

Governance Practices and their Impact on the Inclusion of Youth and Women Among Rice Co-operatives in Eastern Province, Rwanda

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Abstract

This study dealt with the impact of governance practices on the inclusion of youth and women in rice co-operatives in Rwanda. The main research problem is that poor governance practices in co-operatives do not allow this vulnerable group of people; the youth and women to involve in the co-operative activities as stipulated in the principles governing co-operatives. The general objective of the present study was to assess the governance practices and their impact on the inclusion of women and youth among rice co-operatives in Rwanda. This study used descriptive and correlational research design. To determine the extent to which the variables were related, the researchers made recourse on a survey to record the data. Simple random and stratified sampling techniques were used to sample 387 respondents. A questionnaire was administered to selected members of the co-operatives. Data analysis using regression analysis and correlation coefficients and interpretation of results showed indeed that the governance practices not only increased the inclusion levels of the youth and women (the R square = .348) but also encouraged them to train and participate more in various activities that would help them develop economically and socially. The results have also showed that inclusion of youth and women is highly predicted by engagement (P-value = .000), leadership (P-value = .012) and accountability (P-value = .016). It can be concluded that a combination of governance practices has a pivotal role in bringing about the inclusion of the youth and women. This study recommends rice co-operatives in the study area to implement the governance practices that suit entire community members so that more youth and women are encouraged to join.

Keywords: Governance practices, Inclusion, Youth, Women and Co-operative

1. Introduction

Globally, women marginalization is second to none regarding gender equality, despite the lengthy and hard fight extended to curb this practice down in the different societies (Clugston, 2014 and Kathmandu, 2008). Reasons for this phenomenon may include the multifaceted, cultural norms and biases that society carries since time memorial, like; women have a traditional role of reproduction and domestic responsibilities (Clugston, 2014). However, many women have beaten all odds; limited time availability, lower education levels, limited comfort with public speaking; and proved capable beyond immeasurable efforts in participating in leadership and other political endeavors. In Paraguay, the Manduvira co-operative society has the highest rate of female participation both in membership and elected leaders. These women have not only succeeded in the leadership positions; 24% of Manduvira's 17 elected leaders are women, but also reliable and successful suppliers of agricultural products; 12% - 18% from 2009 to 2013 (Clugston, 2014). Young people also around the world are often marginalized from local to national development gains which infringes upon

their human rights and has negative effects on the cohesion and stability of the societies they live in (Columbia Global Policy Initiative Report, 2014). Several platforms have raised concern for the marginalization of the above vulnerable groups including the United Nations through the SDGs with the aim of promoting “women’s political participation worldwide, full participation in social and economic recovery, and addressing the needs of the largest generation of young people” (Phumzile, 2017). Co-operative societies are one of the entities with channels for productive activity and the delivery of services to empower women and young people to contribute to sustainable development (Karunakarani & Gebru, 2015).

The co-operative model enables the people to reach their personal and community development goals (Dayanandan, 2013). Good performance of co-operatives depends on good governance practices, which involve such pillars as participation, accountability, transparency, predictability and rule of law. Actually, (Imran et al., 2009) emphasizes that good governance emerges through honest application of laws and respecting the law. Co-operatives prioritize democratic methods of control as

an essential characteristic which befits them being called collectives as well. Overall, involving more women and youth in co-operatives promises to broaden the scope of co-operatives and improve their social and economic development goals. Youth are energetic and receptive to new ideas, are able to easily use and adapt to changing technology (Youth in Co-operatives management, workshop report, 5-7 October, 2016).

