

Women's Empowerment through Rural Savings and Credit Cooperatives in Enda-Mohoni Woreda in Ethiopia

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Abstract

In the 21st century, women enjoy more freedom and power than ever before. However, they are still disadvantaged when compared to men in virtually all aspects of life. Women in Ethiopia constitute about 50% of the population, and as in many countries, occupy the law status in the society. Women in Ethiopia despite their contribution to the economy and social development, they do not have access to health, education, and other productive resources and they are not adequately represented in leadership and decision-making position at all level. Hence, due to this and other related factors the government of Ethiopia issued polices and other attempts made, that aim to empower women. One of the successful steps which aim to provide women with the condition for their economic independence and empowerment is allowing the poor and especially women with access to financial services. Considering this scenario, this study investigates the level of women's empowerment through Rural Saving and Credit Cooperatives and factors influencing it. The study briefly presents the various benefits that women get from rural saving and credit to bring about change in women access to resources and assets and their confidence. It further recommends a strategy to improve women's empowerment through Rural Saving and Credit Cooperatives. The findings show that women in the study area gained a significant level of empowerment after joining RUSACCOs. The empowerment score reveals only 43(28.7%) respondent women are empowered after joining RUSACCOs and the majority 101(67.3%) of women have low levels of empowerment. The multiple regression analysis shows that there were positive effect of access to training, formal education, contribution to the household income, duration of loan use and utilization of loan by her self on women empowerment score, while time spent on household work has a strong negative effect. Finally, the study recommends that the concerned agencies must be incorporate important factors, like skill acquisition training, education and gender awareness program in their policy. Further in order to achieve gender equality and development at all levels, proper attention is needed to execute the above initiatives and link up them in the main stream of development.

Key Words: Women Empowerment, credit cooperatives, savings, Gender, decision making

Introduction

Ethiopia is predominantly an agrarian country with the vast majority of its population directly or indirectly being involved in agriculture. The total population of the country is 73,918,505 million of which 49.5% are women (CSA, 2007). About 84 percent of the population lives in rural areas and is primarily involved in agriculture. The national sex ratio is approximately one (CSA, 2007), implying an almost equal proportion between the number of males and females. The agricultural sector contributes to overall economic growth as well as providing the poor with opportunities for socio-economic development activities. Agriculture activities heavily relied on family labours and women played a key important role in farming and improving the quality of life in rural areas (World Bank, 2004). Women continue to contribute considerably to household income through farm and non-farm activities as well as through work as landless agricultural laborers.

Although women's contribution to their households, food production and national economies is immense, it has

not been translated into better access to resources or decision-making powers. As a result, women remained to be the poorest of the poor constituting 70% of the global poor (Women affairs, 2004). According to the UNDP Human Development Report, women in Africa represent 52 per cent of the total population, contribute approximately 75 percent of the agricultural work, and produce 60 to 80 percent of the food. Yet they earn only 10 percent of African incomes and own just 1 per cent of the continent's assets. These numbers indicate the tremendous challenges women face on their road to gender equality.

Hence, there is wide consensus that investment in the empowerment of women is imperative while contributing directly to their family development and thereby indirectly to their nation's income growth. In line with, the Ethiopia government recognized that economically empowered women would benefit national prosperity. Accordingly, the government beside, the national policy of women, implement programs like Women Development Initiative Project (WDIP), a program which provides economic and social opportunities for women in low-income households.

Cooperatives, as economic enterprises and as self-help organizations, play a meaningful role in uplifting the socio-economic conditions of their members and their local communities. Cooperative represents a model of economic enterprise that places high regard for democratic and human values and respect for the environment. As the world today faces, increased insecurity of food supply, growing inequality worldwide, rapid climate change and increased environmental degradation, it is increasingly compelling to consider the model of economic enterprise that cooperatives offer (ibid.).

Many literature states that Rural Saving and Credit cooperatives (RUSACCOs) are one of the Micro finance institutions, which provided a comprehensive service of micro-credit, savings generation, skill development and awareness education, and other necessary support for raising their income and employment opportunities and their level of empowerment. In Ethiopia, RUSACCOs are operating nationally in rural areas since 2000 (Melkamu, 2008). Even though, rural savings and credit cooperatives in Ethiopia are newly emerging institutions, most of them have started providing at least savings and credit services to their members in the view to promote member's economic and social benefits. Moreover, many literature shows that, women's commitment and participation in cooperative entrepreneurs, organizations and other local government bodies not only provides them an opportunity to articulate their problems but also helps them to be an active partner in the decision making process. So this paper aims to investigate if women's have achieved their empowerment at household through Rural Saving and Credit Cooperative in Enda-Mohoni woreda.

