

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN ALLEVIATING FOOD INSECURITY: A STUDY IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

¹Adegoke Temitope Damilola and ²Agbasi Obianuju Emmanuel

Article Info

Keywords: agricultural cooperative societies, food security, climate change, economic development, violent conflicts, Nigeria, Yoruba land, farmers, participation, challenges

Abstract

The history of cooperative farming practices among farmers in Yoruba land dates back to periods when they would collaborate and work on each other's farms in a rotational manner. However, food insecurity has been a prevalent issue among black communities, particularly in Nigeria, due to factors such as climate change, economic development, and violent conflicts. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of agricultural cooperative societies in promoting food security in Nigeria. The country has experienced worsening food insecurity over the past 15 years, as reported by the Food and Agriculture Organization. Climate change has led to increased frequency of environmental disasters, including floods, storms, and earthquakes. The unstable economy and violent conflicts, such as the Boko Haram insurgency and inter-tribal wars, further contribute to the underdevelopment and food insecurity in the country. Food security is a fundamental human requirement, and despite some reduction in the number of people experiencing hunger in previous years, it has begun to increase again since 2015. Billions of people still live with moderate to severe food insecurity, lacking regular access to food or facing its complete unavailability. Agricultural cooperative societies are voluntary organizations established to serve the common economic interests of their members and provide goods and services to enhance income, savings, productivity, and purchasing power while promoting equitable distribution of net surplus. These societies play a crucial role in supporting farmers and traders in the agricultural sector. They encourage participation in farming, offer grants, support, and assistance to members, and address various social and economic challenges faced by farmers. This study explores the objectives, mission, challenges, and impact of agricultural cooperative societies in Kwara State, Nigeria, and highlights the issues encountered by farmers in their engagement with these societies.

^{1,2}Department of Finance (Cooperative Economics and Management Unit), Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti.

INTRODUCTION

The history of cooperation among farmers in Yoruba land can be traced back to those periods when two or more farmers would join hands together to work on the farm of each and every one of them on a rotational basis. Since the era in which black people were deprived of their land and farming activities generally, there has been a notable level of food insecurity among them. In light of this, the focus of the study is to assess the effectiveness of the agricultural cooperative societies in the promotion of food security. Food insecurity in Nigeria has (since gone years) been one of the major problems that keeps attacking the country's administration. According to the estimate made by the Food and Agriculture Organization, the condition has worsened in the past 15 years. Based on research and observations, the cause of this problem is traced down to three major factors, namely climate changes, economic development and violent conflict.

These factors, when deeply looked into, play a great part in the underdevelopment of this country. There have been climate changes everywhere in the world, including Nigeria. Throughout the year, environmental disasters such as flood, storm, earthquakes, etc. have been reported to be more frequent. The economy has been unstable and there have been different violent conflicts such as the Boko Haram insurgency, inter-tribal war, kidnapping and banditry, all throwing a great question at the security and well-being of the citizens of the country. According to Ojo and Adebayo (2012), food security is a basic human requirement and fighting against hunger has been one of the greatest challenges in this century. Even though the number of people living in hunger has reduced over the previous years, it has started to increase again in 2015 (FAO et al., 2019). Billions of people are still living in either moderate or severe food insecurity nowadays. This is because they do not have regular access to food (not necessarily malnutrition), or there is no food at all for the whole population available.

A cooperative society is a voluntary organization that was started with the main objective of rendering service to its members. It is a form of establishment where individuals come together joining hands for the promotion and achievement of their common economic interest goals. Its aim is to serve the interest of the poorer sector of the community through the principle of selfhelp and group help. In addition, one of its objectives is to also provide goods and services to its members and thus enable them to attain increased income and savings, investments, productivity and purchasing power, and also promote among them equitable distribution of net surplus through maximum utilization of the available funds. Basically, almost all establishments in Nigeria and some other countries have a cooperative society that delivers the aforementioned responsibilities. Different sectors including education, enterprises, partnership, groups, workers, businesses among several others are made up of cooperatives societies with varying functions based on their structure. Agriculture, as a sector on its own, is not excluded from this.