Eighty percent of the food consumed in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa is produced by some 500 million smallholder farms worldwide (IFAD, 2011) yet women are the producers for household consumption and supply to the market. Nonetheless, they are excluded from the “labour market and related social dialogue and decision-making processes” (ILO, 2018). The informal home-based work that occupies the majority of the women is characterized by long hours, poor returns, significant safety and health hazards, high dependence on intermediaries with limited skills and training opportunities (ILO, 2018). This shows that the importance of developing and promoting women leadership is not well recognized accepted and promoted. It may infer that efforts in leadership development are still yet to enhance all categories of the active

population of the nations that need to be involved to ensure sustainability, especially of agriculture co-operatives. To meet the needs and priorities of its members, both men and women need to be active participants in building and shaping producer organizations. Evidence however shows that producer organizations often do not represent the interests of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

Various studies have found that women and youth often remain excluded from participation and leadership roles, decision-making processes and services (Gotschi, 2009; Agarwal, 2001). Other evidence suggests that in many instances producer organizations, co-operatives, workers’ unions and out-grower schemes are generally controlled and managed by men (Gotschi, 2009). With women excluded, organizations are shaped in a way that overlooks female interests, priorities and needs. The participation of men and women members in producer organizations is conditioned by economic, social and cultural factors, including their access to natural and other productive resources (Bacon, 2010). Several authors (Oxfam, 2013; Coleman, 2012; Gotschi, 2009; Agarwal., 2001; Meinzen-Dick, 1998) have analysed the factors affecting women’s participation in

producer organizations and identified major barriers for women's participation. These include socio-cultural norms and gender perceptions; women's double burden and triple roles; women's status, age and previous membership in an organization; access to assets and resources; organizations' rules of entry; legal and policy environment; women's preferences and motivations; and women's education, training and access to information.

Concerning the youth, Agricultural Co-operatives (ACs) have proved to be an effective mechanism for engaging them in agriculture while increasing youth employment opportunities through on-farm and off activities. As highlighted by the 2011 International Day of co-operatives with its theme of "Youth, future of co-operative enterprise", equitable and efficient, ACs can play an important role in helping young farmers overcome specific challenges to engage in agriculture. Co-operatives can enhance young farmers' participation in policy dialogue so that youth-sensitive policies are more likely to be developed. Youth are an important asset for ACs, not only because they ensure the generational renewal of the membership and will be the ACs' future leaders, but also because they have a greater capacity for

innovation and entrepreneurship, are more inclined to work with new technologies, and generally have higher levels of education than older farmers (FAO, 2011; Agarwal., 2001; Pandofelli L., 2007).

With regard to corporate governance and its four fundamental pillars of accountability, transparency, predictability, and participation, boards that represent members' interest should consider what is best for the co-operative membership (Chaves et al., 2008; Mburu M, 2004; Claessens, 2003) and elaborate on good corporate governance as one compatible with the development of the co-operative identity particularly maintaining democratic decision-making principles. Nelana (in Nealer & Naude., 2011) also highlights that co-operative governance enhances openness and transparency in the formulation and implementation of social-economic policy. Edigheji (in Nealer, J & Naude, M., 2011) identifies differentiated participation, resulting from 'competition' in formulation and implementation of planning that entrenches what co-operative governance seeks to resolve, namely: equalizing the voices of various stakeholders.

Unlike corporate firms or investor-owned firms, co-operatives have their own governance structures based on the

international co-operative alliance principles International (ICA, 1995). Such principles include among others the collective decision making also referred to as the democratic process of governance. The challenge however is the conflicting roles that board members face in trying to control but at the same time provide direction to the efficient running of their organization. As they ensure conformance to their role of enhancing member interests (Cornforth, 2004) they also have to enhance organizational performance through strategies and decisions that add value to the organization. In this sense, co-operative organizational expected standards may be compromised as supervising managers, ensuring integrity and guarding the distinct interest of members and other stakeholders become questioned (Cook, 1994). This hampers the co-operatives' success by affecting member participation and their commitment (Bhuyan, 2007; Borgen, 2001 Osterberg & Nilsson, 2009). Concerning transparency and accountability in co-operatives governance, boards of directors are empowered to make decisions they believe will benefit the organization. However, majority of the co-operative framework and by-laws are provided by respective government policies which do not adapt

them to the specific needs of their society (Shaw, 2006). This creates a member/owner conflict with management (Cuevas & Fischer, 2006) as managers become subject to weaker controls (Labie, and Perilleux, 2006). In terms of members' participation in co-operatives, activities such as attending meetings, serving on committees, involvement in recruiting others and patronage should be adhered to by members (Osterberg & Nilsson, 2009). This nature of participation is a pertinent characteristic of co-operatives as well as an indicator in developing farmers' understanding and appreciation of co-operatives' organization (Gray, T.W. & Kraenzle, 1998). More so, the significance that members attach to their active participation is reflected in their loyalty or disloyalty to decisions made thereafter. Thus, a well-functioning democracy within co-operative governance is important for members' commitment (Osterberg & Nilsson, 2009).

