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## The effect of agricultural cooperative membership on women’s empowerment in the Ashanti region of Ghana

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### Abstract

Cooperative societies and farmer-based organisations are increasingly gaining popularity among farmers due to their promising potential for capacity development and women empowerment. They are seen as an avenue to address the socio-economic needs of rural communities, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Empirical data indicates that increased economic and social empowerment of women has a direct and positive influence on women’s decision-making power in the household and community, as well as on their ability to acquire and manage productive assets. However, gender disparities persist in the agricultural sector, hindering women’s contributions despite investment programmes targeting Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5), which aims to empower women and promote gender equality. The study analysed the effect of agricultural cooperative membership on women’s empowerment in managing their livelihood in rural Ashanti, Ghana using the Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) tool. For structured questionnaire-based interviews, a convenient sampling method was employed to select 106 rural women farmers, comprising 75 cooperative members and 31 non-members. A Pearson chi-square test of association was used to test the scores from the 21 statements from the WEAI’s five domains (Production, Resources, Income, Leadership, and Time). The result revealed a statistically significant relationship between agricultural cooperative membership and empowerment levels among women. The income and leadership domains exhibited the highest empowerment scores among women in cooperatives. This underscores the importance of autonomy among women in managing their resources. The study recommends awareness creation through education and training on the benefits of joining an agriculture cooperative among female farmers as cooperatives have the potential to promote gender equality and empower women in managing their livelihood and resources.

**Keywords:** Cooperatives, equality, gender, livelihood