Statement of the Problem

One of the successful steps which aim to provide women with the condition for their economic independence and empowerment is allowing the poor and especially women with access to financial services. Micro Finance as a tool of poverty alleviation and women empowerment has gained acceptance in development dialogue the world over (Zeller, 2000). However, the provision of this service through the formal financial institutions has been dismal. With respect to access to these services, women face special constraints which men are not subjected to because of their limited access to household assets, low level of skills, experience and education and social and domestic roles that pressure women to concentrate on traditional activities (DBE, 1996). This has led to the justification that to develop credit delivery system for rural women.

Hence, In Ethiopia, where the livelihood of the majority of the population depends on agricultural output at subsistence level and also where credit facility is almost non-existent for rural people including women, financial institutions like saving and credit schemes are of paramount importance for providing facilities for saving and extending credit. Saving and credit schemes are, therefore, the shortest

possible means of accumulating saving and extending loan to the low income groups where established commercial banks are limited in number and far behind the reach of the society (ibid). This approach and movement has now been accepted as an effective strategy in any development endeavour as it is believed to be the main way of increasing income and boosting productivity in an attempt to break through the vicious cycle of poverty by mobilizing saving and provision of credit to their members (ibid).

In addition from past Studies in Ethiopia it is observed that, RUSACCOs had substantial impact on gender equality, by contributing to some extent in generating economic activities, improved their income, to have their own assets and brought change in decision making and asset formation compared to the "before" situation of the women member.

However, very limited empirical studies are available on the role of RUSACCOs in empowering women. In addition, it has not yet been assessed in Enda- Mhoni woreda. Thus, the present study was taking an attempt to check whether the women have achieved empowerment or not through RUSACCOs in Enda-Mohoni woreda. It was tried to identify rural Women's empowerment by analyzing the Empowerment indicators and related socio-economic factors. It was hypothesized that rural women's empowerment could be achieved through Rural saving and credit cooperatives.

Objectives

The general objective of the study was to assess women's empowerment through Rural Saving and Credit Cooperatives, in Enda-Mohoni Woreda.

Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the level of women's empowerment after joining the RUSACCOs
- ii. To study the socio economic factors affecting women's empowerment
- iii. To develop recommendations for improving empowerment of women through RUSACCOs.

The sample woreda

The study was conducted in Enda-Mohoni woreda, which is found in Southern Administrative zone of Tigray region. In the woreda, RUSACCOs perform better in providing financial services to their members including women and in most of them records are well documented. Quite apart from that, a number of women members participate actively in the RUSACCOs. Enda-Mohoni woreda lies in the southern part of the region and is bounded in the north by Emba-Alage in the west by Emba-Alage and Amhara region, in the East Raya-Azaebo woreda and in the south by the Ofla woreda. The city of the woreda is Michew, which is 120 Kilometers away from the regional capital City Mekelle and 650 km from Addis Ababa

on the main high way connecting Mekelle with Addis Ababa. Enda-Mhoni woreda has 11 tabias and 53 qushet. The woreda’s population is 108,210 (CSA, 2007), and of these, 75% (81741) are live in the rural areas, while only 25% (26469) are reported to dwell in urban areas. The estimate of the sex composition of the woreda shows about 51% females and remaining 49% percent are male.



Sampling Techniques

Enda-Mohoni woreda was selected purposively. In the woreda there were 12 RUSACCOs, and from those, 4 RUSACCOs were selected through random sampling techniques. To select the respondents, the probability proportionate to size technique was followed to determine the sample size. Therefore a total numbers of 150 women respondents who are members of the four RUSACCOs were selected for interviewing. The proportion of sample size from the total women member of the sample RUSACCOs was 46%. Before sampling was started a list of women in the selected RUSACCOs was collected, and from the list 150 women were selected randomly as shown in table 1.