Thus, agricultural cooperative societies are those organizations established with the objective of helping farmers and traders who deal in agricultural produce and products. The contribution of the agricultural cooperative societies, as explored by this study, cannot be underestimated. It plays a great role in the existence of agricultural activities up till now. According to FAO (2009), many people had lost interest in farming and all other agricultural practices long ago. This is due to the factors that affect the practices which include climate changes, economic development and violent conflicts. The initiation of the agricultural cooperative societies increase the level of participation in agriculture. It provides grants, encouragement, support and assistance to members who are in need of any at a certain point in time. The Nigerian Agricultural Extension and Liaison Services, NAERLS (1983) gives the definition of agricultural cooperative as "a situation whereby a number of farmers come together and pool their land and other resources together to ensure the inflow of more capital and better use of improved farm equipment (farm mechanization)." In light of this, it would appear that the effort of agricultural cooperative societies (ACS) is based primarily on agricultural production, but it may also be used in solving almost all of the farmers' social and economic problems on banking, products marketing, insurance, housing, financing of farm inputs and other agricultural activities (Jongur, 2005). This study encompasses the objectives of the agricultural cooperative societies in Kwara State, their mission, obstacles and challenges faced by them, and the overall impact

they have made in the promotion of food security in the state. It also states the problems encountered by the farmers with the agricultural cooperative societies.

STUDY REVIEW

Food Security is the sufficient access to safe and nutritious food at all times by people so as to meet their food preferences and nutritional requirements, thus enhancing an active and healthy life. The objectives of food security include ensuring production of enough food, maximizing stability in the flow of supplies and ensuring easy access to available supplies on the part of those who need them. However, there are certain challenges facing food security in Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State. Some of these problems are as follows:

1. Constant growth of the population
2. Increase level of food demand
3. Hiking of price and cost of feeding
4. Extinction of varieties of certain species of agricultural plant
5. Scarcity of water
6. Limited land availability
7. Wastage of food and food loss (due to poor storage facilities).

Agriculture accounts for 70% of the non-oil export and provides over 80% of the food needs in Nigeria (Akande, 2002). Despite this contribution, farmers in the rural areas of the country often face some challenges to increase productivity such as access to loans from commercial banks, purchase of farm inputs and marketing of their products. At this stage, farmers always start identifying their weak individual economic position. As a way of solving these issues, they join forces and initiate economic cooperation; by this farmers could pool their limited resources together to improve agricultural output and this will enhance socio-economic activities in the rural areas (Ebonyi & Jimoh, 2002). According to Talmaki, a cooperative society is an organization of the weak who gather together for a common economic goal and try to lift themselves from weakness into strength through business organization. The International Cooperative Alliance (1995) defines a cooperative as an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic needs.

Study Objectives

The broad objective of the study is to examine the impact of agricultural cooperative societies in Kwara State of Nigeria. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. Identifying and explaining the social and economic significance of agricultural cooperative societies
2. Determination of the impact of agricultural cooperative on the participating farmers
3. Stating the implications of these impacts on food security
4. Identifying the major constraints of agricultural cooperative income
5. Presenting the problems associated with cooperative societies in this state.
- 6 Elucidating and pointing out that agricultural cooperative societies were not fully known and acceptable in that area.

METHODOLOGY

The study is carried out as an empirical research. It is a research type that makes use of verifiable evidence in order to arrive at research outcomes. In other words, this type of research relies solely on evidence obtained through observation or scientific data collection methods. The research work was carried out in a single local government area of the state which is Ilorin West, with a total of 100 farmers under study. This paper presents the idea of the impact of the cooperative societies in promoting food security in Kwara State in such a way that would make an outsider create an image of it. The personal information of the respondents were kept confidential so as to prevent any future conflict and any form of physical brawl. Presentation of facts, ideas, data and information were arranged accordingly so as not to cause confusion in the mind of a reader.

• Variables and Data Collection

This is obtained from data online and records from the active agricultural cooperative societies within the state. These societies include Iwo Fadama Community Cooperative Society Limited, Irewolede Oro Fadama

Community Cooperative Society Limited, Okuta-ten Fadama Users Cooperative Society, Ilesha Fadama Community Cooperative Society Limited, Amuludun Women Okeonigbin Fadama Resource Users Cooperative Society Limited, and Joyful Fadama User Cooperative Group Farming Society Limited. There are also some values gotten from National bodies such as the Food Defense Corps, Abejukolo Fadama Agric Cooperative Society Ltd., Ailoje Royal Farms Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd., Cooperative Supply Association, De Parach Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd., GreenLife Cooperative Limited, Nasara Agricultural Cooperative Society, New Generation FMCS and Nigeria Agricultural Cooperative.

