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RICE FARMERS COOPERATIVE GROUP MEMBERS' PERCEPTION ON LOAN REPAYMENT IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the perception of cooperative rice farmers on loan repayment in Edu Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. Interview schedule was employed in obtaining information from 138 cooperative rice farmers randomly selected from twenty-three rice cooperative groups. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The result shows that the mean age of the respondents was 41 years and household size of 7 persons, majority (70.3%) were males, married (84.1%), with average rice farming experience 25 years. Also majority (98.6%) of the respondents have high perception on loan repayment. Loans were used for buying planting materials (98.6%), paying of laborers (92.8) and managing of farm activities (91.3) among others. Preferred timing of loan repayment are fortnightly (94.9%) and weekly (65.2%). The constraints timely repayment of loan were diversion of funds to non-farm ventures ($\bar{X}$ = 2.18), late disbursement of loan ($\bar{X}$ = 2.02) high interest rate ($\bar{X}$ = 1.99), and lack of government support ($\bar{X}$ = 1.96). Correlation result shows that the age of the respondents (r=0.688, p<0.027), household size (r=0.727, p<0.021), educational level (r=0.923, p<0.014), and years of farming experience (r=0.661, p< 0.036) showed a positive significant relationship with perception of loan repayment. The study established that respondents have high perception for the loan repayment. Socio-economic variables also contributed to the loan repayment. It was recommended that rice farmers should have access to soft loan since they have high repayment, this would help to expand rice farming and boost production as well as constant capacity building training on positive perception on loan repayment.

Keywords: Perception, Cooperative, Rice farmers, Loan Repayment, Edu

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the main dominant anchor of the Nigerian economy. It pays about 19% to the GDP and offers sources of jobs to over 70% of the population. The present position of Nigerian economy and the quest for advanced technological shift in the agricultural sector warranted the need of increased working capital of grain farmers. Among vital inputs for ensuring adequate working condition and infrastructural development is Credit or loan. Once loan and credit are made available and as at when needed to farmers, it will lead to significant upturns in agricultural output which in turn quicken economic development of the farmers and their working groups (Zeweld, et al 2017). Refining agricultural output and commercialization of agrarian products among small-scale agronomists is generally perceived as a vital step towards poverty alleviation, food security and hence rural development. In subsistence agriculture and low-income countries like Nigeria, where smallholder farming dominates the overall national economy, smallholder farmers work on more than 70% of the total cultivated area and produce over 80% of the national output (FAO, 2023). However, smallholder farmers face severe shortage of financial resources to purchase sufficient inputs. The core constraints include, poor access to credit facilities (Oruonye, and Musa, 2012), insufficient infrastructure and somatic dispersion of small-holder farmers (Andersen and Shimokawa, 2006), the extraordinary business costs of gaining access to input and output markets, technical failure (Mojo, Fischer and Degefa, 2017), and fluctuating customer preferences. All of which requires collective action in overcoming the impediments (Petcho, et al 2019).

Agricultural cooperatives, being a legal kind of industry, have been regarded by professionals, researchers and governments as a potential solution to reducing poverty in rural areas through improved standards of living, job creation, food security and improved nutrition (Develtere, Pollet, and Wanyama, 2009). Cooperatives have the tendency to improve production, marketing and technical efficiency of small-holder farmers (Bernard and Taffesse, 2012) since they serve as forum for capacity building, information exchange and innovation in rural areas (Rao and Qaim, 2011; Fischer and Qaim, 2012). It also serves as a medium via which government and nongovernmental programmes and projects reach rural areas to improve rural welfare and livelihoods. Loan can be described as a monetary value or other considerations that an individual, group or other entity borrows from another individual or institution. Amachalu, et. al., (2017) express loan as one of the many factors farmers use to influence and increase the demand for agricultural products. However, perception on repayment of cooperative loan by farmers has been one of the numerous agricultural developments'

constraints in many developing countries and Nigerian rice farmers are no exception. Perception is the process of recognizing and interpreting sensory stimuli to interact with the environment in response to people, behavior or practices. In this case rice farmers' response to prompt loan repayment (FAO, 2023).