In addition, a sample size of 25 key informants was selected from office bearers of RUSACCOs, Cooperative and agricultural bureau purposely for conducting the Focus group discussion. There fore, in total 175 respondents were sampled for the study.

S. No	RUSACCOs Name	Women membership	Sample Size (46%)
1	Haftaminesh	28	13
2	Gereb Weyni	20	9
3	Embeba Haya	205	94
4	Lemelem Sale	74	34
Total		327	150

Table - 1 : Sample Size taken from RUSACCOs

Data Collection Methodology and source

Both secondary and primary data was used to meet the objectives of the study. A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was employed to collect data. However, the quantitative method was the main focus in the analysis process of the empowerment score. The required primary data for the study was collected from 150 women respondents through personal interviewing. Besides,

focused group discussions (FGDs) with 25 key informants were conducted to elicit their views and to have a detail picture in the light of enhancing women’s empowerment. The collected data was coded appropriately and later analyzed by using different statistic techniques.

The study was required some secondary sources to understand the concepts, definitions, theories and empirical results. So the researchers was used several books and published and unpublished materials, as secondary sources for the study. Further, Internet sources were used as a secondary source for the study.

Method of data analysis

The study was used descriptive statistical measures such as mean, standard deviation; frequency and percentage, besides, a number of analytical statistics were performed. Wilcoxon Signed Rank was also conduct to test the difference of the benefits gain before and after joined RUSACCOs. A paired sample t-test was also used to test the differences between the empowerment score of women before and after women’s taking part in RUSACCOs. Partial correlation was used to compute partial correlation coefficient to examine the relationship between the independent variables. Multiple regression analysis was used to identify the most significance variable which influences the women’s empowerment score. “SPSS version 17” was used to analysis the data.

Demographic Information of the respondents

There is a wide age spread in the total number of respondents. They range in age from 25 to 65. The results reveal that the average age of the respondent is 39.15 years. In addition table 2 shows that 47 (31.3%) of the respondents

were in the age group of 25-35 years. 76 (50.7%) were in the age group of 35-45 and the remaining 23(15.3%) and 4 (2.7%) were in the age group of 45-55 and 55-65 respectively. From the result it shows as the majority of the respondents are lies on the average age of 39.15 years. That is more women are at the middle age, which is at their younger ages, with strong desire to work and with optimist future.

The respondents also classified in terms of their educational experiences. It could affect the way in which they manage their lives, households and their business. From the survey the researchers realized that many of the respondents had no educational back ground, which represents 59.3% of the sample. However 15.3% had basic primary education, 23.33% had secondary educational experiences and only 2% had more than 12 years (College) educational experienced. Most women are married and lived with their husband and have an average of 3.4 children. Table 2 shows that 92 (61.3%) of the respondents are married, 36(24%) are divorced, and 17(11.3%) are widowed and the rest 5(3.3%) are single women.

In table 2 the analysis also reveals that .7% of respondents had less than 2 members in their family, which indicates that respondents were either unmarried, or had no children. 28.7% had 2 to 5 family members and the rest 70.6% had more than five members. Also the table shows that 86% of respondents had not engaged in income generating activity before joining RUSACCOs. While after joining RUSACCOs

Variable	Measuring group	frequency	Percentage %
Age	25-35	47	31.3
	35-45	76	50.7
	45-55	23	15.3
	55-65	4	2.7
	Total	150	100.0
Formal education	No schooling	89	59.3
	Elementary school	23	15.3
	Secondary school	35	23.3
	college	3	2.0
	Total	150	100.0
Marital status	Single	5	3.3
	Married	92	61.3
	Divorce	36	24.0
	Widow	17	11.3
	Total	150	100.0
No. of family members	<2	1	.7
	2-5	43	28.7
	>5	106	70.6
	Total	150	100.0
Engage in ING before joining RUSACCO	yes	21	14
	No	129	86
	Total	150	100.0
Engage in ING after joining RUSACCO	Yes	75	50
	No	75	50
	Total	150	100

Table 2: Demographic information of respondents

36% of respondents start new income generating activity and 14% of respondents improve their income generating activity. It indicates that RUSACCOs contributing a lot to start the new business as well as in the expansion and improvement of the old business. As the result shows, more than 70% of the respondents were parts of the large families, and at the same time higher proportion of the respondents

did not have any business activity before joining RUSACCOs, therefore, can be conclude that indirectly, RUSACCOs are reach and benefit more people, as they provide the business opportunity to a large family.

