

Can Cooperatives Promote Women's Strategic Interests

By Deborah Kasente

2. The Context

- ▶ Definition of a cooperative as autonomous, voluntary and democratic promises to deliver women's interests.
- ▶ But women in Africa have very heterogeneous backgrounds.
- ▶ However, women share two values of gender justice and empowerment, regardless of their context.
- ▶ Gender justice = No discrimination on grounds of sex
- ▶ Empowerment = Increasing strength in economic, social, confidence and capacity aspects.

3. Where are Cooperatives in Africa on the Women Question?

- ▶ Only about 8% of the population is affiliated to the coop movement – we do not know how many of these are women.
- ▶ Coops increase women's income thru job creation.
- ▶ Fair Trade movement has enabled women producers to access resources and markets.
- ▶ However, these benefits are not universal.
- ▶ The financial and health care sectors are successful.
- ▶ Agricultural cooperatives have limited appeal due to land ownership patterns and control of benefit.

4. Lessons from Other Regions

- ▶ Cooperatives have been used to empower marginalised women thru bringing out their voices and issues.
- ▶ Simplifying registration procedures can encourage women to join.
- ▶ Organisational structures which are not democratic, are bureaucratic have power imbalances in leadership, discourage women participation
- ▶ Traditional roles of women reduce women's participation
- ▶ Women's lack of independent assets reduces their investment in coops.
- ▶ Some legal requirements constrain women's participation.

5. Recommendations

- ▶ Identify context-specific barriers to women's participation and benefits.
- ▶ Develop new, gender responsive products and partnerships that balance economic and social benefits.
- ▶ Use research-based methodologies.
- ▶ Involve women directly in the whole process.
- ▶ Adapt products and processes that have been proven to work.