The increasing research about co-operatives and gender equality is limited to few areas like good governance practices for co-operative development (Dayanandan, 2013), the barriers and challenges that women and youth face in co-operatives (Karunakaran and Gebru, 2015). There seems no prior research examining the impact that the

governance practices have on the inclusion of young people and women in the co-operatives, more so especially in the rice co-operatives in Rwanda. Keeping the above in view, this article is an attempt to trace out the governance practices and their impact on the inclusion of women and youth in rice co-operatives in Rwanda. It specifically assessed the governance practices in rice farming co-operatives in Eastern province, Rwanda, examined the perceptions on inclusion of youth and women in the co-operatives and found out the extent to which governance practices affect perception of inclusion of women and youth.

2. Methodology

This study aimed at discovering the specific links between different dimensions of governance practices and inclusion not only at a general level but also in the context of youth and women. This study used descriptive and correlational research design. It described the independent variable (governance practices), the dependent variable (inclusion) and the relationship between the dependent and independent variables to stress on the contribution of

governance practices to the inclusion levels of women and young people. Geographically the study was carried out in The Eastern Province of Rwanda which is the most populated with 2,595,703 inhabitants. The districts include Bugesera, Ngoma, Nyagatare, Kayonza, and Rwamagana (NISR, 2014).

A simple random and stratified sample of 387 rice growers was obtained from 9 co-operatives selected from the Eastern province with a total population of 11,506 co-operative members across 25 rice farming co-operatives operating in the eastern province. These rice farming co-operatives are located in the following districts of eastern province as indicated in the map (Figure 1): Nyagatare with a population of 2905 members from 4 co-operatives, Ngoma, with a population of 1620 members from 4 co-operatives, Rwamagana with a population of 2905 members from 4 co-operatives, Kayonza, with a population of 419 members from 2 co-operatives and Bugesera with a population of 5400 members from 10 co-operatives.

