



COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR RURAL FAMILY RESILIENCE

A SOCODEVI study funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) found that members of strong, active agricultural cooperatives suffered less COVID-19 pandemic-related food insecurity and economic disruption than members of less active or inactive cooperatives.



METHODOLOGY

The study surveyed 1,270 SOCODEVI project participants across six regions of Ghana, Mali, Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire between September and December of 2020. We used several indicators to assess participants' resilience as related to food security, women's empowerment and income. To assess food security, we calculated the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) and the Coping Strategies Index (CSI) both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic; we then compared these results using statistical tests.

AN ACTIVE COOPERATIVE CONTRIBUTES TO FOOD SECURITY

In general, our study confirmed that COVID-19 pandemic circumstances increased the prevalence of household food insecurity in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Mali.

Four factors had a decisive impact on food security :

- Cooperative activity level;
- Country of residence - since health measures differed between countries;
- Income loss;
- Agriculture as the main occupation.

Sanitary measures put in place by Public authorities to limit the spread of the disease, such as lockdowns and travel restrictions, are linked to an increase in the prevalence of food insecurity.

However, regardless of their country, members of cooperatives seen as active demonstrated more resilience during the pandemic than members of cooperatives considered less active or inactive, mainly because of a smaller increase in food insecurity.

- Although women and men had similar food insecurity experiences, we noted that **women members of active cooperatives were less likely to reduce their food intake during the pandemic** than women members of less active or inactive cooperatives.
- Furthermore, **members of active cooperatives maintained better economic access to food and used coping strategies that were half as extreme** as members of less active or inactive cooperatives.

Therefore, we found that members of less active or inactive cooperatives experienced a greater increase in food insecurity than members of active cooperatives.



ACTIVE CO-OPS, MORE RESILIENT MEMBERS

Our research yielded additional findings supporting the development of active, sustainable, long-lasting and inclusive cooperatives :

- The most active cooperatives were able to maintain their marketing channels despite the pandemic.

Across the four countries surveyed, 70% of members from less active or inactive cooperatives had to modify their marketing channels, as opposed to 48% of members from active cooperatives.

- Members of the most active cooperatives suffered less income loss during the pandemic.

In Côte d'Ivoire, 53% of members from the active cooperative declared income loss during the pandemic, as opposed to 78%, 88%, and 95% of members from less active or inactive cooperatives in other countries.

- Cooperatives that managed to maintain services and introduce special measures to inform members about COVID-19 or mitigate its effects were able to reduce the impact of the pandemic on their members.

58% of Côte d'Ivoire's active cooperative reported feeling fearful of the pandemic, as opposed to 80% of members from less active cooperatives across all four countries combined.

Through listening to members and engaging with their community, some cooperatives acted **as a social safety net** by :

- a. Preserving marketing channels, which maintained household income flow;
- b. Offering credit for input purchases to maintain agricultural activities;
- c. Informing members about COVID-19 and the health measures, to reduce their feeling of fear;

WHAT IS AN ACTIVE COOPERATIVE?

The dynamism of the cooperative determines its ability to come up with independent internal responses to the needs of its members, particularly when there is a lack of social protection in the wider community or region.

To be considered active by SOCODEVI, cooperatives need to respond to their members' needs and maintain good communication with their base. They must be democratic, well-managed, well-run and provide adequate services.

Throughout the pandemic and other crises, active cooperatives have the structure necessary to continue offering goods and services whenever possible, while also adapting to better meet the different needs of their members.

USEFUL DEFINITION

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. (FAO, 1996)



Centring women in our analysis

SOCODEVI is committed to offering a response adapted to the specific needs of women, while respecting their rights. Unfortunately, women and girls are hardest hit by crises and disasters. As our study demonstrates, the pandemic was no exception to this trend.

Carrying additional burdens : Our analysis of the pandemic's impact on the Women's Empowerment Index shows that 78% of women reported taking on household responsibilities and childcare alone or with little help. This result confirms findings of other studies¹ and highlights the idea that **women have carried additional burdens during the pandemic, regardless of their cooperative's activity level.**

Women are on the front lines of health care and food provision, as well as unpaid domestic and general community work. These responsibilities have increased during the pandemic. It is important to remember that women are the primary caregivers for health and food, and that during the lockdowns, unpaid community service and domestic work increased and was carried out largely by women.

Domestic violence : Women and men who participated in our study reported more household stress and observed an increase in domestic violence within their communities. These results confirm findings of similar studies²: women have been exposed to increased domestic violence due to the economic recession and social isolation when lockdown measures were in place.

1 McLaren et coll. (2020); Power (2020).

2 FAO (2020); WHO (2020)



STRONG COOPERATIVES SUPPORT THE MOST VULNERABLE

Our research on the relationship between dynamism levels of West African cooperatives and member resilience provides governments and international organizations with valuable information that will help them develop targeted policies and initiatives in order to mitigate the negative impacts of crises.

Working with community organizations such as agricultural cooperatives, youth committees and women's organizations can be an effective way to reach the most vulnerable households facing a future that is increasingly unstable and uncertain.

The active presence of cooperative enterprises within communities is a valuable ally to help people cope with crises. They contribute to building sustainable and inclusive solidarity-based local economies. Cooperatives are organizations based on social cohesion and solidarity. They are essential economic agents, inviting collaboration and improving standards of living for their members.

Supporting efforts to create and strengthen cooperatives helps build a social safety net for the most vulnerable populations, increasing the impact of our efforts towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.





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