Therefore, the hope of the subsistence farmers on credit from financial institutions has become substantially higher in recent time. It is crucial that borrowed funds be invested on agricultural productive purposes, and the additional incomes generated be used to repay loans to have sustainable and viable production processes and credit institutions. However, failure by farmers to repay their loans on time or to repay them at all has been a serious problem faced by both agricultural credit institutions and smallholder farmers. Poor loan repayment in developing countries has become a major problem in agricultural credit administration, especially to smallholders who have limited collateral capabilities (Silesh, et al 2012).

Thus, in order to increase agricultural productivity especially among the rice farmers in enhancing food security, majority of farmers resulted in cooperative movement with the belief of accessing loans. This growth in cooperative movement according to Oladele (2016), has resulted in competition hence, loss of economics of scale for informal lenders. The benefitting farmers are expected to make the best or productive use of the borrowed fund and repay on or before the due date, to enable other farmers benefit from the funds. Onyeagocha et al. (2012) noted that one way to tackle the negative perception of farmers on loan repayment is to imbibe a positive perception on loan repayment program among beneficiaries. Osabohien et al (2020) posited that increase in farmers need for loan is a problem to cooperative sector due to increase in population of farmers and low repayment perception. It will continue to be a difficult task for cooperative societies as many credit institutions have registered heavy losses as a result of loan repayment defaults (Kiraka, et. al., 2013). Amongst the major identified causes of low perception on loan repayment and ability are delay in the time of delivery, poor supervision, non-profitability of farm enterprises and undue government interference. Inability of borrowers to repay amount of loans collected is crucial for the long-term sustenance of the cooperative group. Awunyo-Vitor (2012) reported that the important issue affecting farmers' access to credit is negative perception on loan repayment process. Additionally, credit accessibility and utilization among farmers are also influenced by farmers' socioeconomic characteristics, challenges of covering long duration, provision of collateral, inadequate credit granted, unwillingness of cooperative to grant credit, high rate of interest charged by private money lenders, delay and difficulty in communicating with cooperative officials on credit acquisition (Obisesan, 2017). The study thus examined the perception of cooperative rice farmers on loan repayment in Kwara State, Nigeria.

The Specific objectives are to;

1 describe the socio-economic characteristics of rice cooperative farmers in the study area.
2 determine the cooperative rice farmer's perception on loan repayment.
3 examine the loan utilization of cooperative rice farmers in the study area.
4 identify the constraints to timely repayment of loan among cooperative rice farmers.

Hypotheses of the study

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of rice cooperative farmers and their perception on loan repayment.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between the perception on loan repayment and cooperative rice farmers' loan utilization.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Kwara State, in the North Central geographical region of Nigeria. It covers land area of about 32,500 square kilometers and population of 3,192,900 according to 2016 Central Bank of Nigeria-CBN, (2016). The population of this study comprises of all members of Rice Cooperative Farmers in Edu Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. List of all registered 23 rice cooperative groups was retrieved from Kwara State Agricultural Development Programme. A random selection of 6 members from each group was employed to make a sample size of one hundred and thirty eight (138) respondents for the study. Some perceptional statements were developed around loan repayment for cooperative rice farmers to react to as applicable on a 5-point likert type of strongly agree (SA-5), agree (A-4), Undecided (U-3) Disagree (D-2) and strongly disagree (SD-1). A mean value of 3.00 was obtained from 5+4+3+2+1/5=3.00. At upper limit of decision is 3.00+0.50=3.50 while at lower limit is 3.00-0.50=2.50. This implies that mean values of 3.50 and above are positive/favorable perception while 2.50 and below are negative or unfavorable perception of the loan repayment. The study employed the use of both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures in analyzing the data obtained. The descriptive statistical components was used in describing the socio-economic characteristics of cooperative rice farmers such as age, gender, religion, marital status, and educational qualification, perception of loan repayment, utilization of loan and constraints while the inferential components

used was Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) for testing the hypotheses of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents