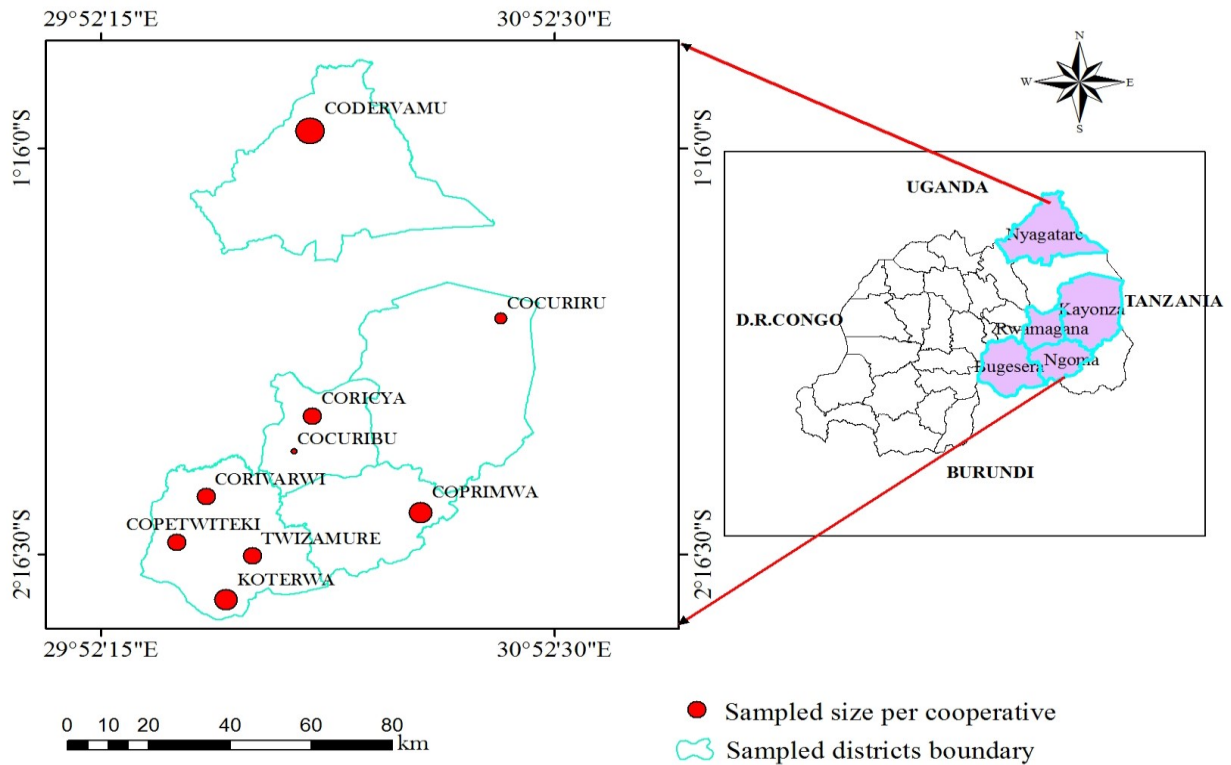


Figure 1: Geographical map of the study area

Data were collected from a simple random sample of smallholder rice farmers in the Eastern Province of Rwanda and then stratified by co-operative and district. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed and collected from 384 of 387 selected participants, with a participation rate of 99.2 percent. The sample was 30 percent female and 70 percent male. All of them were between 18 and 72 years old, with a median age of 39 years.

Returned questionnaires were inspected, edited, coded and data transferred to an Excel spreadsheet and analyzed using SPSS version 22. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, reliability testing, correlation coefficients and analysis of variance

To analyze the perception of respondents about youth and women inclusion, Likert 5 point scale was used. Multiple regression was used to evaluate the relationships between a set of independent variables and a dependent variable. In multiple regression, all of the independent variables were entered into the regression equation. An *F*-test was

used to determine if the relationship can be generalized to the population represented by the sample and T-test is used to evaluate the individual relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable. The following model was tested to capture the relationship between governance practices and the inclusion of youth and women into rice co-operatives.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \beta_5X_5 + \beta_6X_6 + \beta_7X_7$$

Where Y stands for inclusion of youth and women, X_1 is accountability, X_2 is transparency, X_3 is predictability, X_4 is policies/guidelines, X_5 is leadership, X_6 is structure and X_7 is engagement respectively.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of dependent variable (inclusion of youth and women) and independent variable (governance practices) is shown in table 1 and 2.

Governance Practices	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Accountability	384	4.3212	.32829
Transparency	384	4.0609	.31974
Predictability	384	4.3594	.55130
Policies/Guidelines	384	4.1706	.49165
Leadership	384	4.3159	.31441
Structure	384	4.2361	.42319
Engagement	384	4.3620	.47161

As shown in Table 2, results of descriptive statistics of youth and women inclusion report mean score ranging between 4.2 and

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics of governance practices for the selected rice co-operatives. As per the Table, mean scores of accountability, transparency, predictability, policies, leadership, structure and engagement are 4.3212, 4.0609, 4.3594, 4.1706, 4.3159, 4.2361 and 4.3620 respectively. As most of the variables are in the range between 4.2 and 5, this shows a clear indication of good governance practices in the study area except for transparency and policies. This study does not support findings in Mubirigi (2016) that report poor governance among agricultural co-operatives.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of Governance Practices and inclusion of Youth and Women

5, indicating a clear inclusion of youth and women in all co-operative activities. This study does not support findings in Gotschi et

al. (2009) and Tanwir and Safdar, (2013) found that women and youth often remain excluded from participation and leadership roles, decision-making processes and services.