Source: compiled by the researcher (2010)

Cash savings of respondents before and after joining in RUSACCO

Traditionally, women are able to keep hold of greater control over savings than other assets, especially if these are savings that their male counterparts are unaware of. The study result shows that respondents had experience in having cash savings before and after joined RUSACCOs, which uses for anticipated and unanticipated crises period.

As the analysis in table 3 shows, even respondents had an experience in having cash saving, only 12.7% respondents have cash savings in rotating and saving credit (Equb) and in their house before joining RUSACCOs. Whereas after joining RUSACCOs all respondents had saving in different mode of saving. Accordingly, 100% in their

RUSACCOs as compulsory saving and 55(36.7%), 9 (6%), 4 (2.7%) and 5 (3.3%) of respondents had saved in, Equb, Bank, in their house and in RUSACCOs as voluntary saving respectively.

The result in figure 1 shows that the mean average of compulsory saving of the respondent is 735.57 birr. As in the table 3 above shows 100% of respondents had have different size of cash savings after joining RUSACCOs. This appears that,

Table 3: Total Cash Saving before and after Joining RUSACCOs

Group of cash saving in birr	Frequency		Percent	
	Before	After	Before	After
no saving	131		87.3	
216.00- 2430.00	19	116	12.7	77.3
2430.00- 4644.00		23		15.3
4644.00- 6858.00		5		3.3
6858.00- 9072.00		4		2.7
9072.00- 11286.00		1		.7
11286.00- 13500.00		1		.7
Total	150	150	100	100.0

Compiled by the researcher (2010)

as respondents' savings behavior experienced positive change over time, rather than keeping the money in their hand, they preferred to keep it in their RUSACCO as compulsory and voluntary savings or in other mode of saving. A few members were even found to operate bank accounts. The majority above 90% of the respondents had of 216.00 to 4644.00 birr, and the rest had above this range of birr.

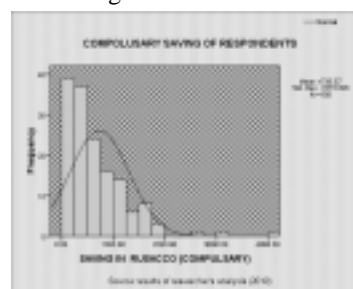


Figure 1: Compulsory saving of Respondents

Amount of loan taken by respondents from RUSACCOs

Loan size took by the respondent in three consecutive years was analyzed by grouping the size of loan in four different sizes, which is, less than 2750.00 birr, 2750.00 to 5500.00 birr, 5500.00 to 8250.00birr and 8250.00 to 11000.00 birr as shown in table 4. The table reveals that few, which are 10% of the respondent, were not taken loan. It also shows, majority of the granted loans, around 58.7% are within <2750.00, which implies that RUSACCO basically emphasize on micro-credit. Few of respondents also got above 10,000.00, which goes in to another criterion of loan offered by RUSACCOs, which indicates some RUSACCOs grant loan by using some type of collateral. For example Embeba-Haye Rural saving and credit cooperative provide loan by using house plan as collateral and offered up to 10,000 birr loan to their members including women. Indirectly the result also indicates that the loan granted by the RUSACCOs were very small amount to start up a medium and large -scale business. That's why the majority of respondents are engaged in small scale business.

Table 4: Total loan size took by respondents

Loan size in birr	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
0.00	15	10.0	10.0
< 2750.00	88	58.7	68.7
2750.00- 5500.00	19	12.7	81.3
Valid 5500.00- 8250.00	18	12.0	93.3
8250.00- 11000.00	10	6.7	100.0
Total	150	100.0	

Source: results of researcher's analysis (2010)

Table 4: total loan size took by respondents

Use of the loan taking from RUSACCOs

Table 5 shows the frequency of respondents' responses on use of loan from RUSACCOs. 54 (36%) of respondents used the loan to start new income generating activity, 21(14%) to improve their old business, 12(8%) to buy household assets, 10 (6.7%) to send their children to school, specifically to high school and university and only 1(.7%) for health. The rest 37 (24.7%) women's loan was used by their husbands. So the result indicates that 50% of respondents are employ themselves, which can result in the increase of income, assets, human resources and increase productive investments. In the time of interviewing very few of respondents, who did not use their loan by themselves, stated that they enjoyed a greater role in familial affairs as they brought the working capital into the household