The results in Table 1 shows the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents in the study area. It shows that rice cooperative farmers in Edu LGA were majorly males (70.3%). This agrees to the findings of Fasina (2017), Oyediran et al. (2020) that males are more involved in farming activities than females. Similarly, male farmers in developing countries have more access to agricultural resources (Kokoye, et al 2017). Age has been identified as being a key to managerial decision making. From the result, it was observed that the mean age of the cooperative farmers was 40.8 years which indicated that the farmers are still within their active economic productive age that is required to undertake aggressive farming activities which in turn can enhance their capacity to repay acquired agricultural loan. This submission is in line with the findings of Ronald and Honesta (2014), Omoare and Oyediran (2020), Anifowose et al. (2022) which stated that most rice farmers are mostly youth between the age range of 31-45 years which shows that respondents are more energetic and vibrant to carry out their farming activities. The educational qualification of the respondents indicated that about 40.6% have completed secondary school while 20.3 % and 25.4 % have completed primary and tertiary education respectively and 8.7 % had no-formal education. This implies that majority of respondents in the study area had one form of education or the other since education influences personality of people towards life issues. This agrees to the findings of Adisa, et al (2019) who found out that most rice farmers in Kwara State have their highest level of education as secondary level. Education is an important socioeconomic factor that shapes farmers' way of life as its influence farmers' perception and adoption of innovations that can bring about increase in their income and ability to repay their loan (Oyediran et al., 2020). The analysis of household size indicated a mean of 7 persons which was observed to be relatively a large. A large household is vital in the provision of free and alternative farm labor and as such may assist farmers in saving cost of labor. By this, the cooperative farmers can save cost associated with hired labour, which can be used to finance loan repayment. The result in Table 1 shows that (27.3%) of the respondents have farming experience between 0-20 years, (36.9%) of the respondents have a farming experience between 21-30 years, while (35.8%) have over 31 and above farming experience. The mean year of the farming experience was approximately 25 years and this implies that the respondents have gathered enough experiences in farming. This is in correspondence with the findings of Afolabi (2008) which state that 54.10% of rice farmers have more than 10years of farming experience.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their socio-economic characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percentages	Mean
Sex			
Male	97	70.3	
Female	41	29.7	
Age (in years)			
15-35	53	38.0	
36-56	68	50.0	40.8
57 & above	17	12.0	
Educational Qualification			
No formal education	12	8.7	
Adult education	7	5.1	
Primary education	28	20.3	
Secondary education	56	40.6	
Tertiary education	35	25.4	
Household Size (No. of person)			
0-5	40	29.0	
6-10	80	57.9	7
11-15	18	13.0	
Farming Experience (in years)			
0-20	36	27.3	
21-30	55	36.9	24.9
30 & above	47	35.8	

Source: Field survey, 2022

Farmers' Perception on Loan Repayment

The respondents' perception on loan repayment in the study area is shown in Table 2. From the Table it shows

that the respondents strongly agreed with the fact that the time frame for loan repayment should be at convenience ($\bar{x}$=4.48), loan serves as capital for improving farm management ($\bar{x}$=4.39), collection of loan my not be bias between male and female farmers ($\bar{x}$=4.27), loan repayment method encouraging ($\bar{x}$=3.97), cooperative loan requirements are easier to fulfill ($\bar{x}$=3.88), loan burrowing is dividend of democracy for farmers ($\bar{x}$=3.78), burden from cooperative leaders discouraged me from fulfilling my repayment ($\bar{x}$=3.77), interest on loan are usually very high ($\bar{x}$=3.57), my loan repayment is affected due to high spending on household needs than farming ($\bar{x}$=3.48) while they were indifferent with regards to bank loans are easier than cooperative loans ($\bar{x}$=2.91). This implies that the respondents have positive perception of loan repayment in the study area. This is in congruent with the work of Ogah, (2015); Ronald et al. (2014) who agreed that rice farmers in the study area have positive perception of loan repayment on burrowed money.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents according to their perception of loan repayment