Table 2: The level of women and youth inclusion

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Women have the same access as men to resources/services	384	4.6172	.48671
Women are involved in the decision-making process	384	4.4870	.53086
Women are given the same dividends as men	384	4.5885	.55738
Women are encouraged to hold leadership positions	384	4.4948	.53100
Youth have the same access to resources/services in my cop	384	4.3724	.62945
Youth are involved in the decision-making process	384	4.2214	.58748
Youth are given the same dividends as men	384	4.4401	.63948
Youth are encouraged to hold leadership positions	384	4.1875	.55624
All members of the co-operative involved in the decision-making process equally	384	4.5964	.50696

3.2 Regression Results

The main objective of this study was to assess the governance practices and their impact on the inclusion of women and youth among rice co-operatives in Rwanda. Multiple linear regression was adopted since all assumptions required were not violated. The first interested output was the good fit of the model (Table 3). Table 3 presents the R, R², adjusted R² and the standard error of the estimates, which is used to determine how well a regression model fits the data. The R square column represents R² value called coefficient of determination which shows the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained the dependent variables. The results from

regression indicate the value of 0.360. This implies that the independent variables explain 36 % of the variability of the dependent variable. Furthermore, 64%% (100%-36%) of the variation is the result of factors other than the predictors included in the model. Adjusted R square is another important factor to determine how well the model fits. A value of 0.348 in this study indicates that 34.8% of variation in the outcome variable is explained by the predictors to keep in the model. As indicated in table 3, p-value tests whether the overall regression model is a good fit for the data. The table shows that the independent variables statistically and significantly predict the dependent variable, $F(7, 376) = 30.256, p(.000) < 0.05$, i.e., the regression model is a good fit of the data. This implies

that we can rely on linear regression to predict the inclusion of youth and women.

Table 3: Governance practices that affect perception of inclusion of women and youth

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.236	.231		5.357	.000
	Accountability	.200	.082	.173	2.425	.016
	Transparency	.102	.071	.086	1.444	.150
	Predictability	.036	.035	.053	1.031	.303
	Policies	-.022	.041	-.028	-.536	.592
	Leadership	.273	.108	.226	2.528	.012
	Structure	-.024	.055	-.027	-.438	.662
	Engagement	.181	.043	.225	4.245	.000
The good fit of regression model						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
	0.728 ^a	0.360	0.348	0.306		
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Regression	19.831	7	2.833	30.256	0.000 ^b	
Residual	35.206	376	0.094			
Total	55.037	383				

* = Significant at 10%, **= Significant at 5%,

***= Significant at 1%

Results of the regression analysis in Table 3 showed that among governance practices in the province, some have a greater influence on the process of inclusion of youth and women than others such as engagement, leadership and accountability. The above findings concur the study by Agarwal (2001); Gotschi *et al.*, (2009) & Tanwir and Safdar (2013) who in the same line argue that women are looked at as not good leaders in the community. Furthermore, the results showed that the youth and women have a perception that men are the ones to lead and manage the co-operatives and this limits their participation in the activities of

the co-operatives. Similarly, these views were supported by the authors such as Bacon (2010); IFAD (2010); Oxfam (2013) & Gotschi *et al.* (2009). Apart from that, the findings suggested that there is a relationship between governance practices and inclusion levels and it has been shown that if there are inclusive good governance practices then more youth and women will be part of the co-operatives and these are supported by the researchers such as Pandofelli *et al.* (2005) & Westermann *et al.* (2005). Several authors (Coleman and Mwangi, 2012; Sultana & Thompson, 2008) argue also that women and youth participation bring benefits that attract more to join.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

From the above findings, it can be concluded that a combination of governance practices has a pivotal role in bringing about inclusion of the youth and women. The results showed that engagement, leadership and accountability are significant factors that contribute to the inclusion of youth and women in rice co-operatives in Rwanda. Though, in spite of clear policies regarding youth and women inclusion into co-operatives, their implementation is still an issue among co-operatives in the study area. In the endeavour to improve the process of youth and women inclusion, on the basis of research findings, rice co-operatives are recommended to sensitize the community about the benefits of inclusion of youth and women so that the co-operatives can be beneficial to the entire community. The co-operatives should come up with strategies such as making women and youth leaders in these co-operatives so that they can build confidence in women and youth as well as encourage more to participate. The co-operatives should also implement the governance practices that suit entire community members so that more youth and women are encouraged to join.

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