

ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM

THEME: MEMBERSHIP AND OWNERSHIP OF  
COOPERATIVE IN A COMPETATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Topic: Cooperative Education and Training: Key  
Component for Empowerment

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## Cooperative Education and Training Key Component for Empowerment

### 1. Introduction

We all dream of business as Cooperators. It is an assumption that this can help mostly the people in need to make improvements in their standard of living. The question remaining is whether cooperative business can give respectable surplus (I.C.A,1993).

The First Society (Rochdale) had Component of Education and Training for strengthening membership. Today we should not claim to ignore it. In Tanzania Cooperatives are associated commonly with cash crop production especially with Cotton, Coffee, Tobacco etc. (Bee 1996). They were using it as instrument for mobilizing resources for state and were also expected to relieve government from heavy burdens.

What is paining is when these members were left uninformed of what is actually transpiring. Agricultural activities being the backbone of the country's economy, occupies almost 90% of population. But majority of these people don't know some of important information for their activities.

## 2. Cooperative Education and Training

Cooperative education and training is an effort by which cooperative members and staff are required to acquire knowledge and skills necessary to oversee their cooperative understandings. This include knowing their weakness and obligations and also enable staff to acquire skills necessary to perform cooperative works. The process consists of systematic member awareness of what Cooperatives were, how they were organized, functions, roles, rights and obligations of membership.

Through the process of education, members, committee members and staff of cooperatives are made aware and empowered. This means more than just giving information and patronage (Ian, 1995). According to Ian Cooperative Education means engaging in minds of members, committee, leaders and employees of cooperative to comprehend fully the importance of cooperative. The training would ensure that they have the skills they needed to carry their duties effectively.

The Cooperative Education will make members aware of simibrities, between cooperative workings, hypothesis and their own thinking.

It was identified and committed long time ago by International Cooperative Alliance ( ICA, 1966 ) to have 'Education, Training and Information as one of the seven (7) principles of cooperative where they can put their values into practice.

With this principles it was believed that Cooperatives should provide education and training to its members, elected leaders and employees. This will help to contribute to the effectiveness in their cooperatives. This also involve informing the general public on nature and benefit of cooperation.

### **Importance of Cooperative Education Training**

Cooperatives like any other business entities require skills which do not exist in most societies. The technical training in producing things is not enough. For example most women cooperative activities in handicraft have failed due to lack of marketing techniques. The skills in marketing which involve identification of customers, marking right design, appropriate pricing quality control and efficiency is what is missing in most cooperatives. They also lack skills in purchasing raw materials, storage and stock control. Some even don't know the process of obtaining a licence. Handling money is a big issue throughout cooperatives. Many have managed to swindle amount of it especially managers, secretaries and

treasures of some unions and societies. Cases have happened where officials squander money belonging to members, but since members don't know even how much they have, it is not easy to follow. One of the example being Tranzoia where committee members took some money from their business without the knowledge of the members. In Tanzania, there are several cases where leadership colluded with staff and innocent members were the suffers (WID 1996). For sure handling money is a problems throughout the country. Some people have managed to swindle large amount of money. But the issue is how does one know that his property is squandered if one is not aware of how transaction operates?. An example is women group in some areas who are keeping their money in village or church account fearing bureaucratic systems existing in those financial institutions and inadequate record keeping system.

Although autonomous member-based cooperative movement exist members are not all aware of such new changes. For example, the 1991 Cooperative Act is not known to all members. One of the reason being underfunding of Cooperative Education (Chambo 1998). Members sill fear government interference since they were not aware of changes especially the new Act, changes in monetary system, marketing system and trade facilities.

Apart from ignorance on frequent changes most members, employees and leaders lack entrepreneurship skills and proper record-keeping among cooperative groups. Those with high level qualification and with professional training are at national and union level. Research results (CEC, 1985) Showed that only 30% of top management in Tanzania has societies has high level of training, specifically the report showed that 14% of secretaries of Primary Societies has attained Secondary Education. Findings from the research also indicated that those secretaries who attended phase I and II of secretaries course conducted by the college were performing better than those who had not been to any course.

Cooperative education and training is pre-requisite for development of a strong, effective and successful cooperative movement. In the past, training were conducted through seminars, short courses, correspondence courses and radio programme. The training given were supply oriented and served the interest of government and staff of cooperative movement instead of member's interest. It was fully sponsored by the government and the donors. This was possible until 1990's when cost sharing element was introduced. But again this had its impact on the economic situation of the society. Not all can afford paying for education they needed.

The actual training conducted used to be unorganized in some areas, little attention was given to training needs assessment. Little or no attention was given to systematic programme of member education.

It is a mere fact that no cooperative movement can perform successfully if its members and leaders are not enlightened on what cooperatives are, how they are organized and function. No matter how well their employees are trained (Cooperative College 1998) and knowledge of ownership is important keeping their property well.

Training conducted before used poor methodologies whereby few were trained using conventional method instead of modern approaches (Participatory approaches).

Lack of information on women/youth involvement also has contributed in hindering dissemination of information. For example in Uganda women comprised of 25% of Cooperative membership (WID 1996). Reasons given being lack of appropriate information, material and moral encouragement. Kenya indicate that low performance of women in cooperative was due to cultural factors which inhibits and exclude them from ownership of property.

In Tanzania where women form about 20% of entire cooperative membership (Mkwizu 1992) there was no single female member represented in the Board e.g KNCU, VUASU, Njoluma whereby in each membership is 2.6%, 45% and 35% respectively.