	SA	A	U	DA	SD	$\bar{x}$	R
Variables	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)		
Loan repayment method encouraging	45(32.6)	54(39.1)	31(22.5)	6(4.3)	2(1.4)	3.97	4th
Loan burrowing is dividend of democracy for farmers	16(11.6)	79(57.2)	33(23.9)	7(5.1)	3(2.2)	3.78	6th
Interest on loan are usually very high	30(21.7)	51(37.0)	27(19.6)	27(19.6)	3(2.2)	3.57	8th
My loan repayment is affected due to high spending on household needs than farming	21(15.2)	46(33.3)	51(37.0)	18(13.6)	2(1.4)	3.48	9th
The burden from cooperative leaders discouraged me from fulfilling my repayment	27(19.6)	59(42.8)	46(33.3)	5(3.6)	1(0.7)	3.77	7th
Bank loans are easier than cooperative loans	14(10.1)	26(18.8)	41(29.7)	48(34.8)	9(6.5)	2.91	10th
Cooperative loan requirements are easier to fulfill	37(26.8)	70(50.7)	14(10.1)	12(8.7)	5(3.6)	3.88	5th
Loan serves as capital for improving farm management	71(51.4)	57(41.3)	5(3.6)	3(2.2)	2(1.4)	4.39	2nd
Collection of loan my not be bias between male and female farmers	59(42.8)	65(47.1)	8(5.8)	4(2.9)	2(1.4)	4.27	3rd
Time frame for loan repayment should be at convenience	79(57.2)	50(36.2)	6(4.3)	2(1.4)	1(0.7)	4.48	1st

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Level of Perception of the Respondents on Loan Repayment

From the analysis as presented in Table 3, on the level of perception of the respondents on loan repayment in the study area. The levels of perception of the respondents was categorized in High, Moderate and Low respectively. It was observed that majority (98.6%) of the respondents have high perception on loan repayment process while little proportion (1.4%) have low perception on loan repayment respectively. This implies that the respondents who have high perception on loan repayment are the majority in the study area. The implication is that the rice cooperative farmers have high commitment on loan repayment process probably because they belief that loan help to improve farm management. This is in congruent with the work of Anifowose et al. (2022); Ronald et al. (2014) that rice farmers are very much inclined to cooperative loan repayment process in the study area.

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents according to level of perception on loan repayment (n=138)

Level of perception	Perceptional score range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	51.0-100.0	136	98.6
Low	1.0- 50.0	2	1.4

Sources: Field Survey, 2022

Rice cooperative member utilization of loan

Table 4 shows the distribution of the respondents based on utilization of loan. It shows that majority (98.6%) of rice farmers utilized the loan collected for the buying of planting materials (seeds), 94.2% proportion uses the loan for buying farm inputs, about 92.8% spent the loan on hired labor while 91.3% used it for farm operations and management. Also, greater proportion (77.5%) spent part of the loan on transportation, about 55.8% for purchasing food, and 53.6% used the money for miscellaneous expenses. So also, about average (50.7%) paid house bills from the loan, 34.1% acquired land and 45.7% used the loan to settle children's school bills. This implies that some of the respondents were not using the loan for the primary purposes to which the loan is to be used for. This is in agreement with the findings of Anyiro and Oriaku (2011) who agreed that rice farmers

divert some of the loan collected to none agricultural activities.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents based on their utilization of loan

Variables	Utilization (%)
Buying planting materials (seeds)	98.6
Use in buying farm inputs	94.2
Use in payment of laborers	92.8
Management of farm activities	91.3
Transportation to market center	77.5
Payment of food	55.8
Other miscellaneous	53.6
Payment of house bills	50.7
Payment of children school fees	45.7
Land acquisition for farming	34.1