• Statistical Method

Descriptive statistics were used while analyzing the objectives of this study. Charts (bar and pie) and other statistical devices were used to represent certain information in the paper. The analysis of the data was according to the survey made of the local government farmers. Numerical values such as the input of farmers, output of societies, credits, etc. were expressed. The values presented in the tables were calculated averagely from the estimates provided by the farmers.

RESULTS

Based on observations, it is generally accepted by many experts that a good proportion of agricultural downfalls in Nigeria comes from the unorganized peasant farmers (Olayide, 1981; Ijere, 1985; Jongur, 1993; Jongur, 2005). The rate at which this is increasing in Kwara State is so alarming and gives a cause for the coming together of farmers in a given geographical area to form cooperative societies. There is still a great question thrown at the economics of scale in cooperative credit, which is the small peasants output which thus brings about the need for cooperation among farmers. The results from the study were as follows:

Social and Economic Characteristics and Farming System of Respondents

Among the 100 farmers interviewed, there were almost 60% of them who belonged to the agricultural cooperative societies, while the remaining 40% did not belong to any of the societies. Over 83% of them were males while 17% were females (see Table 1). Most of the cooperative farmers used modern implements and machinery to carry out various operations on their farms; hence, they were mostly commercial farmers. The non-cooperative farmers, on the other hand, were mostly subsistence farmers who cultivated small areas of land. They used family labour and crude or traditional implements to cultivate lands and for other farming processes (Table 2). The average age of the farmers was 40, which implies that the farmers were in their productive age. The average size of their household was 15 and 9 for cooperative and non-cooperative farmers respectively. Additionally, the average farm size was measured to be 3.5 and 2.4 hectares respectively (Table 3).

Impact on Promotion of Food Security in the State.

As a result of the above analysis, the level of food security in the state was affected. There was an abundance of agricultural produce and products such as foods and fruits in the market. The farmers who were members of the cooperative societies were able to produce more of the products than those that did not belong to any cooperative society. This is indisputably one of the impacts of membership of the farmers in the cooperative societies (Table5).

Challenges Faced by the Cooperative Societies

Due to certain factors, the activities and the effectiveness of the cooperative societies are being affected. These factors include poor leadership and management, marketing problems, high cost input, inadequate capital, lack of adequate extension staff, lack of patronage, and lack of storage and marketing facilities, among others (Table 6).

• Tables and Charts Displaying Data and Results

Table 1: Status of respondents, whether cooperative or non-cooperative farmers, and sex.

Cooperative Farmers (%)	Non-cooperative Farmers (%)	Sex (%)
60	40	Male – 83
		Female – 17

Source: Survey data, 2021

Table 2: Loan gotten from cooperative societies and farming system of members and nonmembers

Variables	Cooperative Farmers	Non-cooperative Farmers
Average Loan Gotten (₦)	1,250,000	----

Farming System	Commercial (Mechanized)	Subsistence (Traditional)
----------------	-------------------------	---------------------------

Source: Survey data, 2021

Table 3: Mean values of age, household size and farm size of the cooperative and noncooperative farmers.

Variables	Mean Values of Cooperative Farmers	Mean Values Of Non-cooperative Farmers
Age (Years)	40	40
Household Size	15	9
Farm Size (Hectares)	3.5	2.1

Source: Survey Data, 2021

Table 4: Average values of cost and return of the cooperative and non-cooperative farmers.

Variables	Average Values of Cooperative Farmers	Average Values Of Non-cooperative Farmers
Cost of Seeds (₦)	7000	3000
Family Labour	Little or none	High
Hired Labour	High	Little or none
Cost of Agro-chemicals (₦)	Above 15,000	Below 5,000
Cost of Implements (₦)	Above 500,000	Below 5,000
Cost of Production (₦)	Above 1,000,000	Below 10,000
Net Farm Income (₦)	Above 2,500,000	Below 50,000

Source: Survey Data, 2021

Table 5: Quantity and quality of agricultural products produced by both cooperative and non-cooperative farmers.