Although the Cooperative Development Policy of 1996 encourage women participation in cooperative, no effective changes has taken place. We could then say that their low participation in Cooperative was based on lack of education and information on cooperative affairs. They have little access to unions societies services. It was also argued by different scholars that ignorance of members of cooperative societies had direct relationships with their performance in that society (Ngalula 1991).

From the above evidence it is necessary for each category of cooperators to be educated and trained with specificity starting with members education, it has the following purposes:-

- a) To be aware on ways and means of improving their situation
- b) To understand the aims and Principles of cooperation so as to be able to decide whether cooperative would be appropriate in their development.



- c) To understand cooperative Principles and business methods and be aware of what is expected of them as members.
- d) Evaluated the success of Programme to check if objective have been achieved.
- e) To locate and develop those who will be the future on the other hand, staff education leaders.

Aimed at:

- a) Increasing staff knowledge of the values of cooperation
- b) To increase staff belief in values of cooperation
- c) To increase efficiency of staff in jobs they are doing
- d) To increase the efficiency of staff throughout their career
- e) To improve the general education of the staff
- f) To improve the ability of the staff to make intelligent choices in all areas of life.
- g) To motivate the staff.

### **How Education and Training Could be Improved**

It is high time for cooperative movement to have concrete policy on education and training. The College was identified to become centre for member, committee and staff education. (CEC 1995).

The current Field Education Policy has strategies on diversification (DFE 1998) i.e activities to focus mainly on cooperatives, youth

and women groups. The training needs to be undertaken in these groups should be customer based and should have cost sharing element to have future sustainability.

Although Cooperative Policy to be implemented is in its final stage, preparations process on enlightening people should start earlier. Lack of policy being one of the factors that contributed to many cooperative problems.

The Cooperative Education should mean more than just teaching using traditional methods. The Education and Training should be both formal and informal and in most cases should use unconventional means including involvement of its activities. Thus "Education through Cooperation" rather than "Education for Cooperation". In this method/approach, participants take active role throughout the process. The trainers/educators then should be trained in modern methodology used which was supply-oriented.

It is my feeling that cooperative education be introduced from Primary to Secondary and School Cooperative Project be formed as Pilot. The teaching of Cooperation in schools might enable large population be reached easily so that they can learn cooperatives

and internalize as they grow socially mentally and intellectually. This can have multiplier effect since the knowledge can be carried to their future life.

Cooperative members need to know the nature of cooperative enterprise, how cooperatives are organized and function. From education, members will then understand how cooperatives operate and thus can be able to elect competent and honest leaders, eventually they can summon them.

Committee members on the other hand need to know their role as elected leaders to be honest in conducting cooperative affairs. Laws and by-laws should be known especially those that regulate the cooperative business, to ensure it is in the right track and to match with other competitors.

Education and training, although not solution to all cooperative problems, can institute major factors in determining the success or failure of cooperative. From the beginning the pioneers of Cooperative movement (Rochdale) which was believed to be the first modern society, had education and training as one of their

principles. Education gave them light on social policy and techniques of Cooperation for both economic and democratic, through which their objectives were met.

Many cooperative movements in different countries has education and extension departments and has considerable funds on the subject. But the problem is that emphasis on how such funds should be utilized is not made clear. It is sometimes misallocate

and as a result cooperative members and general public pay less attention to cooperative education. It is then recommended for cooperative movement to survive, there should be defined and prepared educational plan that is implementable.

The training offered should be designed in such an way that it focuses on gender literacy. Trainers should carry training activities which addresses gender issues. This is because women are the minority members (20% membership) while in actual fact they are the majority in performing cooperative activities. The 1996 Cooperative Development Policy has encouraged Participation of women through removing inhibiting factors. The problem remain on how this will be achieved. The ministry concerned together with collaborating institution to take a leading role in gender

sensitization, awareness creation and empowerment. If men and women do not understand the democratic nature of cooperatives that they should both be members and leaders, men will continue dominating in cooperative. After training even men will see the importance of involving women participating in all cooperative undertakings as members and decision makers. Some who would not accept this may change since it is a process and may be after seeing results, their attitude might change.

Cooperators, especially committee and employees should be equipped with skills of recording, summarizing and interpreting financial transactions. Together with these skills, management control system is needed through banking of money, using cheque system, using more than one person to handle money and proper authorization of payments to be taught to committee members and even members. The impact of such training has been observed with MEMCoop Project where Chawampu members questioned audited report by COASCO (Interview with MEMCOOP Coordinator).

For cooperatives to operate democratically, members have to be informed of their rights and obligations. They should actually know cooperative principles and by-laws under which they operate. In some areas these are taken for granted. Results from

MEMCOOP has indicated that some members of pilot area did not know their society. They thought the society belonged to the union (KNCU) or it might belong to Coffee Authority. After the training some members have realized ownership of their society, have drawn action, plans for their societies and have started following them up.

Pre-cooperative education should be give to potential members.

After they have been informed, they can form groups. More intensive training for both members and committee is necessary.

Most animators encourage groups form cooperative without telling them its

importance. In some areas like Same, in Kilimanjaro Region, change agents have been identified from members themselves.

These have been very active and managed to mobilize and influence even non-members in the community to join cooperatives. The exercise was successful and some were influenced to join

Cooperatives (MEMCOOP 1998).

## 5. CONCLUSION

From the discussion above it is obvious that for future improvement of cooperatives, education and training should be emphasized at all levels of the movement and different categories. For members, it is

obvious that knowledge and skills for managing cooperatives is in high demand. Their roles, responsibility and benefit of their society are among topics to be covered.

Committee Members and employees of cooperative society on the other hand needed extra training on management and monitoring of cooperative activities on behalf of members. Therefore training on management, planning, supervision control and evaluation and provision of information to members is important.

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