

THE ROLE OF COOPERATIVES IN PROMOTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: EVIDENCE FROM MULTIPURPOSE COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES IN UGANDA

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Semuliki Cooperative Union Limited

Semuliki Cooperative Union Limited started in 2010 as Bundibugyo Cocoa Association. It was a smallholder cocoa producer organisation operating in Bundibugyo district. It was established to respond to the challenges faced by the small-scale cocoa producers in the district. The union now has 80 collective market centres in 14 sub-counties, with a total of 1,837 members – 962 men and 875 women. The union's core business portfolios include facilitating collective marketing of members' cocoa; training of member farmers; resource mobilization through shares, commissions and subscriptions; research, lobbying and advocacy support; provision of agricultural information; value addition, innovative linkages to other service providers such as buyers, input dealers and financial institutions, such as banks; and encouraging a saving culture among members.

The union is also empowering women through a number of activities, including the Women in Business (WIB) scheme, where women are advanced loans at an interest rate of 1% to boost their production, ensuring that members have equal rights such as freedom of speech, rights to property and

access to goods and services, and promoting women in leadership through training in cooperative governance. SEMCU also conducts radio talk shows on gender equality.

Mt Rwenzori Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union

Mt Rwenzori Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union was established in 2014. The union was started with 25 farmers, among whom were four women, who mobilized the existing small primary coffee farmers' groups. Today, however, 40% of the members are women.

A five-year project supported by WE Effect and a \$250,000 grant from the United States Agricultural Development Fund (USADF) is helping the union purchase equipment and set up facilities such as the store for the post-harvest storage of coffee.

The union ensures that women have access to land so they can plant their own coffee. Farmers and the general community are also trained. Communities are sensitised to women's rights to land, including inheriting land. Increasingly women are inheriting land from their parents.