Variables	Cooperative Farmers	Non-cooperative Farmers
Quantity of Products	Very high	Relatively low
Quality of Products	Very high	Low
Amount marketed	Almost all outcomes	Little or none

Source: Survey data, 2021

Table 6: Obstacles and Challenges faced by the Cooperative Societies

Constraints	Effects on Agricultural Cooperative Societies
Poor Leadership and Management	Decreased cooperation and regulation among the members of the societies
Marketing Problems	Inability of farmers to pay back grants and loans due to market failure
High Cost Input	The yearly expenses being more than the money received
Inadequate Capital	Failure to meet up with member's demand
Lack of Adequate Extension Staff	Lack of awareness among farmers in most areas which causes the low level of turn-up
Lack of Patronage	Low availability of fund to finance the societies
Lack of Storage And Marketing facilities	Loss of record which may lead to dispute and disagreement among the farmers and the administrators

Source: Internet, 2018

● **Bar charts showing some constraints of the cooperative bodies**

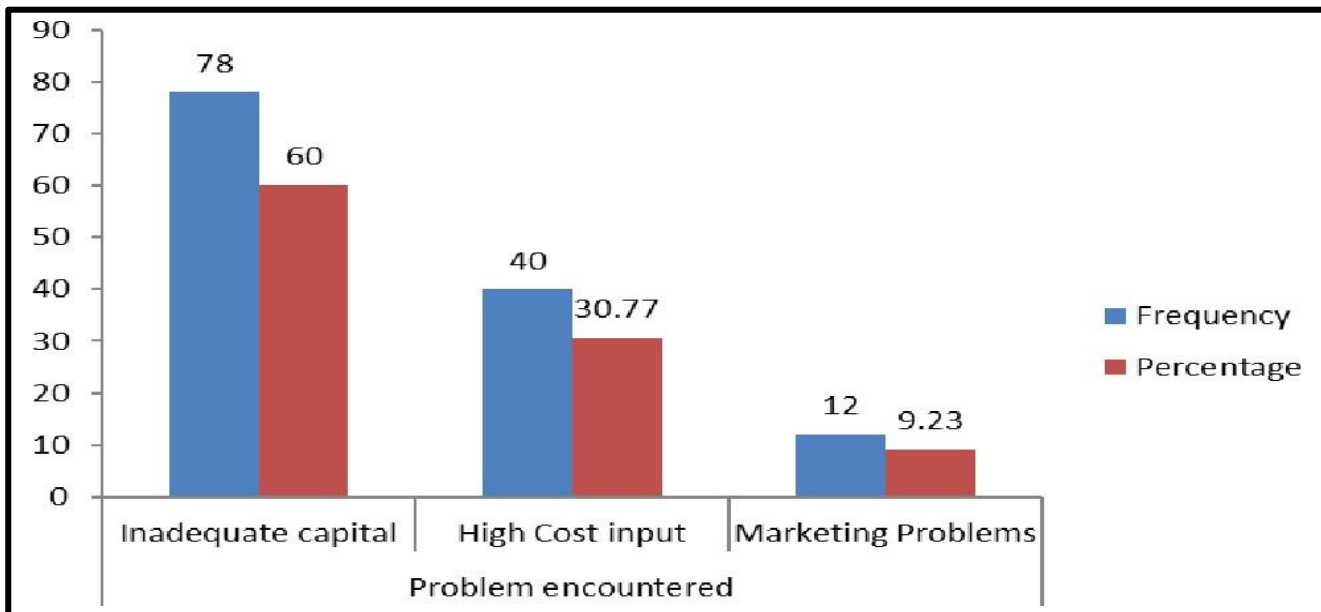


Figure 1: Bar chart showing the frequency and percentage of some constraints of agricultural cooperative societies.

