mean. Since the mean scores of both co-operators in Ikwerre LGA and Emohua LGA are all greater than the criterion mean of 2.5, the result implies that the co-operators agreed that decision-making is a managerial skill is relevant for ensuring inclusivity among farmers' co-operators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas because inclusive decision-making processes increase the participation of all members in cooperative, it leads to more effective solutions to



cooperative's challenges, empowers members to contribute more actively to the cooperative, foster trust and collaboration among cooperative members, and help to resolve conflicts that may arise within the cooperative

Research Question Two: What is the relevance of planning as a managerial skill in ensuring social justice among farmers' co-operators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Analysis of Relevance of Planning as A Managerial Skill in Ensuring Social Justice Among Farmers' Co-operators

RQ2		Ikwerre LGA Co-operators			Emohua LGA Co-operators		
S/N	Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
11	The planning process in our cooperative ensures that all members, regardless of status, are equally involved in setting goals and strategies	2.81	0.87	Agree	3.00	0.69	Agree
12	The cooperative's management assigns roles and responsibilities fairly during planning, ensuring that no member is overburdened or left out	3.28	0.97	Agree	3.08	0.86	Agree
13	Our cooperative's planning efforts ensure that all members have equal access to resources, such as land, tools, and financial support	3.02	1.04	Agree	2.81	0.82	Agree
14	The cooperative's long-term plans prioritize the well-being and rights of all members, promoting fairness and justice in decision-making	2.92	1.18	Agree	3.00	0.77	Agree
15	The cooperative's planning process includes all demographic groups (e.g., women, youth, small-scale farmers), ensuring fair representation in decision-making	2.79	0.84	Agree	2.91	0.94	Agree
16	The management of the cooperative ensures that the planning process is transparent, allowing all members to understand how decisions are made	2.85	1.03	Agree	3.07	1.15	Agree
17	The cooperative's planning process gives special attention to the needs and participation of marginalized groups, ensuring social justice.	2.77	0.91	Agree	2.86	0.84	Agree
18	The benefits resulting from the cooperative's plans, such as profits or resources, are distributed equitably among all members	3.27	0.75	Agree	2.87	1.01	Agree
19	The cooperative's leaders are accountable for ensuring that the plans they create promote fairness and social justice for all members.	2.75	0.84	Agree	2.94	0.79	Agree
20	The cooperative's planning process is flexible and adjusts to meet the specific social and economic needs of all its members	3.11	0.91	Agree	2.94	1.08	Agree
	Grand Mean	2.96	0.93	Agree	2.95	0.86	Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 shows that Ikwerre LGA co-operators responses on items 11-20 gave mean scores that ranges from 2.79-3.28 with corresponding standard deviations (SDs) of 0.75-1.18 respectively. Their aggregate responses gave a grand mean of 2.96 which is greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 and this implies a positive response. For co-operators in Emohua LGA, their responses on items 11-20 gave mean scores that ranges from 2.81 to 3.07 with corresponding SDs that ranges from 0.69-1.15, and a grand mean of 2.95 which is also greater than 2.5 criterion mean.



Since the mean scores of both co-operators in Ikwerre LGA and Emohua LGA are all greater than the criterion mean of 2.5, the result implies that the co-operators agreed that planning as a managerial skill that is relevant in ensuring social justice among farmers' co-operator, it ensures that all members, regardless of status, are equally involved in setting goals and strategies, ensure that all members have equal access to resources, such as land, tools, and financial support. Through planning, cooperative's management assigns roles and responsibilities fairly during planning, ensuring that no member is overburdened or left out and long-term plans prioritize the well-being and rights of all members, promoting fairness and justice in decision-making

Research Question Three: What is the relevance of coordination as a managerial skill in ensuring availability of support services among farmer' co-operators in Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean Analysis on Relevance of Coordination as A Managerial Skill in Ensuring Availability of Support Services Among Farmer' Co-operators