Sources: Field Survey, 2022

Timely Repayment of Cooperative Loan Collected

The distribution of the respondents according to timely repayment of cooperative loan collected is shown in Table 5. As depicted in the table, majority of the rice farmers prefer repayment of their cooperative loan fortnightly (94.9%). This is probably because most of the farmers and rural farm families engaged in periodic daily savings from their various farm production activities. Arising from this background some private money savers abound who visit these farmers on a daily basis to collect available cash and make deposits daily. Some may take their savings at the end of the week or fortnightly. In contrary to this pattern cooperative loan repayment is mostly in amortization pattern of monthly repayment, hence most farmers may not adequately pay their loan effectively. Those that collect savings monthly and fortnightly might have used same for other none agricultural activities thereby affecting repayment at the end of the month. This is also evident as one of the main constraints of loan repayment among the respondents in the study area. From the table 5 below (47.8%) agreed on monthly repayment while smaller proportion (13.8%) agreed on a daily basis. This is in line with the findings of Amachalu et al., 2017 who agreed that most farmers engaged in daily and weekly savings in order to meet up with their financial needs and loan repayment.

Table 5: Distribution of the respondents according to loan amortization schedule

Variables	Frequency	%
Daily	19	13.8
Weekly	90	65.2
Fortnightly	131	94.9
Monthly	66	47.8

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Constraints to timely repayment of loan by the respondents

The level of severity of various constraints to timely repayment among respondents has been identified in Table 6 below. Respondents identified most severe constraints as 'diversion of funds to non-farm ventures' with ($\bar{x}$=2 .18) and was ranked 1st. Anyiro and Oriaku (2011) reported that smallholder farmers divert a proportion of borrowed funds from financial institutions to non-farming activities. This implies that most of the cooperative rice farmers in the study area diverted their funds to nonfarm ventures. Late disbursement of loan ($\bar{x}$=2.02) and high interest rate ($\bar{x}$=1.99) were rated 2nd and 3rd respectively; this implies that the earlier the farmer were able to get the loan, the earlier they were able to meet up their targeted budget and the negative effect of interest rate suggests that credit scheme with high interest lower the probability of having access to loan. This result is quite consistent with many studies which found that farmers are reluctant to loan scheme with higher interest rate (Ololade and Olagunju, 2013). Action of pest and diseases ($\bar{x}$=1.68) was rated 8th, high literacy among cooperators ($\bar{x}$=1.99) rated 9th and the least constraints is weak market link ($\bar{x}$=1.99) which is ranked 10th, this also implies that if farmers were not able to sell their produce at the right time its results to loss of income which can affects their loan repayment .

Table 6: Respondent constraint to timely repayment of loan

Variables	Highly Severe F (%)	Moderate Severe F (%)	Not Severe F (%)	Score	$\bar{x}$	Rank
Diversion of funds to non-farm ventures	53(38.4)	58(42.0)	27(19.0)	302	2.18	1st
Late disbursement of loan	44(31.9)	53(38.4)	41(29.7)	279	2.02	2nd
High interest rate	43(31.21)	51(37.0)	44(31.9)	275	1.99	3rd
Lack of government support	40(29.0)	53(38.4)	45(32.6)	271	1.96	4th
Natural disasters	21(15.2)	58(42.6)	59(42.8)	238	1.72	5th
Low profit from rice farming	16(11.6)	70(50.7)	52(37.7)	235	1.70	6th
High production cost	12(8.7)	72(52.2)	54(39.1)	234	1.69	7th
Action of pests & diseases	12(8.7)	71(51.4)	55(39.9)	233	1.68	8th
High illiteracy among cooperators	12(8.7)	46(33.3)	80(58.0)	208	1.51	9th
Inadequate and weak market link	6(4.3)	11(8.0)	121(87.7)	161	1.17	10th

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between selected socio-economic characteristics and perception towards loan repayment