Source: Internet

• **Charts on the contribution of both cooperative and non-cooperative farmers to the production of food**

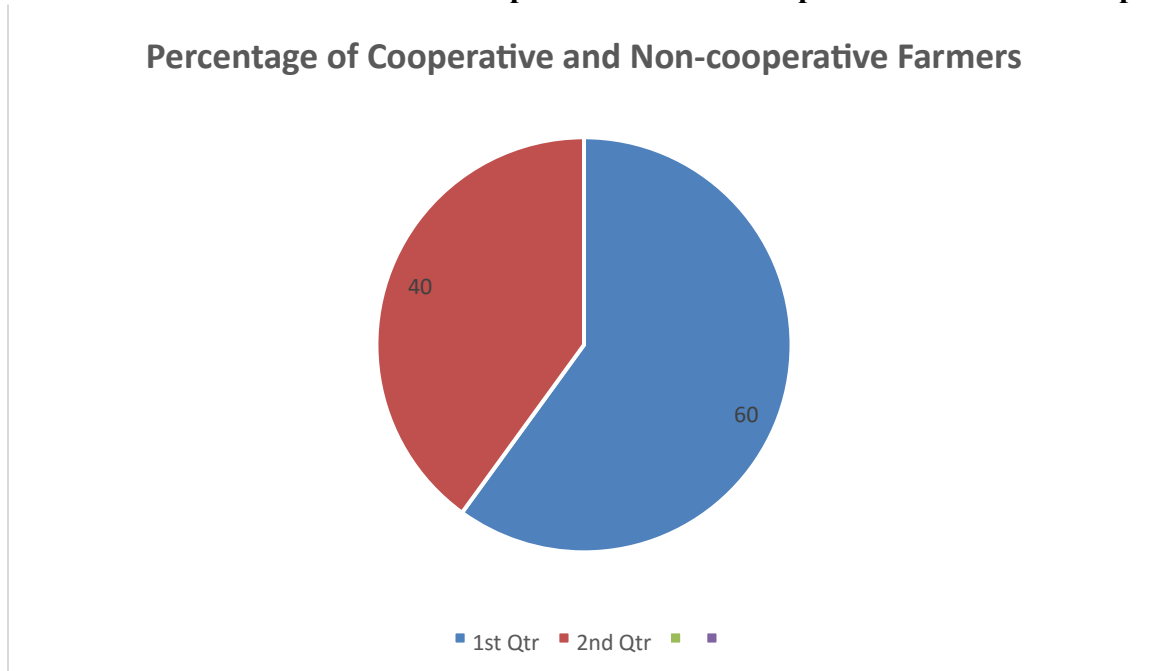


Figure 2: Percentage of cooperative and non-cooperative farmers

Key to chart:
 Blue sector (cooperative farmers)
 Red sector (non-cooperative farmers)

Source: Survey Data, 2021

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

It can be seen from the above analysis and results that the agricultural cooperative societies have a great impact in the promotion of food security in Kwara State. The status of respondents, sex, average loan gotten, farming system, mean values of age, household size and farm size of the cooperative and non-cooperative farmers were presented in Table 1 to 3. The result shows that the majority of the farmers (60%) belonged to at least one of the

cooperative societies in the state while the remaining ones (40%) did not even know about the societies let alone being a member. It was also shown that most of them (83%) were male farmers while only a few (17%) of them were females. This implies that the level of participation of females in this area was relatively small. It was further indicated that farmers, who were members of the cooperative societies, were able to get financial assistance (in the form of loan) from the society while the rest were never privileged to do so. These credits from the cooperatives help the beneficiaries in terms of the farming system as they embark on large-scale farming. The noncooperatives were just left alone struggling with their subsistence/traditional type of farming.

Furthermore, the result gives the average age of all the farmers to be 40 years, which means their age ranged from 38 to 43 and thus purports that they were in their productive ages. The household size of the farmers were calculated and observed on an average to be 15 for the cooperators and 9 for the non-cooperators. Their land size was measured to be 3.5 hectares for the former and 2.1 hectares for the latter. This is apparently one of the impacts of the cooperative societies on members. It gives them the opportunity to have many wives and give rise to many offspring and also to cultivate a vast area of land, unlike the non-cooperators who struggle to manage a small area of land to cultivate for their small family and probably some little sale.

Table 4 represents the average values of cost and return of the cooperative and non-cooperative farmers. It provides the cost of seeds, family labour, hired labour, cost of agro-chemicals, cost of implements or machinery, and the overall cost of production. It could be derived from the table that the cooperative farmers, due to grants and credits they get from the societies, were able to fully practice farm mechanization. Farm mechanization is the use of new ideas and machines in replacement of the crude method of farming to maximize productivity and profitability. They use quality machines, fertilizers, treated seeds, hired labour and agrochemicals to increase the quality and quantity of their products as shown in Table 5. Cooperative farmers have a high quality product in relatively large quantities while the noncooperative farmers are not able to meet up with this standard. This makes the former to market most of their products and thus proffer a solution for the long-time food insecurity. These were all a product of the agricultural cooperative societies in the local government area.