Reasons for taking loan from RUSACCO	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid to start IGA	54	36.0	36.0	36.0
to improve IGA	21	14.0	14.0	50.0
for education	10	6.7	6.7	56.7
for health	1	.7	.7	57.3
to buy household asset	12	8.0	8.0	65.3
husband uses the loan	37	24.7	24.7	90.0
didn't take loan	15	10	10.7	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

a. Source: results of researchers' analysis (2010)

Table 5: Use of the loan

Respondents engaged in IGAs before and after joining RUSACCO

Table 6 shows that 50% of the respondents were presently engaged in IGAs, and 14% of them were also engaged in IGAs, mostly in traditional activity (beverage preparation and crop marketing) before joining RUSACCOs. Through their participation in RUSACCO, 36% of the respondents become involved in IGAs for the first time, while others had been able to expand their traditional activities. The result in table 6 shows that 52 respondents had been involved in traditional activity, which included crop marketing, animal product marketing and beverage preparation. 23 respondents had also become involved in various non-traditional activities such as Kiosk (small shop), hotel and beauty salon after joining RUSACCOs. Also the survey results shows that, the middle-aged group respondents (from 25-45) were found to have the highest involvement in the IGAs.

Participation of respondents in household decision making

The researchers examined first, whether women

Type of IGA	Frequency	Percent
Valid Respondent engaged in IGA	75	50
crop marketing	39	26.0
beverage preparation	7	4.7
tea house	10	6.7
Hotel	2	1.3
kiosk(small shop)	5	3.3
food and beverage preparation	5	3.3
beauty salon	1	.7
animal product marketing	6	4.0
Total	150	100.0

a. Source: results of researchers' analysis (2010)

Table 6: Type of Income Generating Activity (IGA), respondents engaged after joining RUSACCOs

participate in rural saving and credit cooperative changed the decision making role in the household. During the survey there were questions regarding the decision-maker in the household before and after joining RUSACCOs. Accordingly, the analysis in table 7 shows that 87%, 29%, and 34% husbands, wife and spouse together and respondent herself respectively were decided before joining RUSACCOs, whereas 62%, 30%, and 58% husband, wife and spouse together and respondent herself respectively were decided after joining RUSACCOs. This result shows that as there was a change in decision making in the household after the respondents joined RUSACCOs.

	Frequency		Percent	
	Before	After	Before	After
husband	87	62	58.0	41.3
wife and spouse	29	30	19.0	20.0
respondent, herself	34	58	23.0	38.7
Total	150	150	100.0	100.0

a. Source: results of researcher's analysis (2010)

Table 7: Decision-making role of respondents before and after joining RUSACCOs in the household

Level of empowerment before and after joining RUSACCOs

Empowerment of women: The main objective of the study was to assess whether the women have achieved empowerment or not through participation in RUSACCOs. The level of women empowerment was determined on the basis of the five selected indicators. Table 8 shows the average empowerment scores and associated unit empowerment scores of the respondent women in all five dimensions before and after their participation in the RUSACCOs. The data reveal in table 8 clearly demonstrates that women in the study have better status of empowerment in all dimensions measured after participation in rural saving and credit cooperatives compared to before joining RUSACCOs, which is clearly proved by the paired-sample t-tests. Besides, the unit scores also indicate that the empowerment of the respondents in most of the dimensions is changed after joining RUSACCOs.

Empowerment dimensions	Possible Score range	Mean and standard deviation		Unit score		t-value for difference of means	Significant level
		Before	After	Before	After		
Decision making ability	0-30	13.37 (6.74)	18.21 (7.18)	0.45	0.61	-11.06**	.000
Asset ownership	0-39	1.49 (1.45)	4.23 (3.94)	0.013	0.11	-12.20**	.000
Access to resource	0-21	3.19 (2.11)	6.44 (3.99)	0.15	0.31	-12.47**	.000
Contribution to household income	0-15	1.85 (1.91)	3.11 (3.41)	0.06	0.21	-9.56**	.000
perception on gender awareness	0-36	7.05 (6.61)	10.98 (8.52)	0.20	0.31	-8.39**	.000
Total Empowerment score	0-141	25.15 (15.89)	39.29 (18.83)	0.18	0.28	-14.54**	.000