RQ3		Ikwerre LGA Co-operators			Emohua LGA Co-operators		
S/N	Statement	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
21	Cooperative management effectively coordinates with external service providers to ensure timely access to necessary support services for all members	3.02	0.91	Agree	2.88	0.83	Agree
22	Coordination efforts by the cooperative management have led to improved access to agricultural extension services, helping members enhance productivity	2.94	0.89	Agree	3.21	0.93	Agree
23	Cooperative's management ensures the availability of financial support services (such as loans and grants) through effective coordination with financial institutions	2.95	1.24	Agree	2.87	0.97	Agree
24	Cooperative management effectively coordinates with technical experts, ensuring that members receive the necessary technical support to improve their farming activities	3.12	0.97	Agree	2.92	0.81	Agree
25	Through effective coordination, the cooperative regularly provides training programs on best farming practices and cooperative management to its members.	3.17	1.21	Agree	3.21	0.84	Agree
26	Cooperative's coordination with suppliers ensures timely delivery of essential farming inputs (such as seeds, fertilizers, and equipment) to all members	2.86	1.23	Agree	2.93	0.85	Agree
27	Cooperative management coordinates with government agencies to secure agricultural support programs, subsidies, and other benefits for members	2.62	0.92	Agree	2.79	0.81	Agree
28	Cooperative ensures that members have access to healthcare services (such as health insurance or medical check-ups) through coordinated efforts with health service providers.	2.93	0.82	Agree	2.85	0.64	Agree
29	Cooperative management effectively coordinates with marketing agents and cooperatives, ensuring that members have access to markets and better pricing for their produce.	2.94	0.78	Agree	2.96	0.79	Agree
30	Cooperative management ensures that all members receive timely and accurate information on available	3.12	0.88	Agree	3.37	0.88	Agree



	support services through effective coordination of communication channels						
	Grand Mean	2.97	0.99	Agree	3.0	0.84	Agree

Source: *Field Survey, 2025*

Table 3 shows that Ikwere LGA co-operators responses on items 21-30 gave mean scores that ranges from 2.61-3.17 with corresponding standard deviations (SDs) of 0.78-1.24 respectively. Their aggregate responses gave a grand mean of 2.97 which is greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 and this implies a positive response. For co-operators in Emohua LGA, their responses on items 21-30 gave mean scores that ranges from 2.79 to 3.37 with corresponding SDs that ranges from 0.64-0.97, and a grand mean of 3.0 which is also greater than 2.5 criterion mean. Since the mean scores of both co-operators in Ikwere LGA and Emohua LGA are all greater than the criterion mean of 2.5, the result implies that the co-operators agreed that coordination is a relevant managerial skill in ensuring availability of support services among farmer' co-operators because ensures timely access to necessary support services for all members, lead to improved access to agricultural extension services, helping members enhance productivity, and it ensures that members receive the necessary technical support to improve their farming activities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

According to the findings, most co-operators agreed that making decisions is an important managerial ability for fostering inclusivity in the cooperative framework. It was believed that more inclusive decision-making procedures would boost every member's involvement in the cooperative. Higher levels of involvement and a greater sense of ownership result from co-operators feeling more linked to the cooperative's goals when they participate in the decision-making process (Smith, 2022). Because members bring a variety of viewpoints to the table, this participatory method not only increases involvement but also helps the cooperative find more effective solutions to its problems (Johnson, 2023). The study aligns with the findings of Okon (2023), which showed how inclusive decision-making encourages members to participate more actively and cultivates an environment where each person's opinion is respected. In the same vein, it is in support of the research carried out by Nwankwo and Adebola (2024), who observed that the success and sustainability of cooperative management depend on the development of trust and cooperation among cooperative members, which is what this empowerment does. The study also discovered that inclusive decision-making procedures aid in resolving potential disputes inside the cooperative. Giving participants a voice increases the likelihood that disagreements will be resolved peacefully, creating a more peaceful working atmosphere (Eze & Williams, 2024). The overall efficacy and cohesion of cooperatives in these areas are improved by inclusivity in decision-making through encouraging wider participation, empowering members, and supporting conflict resolution. The results showed that in order to ensure social justice inside their cooperatives, co-operators overwhelmingly agreed on the significance of planning as a managerial competency. It was discovered that the planning process in cooperative management is essential to ensuring that all participants, irrespective of their position or social standing, are equally involved in establishing objectives and plans of action (Smith, 2022). Planning promotes justice by accomplishing this and creating a participative atmosphere where all members have a chance to influence the cooperative's growth and future course.