Table 6 listed the obstacles as challenges faced by the cooperative societies in the state. These include a high level of ignorance and illiteracy, lack of patronage, and poor management system, among several others. They were the factors that hindered the progress of the cooperative societies in the state. They were listed along with their implications on the activities of the cooperative bodies. The figure 1, which is a bar chart, was used to analyse the frequency and percentage of three (3) out of the obstacles that serve as a hindrance to the progress of the organizations. Figure 2 is a pie chart that shows the number of farmers who fall under the category of either cooperative or non-cooperative farmers. All of this data have their source from the survey made in the local government area.

Problems

As there is no such policy or principle that would assure one total perfection, there are also certain problems caused by these agricultural cooperative societies in the area under study, Ilorin West Local Government. These problems, though significant, are mostly due to high levels of illiteracy and ignorance among the occupants of the geographical area. Some are also due to poor management and administration of the society. Some of these problems are as follows:

- Lack of secrecy
- Weightage to personal gain
- Lack of incentive and initiative
- Corruption
- Limited consideration
- High interest rate
- Lack of universal acceptability ● Dishonesty.

These and several others are the burden placed upon the farmer by the cooperative societies.

CONCLUSION

Agriculture—farming, forestry, fishery and livestock management—is the main source of employment and income in the rural areas of Ilorin West Local Government Area. Agricultural cooperative societies play an important role in supporting small agricultural cooperators and marginalized groups such as young people and women. They empower their members both economically and socially. The societies facilitate smallholder farmers' access to natural resources such as land and water; information, communication and knowledge; markets, food and productive assets such as seeds and machinery; and lastly, ideas for policy and decision making. Food insecurity, as a problem faced by the Nigerian economy, is spread across each of her states.

Furthermore, the state of harmony, Kwara State, is full of individuals who have a great zeal and enthusiasm for farming. The problem is now how to go about it. They have no idea of what agriculture generally encompasses beyond planting and harvesting. The quest for a successfully attained food security plus the interested individuals who are willing and who show readiness to embark on that mission initiated the cooperative societies in the state, starting from two or more farmers who come together to help one another on their respective farms on a certain basis and a rotational manner. Cooperatives offer small scale farmers opportunities and a wide range of services, including improved access to markets, technologies, credits, training and warehouses.

There are more agricultural produce and products in the market as members who were granted loans and offers are able to cultivate a large area of land, thereby yielding more results than previous years. Although faced with many challenges in the state, the agricultural cooperative societies were still able to establish and achieve their main objective which is to ensure that rampant food insecurity is reduced or possibly ended. They were able to achieve this through their individual support, as smallholder producers are able to secure their livelihoods. They also play a great role in meeting the growing demand for food on local, national and international markets, thus contributing to poverty alleviation, food security and eradication of hunger.

Therefore, the study recommends among others that the government at all levels should give agricultural cooperative societies adequate support in order to enhance their productivity and improve food security in the land.

REFERENCES

- Akangbe, J. A., Komolafe, S. E., Ajibola, B. O., & Abdul-Karim, I. F. (2018). An Assessment of Agricultural Cooperative's Leadership Style In Ilorin West Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria (1st Edition).
- Federal Ministry of agriculture and Water Resources, 2008 "National Food Security Programme" (3rd Edition).
- ILO Coop Fact sheet No. 1: Cooperatives and rural employment, (2007) (2nd Edition).
- Jongur A. A. U., (2011). "Performance Of Agricultural Co-Operative Societies In Mubi Zone Of Adamawa State, Nigeria". Global Journal of Agricultural Sciences, (10) 2, 119-126.
- Onugu, C. U, (2017) "The Performance of Agricultural Cooperative Societies under the National Programme on Food Security in Enugu State, Nigeria (2nd Edition)". Siljak M., (2019). "Advantages and Disadvantages of cooperative Societies" (1st Edition).
- Sophie, K. (2020) "Food Insecurity in Nigeria; an analysis of the impact of climate change, economic development and conflict on Food Security" (1st Edition).