Table 8: scores obtained by the respondents in five dimensions of empowerment before and after joining RUSACCOs (N=150) by paired t-test

N.B. figure in parentheses indicating standard deviation

Source: results of researcher analysis (2010)

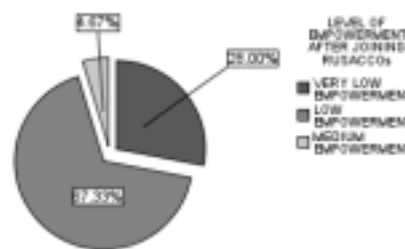
Categories of women according to their empowerment status score

The total empowerment score of a respondent was obtained by summing the scores obtained from all five measures of empowerment. Possible scores ranged from 0 to 141. The respondents were classified into four categories on the basis of their empowerment scores, as shown in table 9. Data presented in table 9 indicates that there was a clear improvement of rural women in regards to their empowerment status after participation in RUSACCOs. The table reveals that the percentage of respondents having ‘very low’ empowerment decreased after their participation in RUSACCOs, and an increase was identified in the ‘low’ and ‘medium’ empowerment. But the increment to the medium empowerment is very low. The mean empowerment scores before participation (25.15) and after participation (39.29) clearly indicate the improvement and this is further supported by a significant t-value of -14.54** in the t-test. However, no women in the study area were elevated to a ‘high’ level of empowerment. The analysis of the study shows that among the respondents only 42 (28.9%) are empowered after their participation in RUSACCOs. This finding might represent the reality of rural women in Tigray, where, in general, levels of women empowerment still remain below expectation. Indeed, although there was improvement in overall empowerment scores, they were still not very high overall. The average score before joining RUSACCOs indicates ‘to very low’ empowerment, while the average empowerment score after joining RUSACCOs indicates a ‘low’ level of empowerment. This result confirmed that RUSACCOs have a significant trend to influence women’s empowerment.

Categories and score ranges	No of women		Mean and standard deviation		t-statistics	Level of significant
	Before	After	Before	After		
Very low empowerment (up to 21)	80	42	25.15 (15.89)	39.29 (18.83)	-14.54**	.000
Low empowerment (22 to 68)	67	101				
Medium empowerment (69 to 115)	2	7				
High empowerment (above 115)						
Total	150	150				

Table 9: Categories of women respondents according to their status of empowerment before and after joining RUSACCOs

LEVEL OF EMPOWERMENT AFTER JOINING RUSACCOs



source: results of researcher's analysis(2010)

Figure 2: Categories of empowerment after joining RUSACCOs

Factors affecting women’s empowerment

The multiple regression technique was applied to explore the effects of fourteen factors on women’s empowerment. The multiple regression analysis in table 10 revealed that only seven independent variables were significant predictors of women’s empowerment. These were; time spent on household work, formal education; duration of loan use; training exposure; age of respondent; contribution to household income and utilization of loan by herself. Information in the table 10 also point out the value of R (multiple correlations of coefficients) is .959, which indicates that there is strong relationship between independent variables and a women’s empowerment score. The results also reveal that 92% of the variation in a women’s empowerment can be accounted by the combined effect of these seven independent variables. The F value is highly significant, which implies the variation is considerably larger which is explained in the model. These results support the proposition that women’s empowerment is influenced by the aforementioned seven independent factors.

Model independent variable	Coefficient	t-value	Significant level
1 (Constant)	47.782	5.522	.000
Age of respondent	.236	3.078	.003
Formal education of respondent	.872	4.880	.000
Time spent on household work	3.952	-5.103	.000
Access to training	2.591	2.785	.006
Duration of loan use	1.534	2.900	.004
Utilization of loan by her self	10.384	6.328	.000
Contribution to household income	6.160	3.434	.001

N=135; multiple correlation coefficient R=.959; coefficient of determination R²=.920; Adjusted R²=.916, F=209.432 (significance level=.000)

a. Dependent Variable: Empowerment score

b. Source: results of researcher's analysis (2010)

Table 10: Effects of determinants on women's empowerment

Note: The SPSS multiple regression option was set to **exclude cases list wise**. Hence, although the researchers collected data from 150 respondents, SPSS analyzed the data from only the 135 respondents who had no missing value.