The result of the correlation analysis between the selected socio-economic characteristics of the respondents and their perception on loan repayment is shown in Table 7. Results presented in Table 7 shows that the 'age of the respondents' ($r=0.688$, $p<0.027$), 'household size' ($r=0.727$, $p<0.021$), 'educational level' ($r=0.923$, $p<0.014$), and 'years of farming experience' ($r=0.661$, $p< 0.036$) have a strong positive significant relationship with perception of cooperative rice farmers on their loan repayment. The positive relationship between the age and respondents' perception on loan repayment indicates that the age of the respondents increases as their perception on loan repayment. Similarly, household size relationship with respondents' perception implies that large family may serve free labour force to expand the farms thereby which help in reducing the cost of labour and loan repayment burden. Education provides the farmers opportunity to apply and use the loan for optima production, thereby shaping their perception on loan repayment; higher educational status increases farmers' perception to promptly pay their loans. Lastly, the positive relationship between years of farming experience and respondents' perception implies that the higher the years of experience, the higher the respondent perception of loan repayment. Therefore, some farmers' socio-economic characteristics have an effect on how they perceive their loan repayments. This is in line with the submission of Ameh and Lee (2022) on loan acquisition by rice farmers in Lagos state, Nigeria.

Table 7: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between socio-economic characteristics and farmers' perception on loan repayment

Variables	r- value	p- value	Decision
Gender	0.140	0.100	Not significant
Age	0.688*	0.027	Significant
Household size	0.727*	0.021	Significant
Educational level	0.923*	0.014	Significant
Farming experience	0.661*	0.036	Significant

Source: Field Survey, 2022 *Correlation is significant at 0.05 levels.

Regression Analysis between Cooperative Rice Farmers' Perception on Loan Repayment and Loan Utilization

The result of the regression analysis between the cooperative rice farmers' perception on loan repayment and loan utilization is depicted in Table 8. The Regression results show that the R^2 is 0.332 which is an indication that 33.2% variations in the loan utilization is caused by farmer's repayment perception.

Transportation to market center, miscellaneous expenses, and payment of children school fee were found significant by 44%, 46%, and 59% respectively.

This is in congruent with the submission of Anngbogu, et al (2014) in the study in Anambra state, Nigeria.

Table 8: Results of regression analysis between cooperative rice farmers' perception on loan repayment and loan utilization

Variables	B	Std. Error	T	Sig.
Constant	1.426	0.078	18.331	0.001
Buying planting materials (seeds)	0.421	0.43	0.979	0.339
Use in buying farm inputs	0.14	0.39	0.360	0.716
Use in payment of laborers	-0.13	0.24	-0.541	0.598
Management of farm activities	-0.14	0.19	-0.740	0.452
Transportation to market center	0.44	0.22	2.000	0.048*
Payment of food	-0.20	0.21	-0.952	0.340
Other miscellaneous	0.46	0.08	5.75	0.001*
Payment of house bills	0.24	0.33	0.727	0.477
Payment of children school fees	0.59	0.22	2.682	0.010*
Farm land acquisition	-0.26	0.19	-1.368	0.165

Source: Field Survey, 2022 R-Square = 0.332.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that 'the perception of cooperative rice farmers on loan repayment in Edu Local Government, Kwara State was high and could positively influenced respondents loan repayment because most of the rice farmers are committed to the loan repayment. Timing of loan repayment are weekly and fortnightly against the monthly timing of repayment. It was however identified that diversion of funds to non-farm ventures, lack of government support, high interest rate and late disbursement of loan were severe constraints on respondents' perception to loan repayment. So, it was recommended that rice farmers should have access to soft loan since they have high repayment; this would help to expand rice farming and boost production as well as periodic capacity building on positive perception on loan repayment. Diversion of funds to non-farm ventures among farmers can be corrected through enlightenment and training on finance and debt management; also should be made into cluster rather than individuals. Government support could be through policy formulation that will fit-in to various production cycles in agricultural. Loan should be made available and disbursed at right time.

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