Cooperative management guarantees fair access to resources including land, tools, and financial assistance for all members through efficient planning, which is one of the study's main advantages (Johnson, 2023). Because it enables members to fully participate in cooperative activities and benefit equally from its operations, this equitable distribution of resources is essential for minimising inequality within the cooperative. Additionally, the study demonstrated that cooperative managers equitably distribute positions and duties throughout the planning phase to guarantee that no participant is overworked or left out. Okon (2023) also established that cooperative's social justice is upheld and exploitation is prevented because to this equitable task distribution. Furthermore, the cooperative's administration has prioritised the rights and well-being of all members in long-term goals, which promotes equity and inclusivity (Nwankwo & Adebola, 2024). As asserted by Eze and Williams (2024), planning ensures that all opinions are heard and that decisions represent the larger interests of the cooperative by concentrating on the collective interest of all members in the decision-making process. Fairness in planning fosters member trust and increases the cooperative's ability to accomplish its objectives.

The study showed that in order to ensure social justice among farmers' cooperatives in the Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas of Rivers State, Nigeria, planning a managerial skill is crucial. Planning creates a collaborative atmosphere where justice and fairness are respected by emphasising people's well-being, allocating resources equitably, assigning roles fairly, and creating inclusive goal-setting. The results showed that cooperation was largely acknowledged by the co-operators as an essential managerial capacity for guaranteeing that farmers could access support services. It was discovered that efficient coordination is critical to guaranteeing that all cooperative members, irrespective of their resources or status, have prompt access to critical support services. Cooperative leaders promote equity within the organisation by effectively coordinating support services to ensure that members have access to what they need when they need it (Smith, 2022). The study also demonstrated how cooperatives with great coordination were able to provide better access to agricultural extension services, which are essential for raising productivity. This is in line with Johnson (2023) study that found out that cooperative coordinators assist in setting up members' access to agricultural experts' training, education, and resources, giving them the most recent information and abilities that immediately enhance their farming methods (Johnson, 2023). By bridging the gap between farmers and technical resources, this support increases farmers' output and advances the cooperative's overall performance. Furthermore, the study discovered that efficient coordination guarantees that participants obtain the required technical assistance to enhance their farming operations (Nwankwo & Adebola, 2024). For instance, members can gain from shared access to machinery, cutting-edge farming methods, and other technical resources necessary to improve their agricultural yields by working together (Eze & Williams, 2024). Coordination is a managerial ability that immediately benefits the success of the cooperative and the welfare of its members by enabling the fair allocation of these services. The results highlighted the importance of coordination as a managerial competency in guaranteeing the provision of support services to farmer cooperatives in Ikwerre and Emohua Local government areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. Cooperatives boost farming activities and members' total production by ensuring timely access to essential services, improving agricultural extension services, and providing the required technical support through good coordination.



CONCLUSION

The study emphasised how important managerial skills like coordination, planning, and decision-making are in promoting social justice, inclusivity, and cooperative members' access to support services. It demonstrated that decision-making increases trust, empowers contributions, and increases member engagement. On the other hand, planning guarantees equitable distribution of roles and resources, advancing social justice. In addition, coordination was found to be a crucial ability for guaranteeing prompt access to necessary support services, including technical assistance and agricultural extension, which increased members' production. By fostering equity and access, these managerial abilities work together to fortify cooperative institutions, ultimately enhancing the long-term viability and profitability of the cooperative businesses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that:

1. Cooperatives should keep promoting participatory decision-making so that all members, irrespective of rank or power, can participate in key decision-making processes. This can be accomplished by setting up frequent forums and workshops where participants can talk about cooperative problems and decide as a group.
2. More inclusive and transparent planning processes should be implemented by cooperative managements with equal participation from all members in goal-setting, resource allocation, and responsibility assignment. This will guarantee the equitable distribution of resources, including land, equipment, and funding, fostering social justice and fairness inside the cooperative.
3. To guarantee that all members have timely and equitable access to crucial support services, especially agricultural extension services, the cooperative leadership should place a high priority on effective coordination systems. This can be done by setting up committees that are specifically tasked with organising technical assistance, training, and the supply of required materials.
4. In order to maintain the efficacy of decision-making, planning, and coordinating procedures, cooperative managers and leaders ought to undergo continuous training in managerial competencies. They will be better able to handle resources, settle disputes, and promote diversity within the cooperative as a result.



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