Conclusions

The analysis of data was demonstrated that significant number of women respondent were educated, which is from elementary school to college, and most of the respondents are married. Most of the women took loan from their RUSACCOs. They took loan not only to start their business, but also used for education, (specifically to send their children to high school and university), health, to buy assets and to have resources like potable water and electricity in their home. From the study who particularly found out to be impressive is the creation of self-employment opportunity. Women who were previously not involved in any income generating activities have now begun to participate in the same due to their participation in RUSACCOs. Therefore, it can be interpreted that participation in RUSACCOs affects the creation of self-employment, which enable women to increase their income and cash savings. It also enables women to have own assets and access to resources.

The women brought about a positive change to their financial and social situation and started taking active part in the household decision making process. Educated married women participate in the household decision making equally with their spouse otherwise their husband decides mostly in the household. Single, divorced and widowed women can fully decide in their household. The study also reveals that women have begun to acquire positive self-perceptions of their own personal interests after joining RUSACCOs. Most of the respondents have gained more confidence that can enable them to raise enough money to feed their family alone and few of them also have confident to raise their opinion in public and speak freely in meeting.

To sum up, the results obtained from the study regarding women empowerment provide sufficient evidence that RUSACCOs, the newly emerging institution in Ethiopia, have a trend to contribute to some extent in women's empowerment. Though the analysis shows that the overall

level of empowerment of the respondent women empowerment is poor, their level of empowerment are relatively better than before joining rural saving and credit cooperatives. Hence, from the analysis, it can be conclude that RUSACCOs are seen to be quite helpful for opening up economic opportunities for the rural women who cannot afford to be wage employed outside the home. Putting capital in the hands of women to be utilized themselves has the ability to contribute financially to the household and consequently increased control and empowerment. It is possible to upgrade economic and social status of women by providing them with access to RUSACCOs services.

Generally, the impact of saving and credit cooperative participation on the empowerment process of women is positive for most women as a function of the above indicators. For most of the women, participation in Rural Saving and Credit Cooperatives was observed to contribute to their social and economic empowerment; or it has at least drawn women from their disempowered position. Therefore, the analysis suggests the need for implementing holistic strategies for women (particularly in the areas of human resource development, which makes women to acquire knowledge and skill to choice the strategy of their life) that may enhance women's empowerment.

Recommendations

Empowering women is an important end in itself, not only as a human rights issue but also as having the potential to enhance human well being. It is largely a means to a broader goal, development and sustainable development. Attention to empowerment of women and equality of women with men are prerequisite for achieving full potential of economic, environmental, cultural, social and political development of the entire society thus ensuring sustainable development. Therefore to improve women's empowerment through rural saving cooperatives, the following recommendations have been formulated to be undertaken by cooperatives, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other stakeholders aimed at stimulating the process of women empowerment.

- i. Raising gender awareness, through group discussion, training and general assembly meeting, about gender difference and the important of women's empowerment in the home and community.
- ii. Promote women's knowledge and position by providing regular and skill acquisition training on agro-processing techniques, agribusiness management, accounting, basic mathematics and time management. These type of training might increase their knowledge and skill and may create opportunities of self-employment and increase income earning for strengthen their self-esteem and improving their participation in the household decision making process, which eventually empowered the rural women in their family as well as in the society.

- iii. The RUSACCOs should be quite creative in developing products that are capable of avoiding barriers that have traditionally kept women from accessing financial services.
 - iv. Expand services (not just saving and credit, but also social benefits, like providing labour saving technology and establish community services) to reduce the burden work in the household, which help rural women, cope with housework.
 - v. Government, NGOs, and international organizations all should play a supportive role in assisting the establishment of microfinance organizations especially Rural Saving and Credit Cooperative.
 - vi. Enable and strengthen grassroots level women's participation in design and planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their cooperatives geared towards women and gender. This includes identification of factors that hinder women's participation and overcoming these barriers in a systematic manner;
 - vii. Self help group should be formulated so that they can organize and take up income generating activities. Self-help groups intermediated by micro credit have been shown to have positive effects on women, with some of these impacts being ripple effects.
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