

**CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN AFRICA
A CONTINENTAL PERSPECTIVE**

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1.0 Background

Education, training and information is one of the seven principles of co-operation that is observed worldwide, but quite neglected and marginally treated in the budgets of co-operative organizations, especially in Africa. As a principle, education and training means the improvement of understanding (education) and skills development (training) by providing access to general knowledge, teaching values and norms of behaviour as a basis for further education and the acquisition of theoretical and practical knowledge in terms of vocational training (Munkner, 1995).

Treated in its generality, co-operative education and training has four major characteristics on its constituents - the members, leaders and employed staff. First, is the awareness or general knowledge about the co-operative enterprise. Second, is the acquisition component where the major constituents of the co-operative enterprise - the members, employed staff and the Board, need space and opportunity to acquire the required education, training and information from a given source of delivery. Thirdly, it has impact or effect characteristics in that people would like to observe improvement in the understanding of the acquired skills in terms of performance of the groups in the selected co-operative enterprise and four, the behavioural component in that the behaviour of those who had the opportunity of accessing co-operative education and training, would have changed on how they treated their co-operative society. Those who had access to education and training would take their co-operative society as an instrument of changing their economic life through improved services to the members as the ultimate goal of the co-operative enterprise.

It is also important that we provide a working definition of a co-operative society, so that when we talk about co-operative education and training is knowledge of the organization itself. a co-operative society is an association of individual persons who voluntarily form an economic enterprise of which they pool their resources so that it can serve their economic and social interests democratically, on the basis of equity and equality. A part from the requirement of the practice of equity, equality, fairness and democracy, the co-operative society is an organization combining the cooperation of individual persons and the need for the co-operative individual persons to form a joint economic enterprise to improve their conditions of life.

Members, leaders and employed staff, must realize that a co-operative society is formed for the members to practice **self-reliance**. The colonial history and the post-independence political interpretation of why co-operatives are formed, has always informed the members that co-

operatives are formed to perpetuate dependence and as a catchment organization for receiving aid. To the contrary, co-operatives are about self - help self- reliance and creating self - confidence and providing the enabling organizational conditions for self-help promotion.

After the background, this presentation will look into the following areas: first, the conceptual framework of co-operative education, training and co-operative learning. Second, we shall investigate the link between education and training on one hand, and member empowerment on the other. Thirdly, we look at co-operative education and training in the context of entrepreneurship. Fourth, we look at the supply for co-operative education and training, and lastly, the future of co-operative education and training in Africa.

2.0 Conceptual Framework

In this section, we look at the concepts of co-operative education co-operative training and co-operative learning. As will be seen, there are differences between co-operative education and co-operative training. While co-operative education is general knowledge about co-operatives, co-operative training is the attainment of skills about co-operative organization and how run the business. On the other hand, co-operative learning, is an organizational strategy for making co-operative education and training more effective.

2.1 Co-operative Education

This is the general knowledge and awareness of the functionality of co-operative organizations. All members of co-operative societies, leaders and managers, need to know how co-operatives are formed, why they are formed and why they exist in given communities and countries. Co-operatives are managed and guided by the internationally accepted principles, values, ethics of equity, equality self respect and service to the members. All members have equal rights, opportunities and obligations. It is the members who form it, use it, and finally may close or change it to address current problems.

In terms of the co-operative education principle, members and their co-operatives are expected to educate the public on the need and importance of co-operatives in their country. In that way, they can disseminate the economic advantages brought by co-operatives as an alternative organizational strategy for bringing about national economic empowerment and preventing poverty to the greater majority of the population. It is also important to know that not all people who join co-operatives want to become genuine members. There could be a mixture of those who genuinely want the co-operative society because as individuals, they are unable to fight

poverty. There are those who join because they want to free ride the poor members and there are those who join just because the government has told them to do so. It is only those who have genuine economic reasons who will sustain the co-operative society and therefore, need co-operative education and training.

2.2 Co-operative Training

Co-operative training is more specifically the process of acquiring of specific skills of running co-operative societies as business organizations. such skills would involve learning some basic techniques of business planning, business calculations, marketing, management, basic book keeping, warehousing, processing and financing. These co-operative management skills need to be acquired by the members and their leaders. As members, they are supposed to know such techniques, because they are important tools for monitoring their business. They may not go very deep into all these techniques, but a general comprehension of what they all mean is important. Three critical business monitoring techniques have proved to be critically important for the members; First, the simple business planning techniques, how to read and interpret the balance sheet and simplified techniques of auditing. The members, especially the supervisory committees, will be required to make use of their auditing techniques for making their appraisal report to the Annual General Meeting of all the members. It is therefore crucial that such comprehension of business techniques and how to use them in co-operative business is gradually popularized to all the membership. Awareness of such techniques makes members provide leadership to the leaders and the managers, because they will technically be empowered with tools of business analysis.

The management of co-operative societies has the responsibility of initiating co-operative education and training programs for the members in order to achieve the long-term objective of raising the general awareness and knowledge for the members so that the later can effectively take control of their co-operative business and solve their problems.

2.3 Co-operative Learning

Members who form co-operative societies are starting a process of building knowledge about their problems, and how their co-operative society can be a source of problem resolution. But doing co-operative business is a process of learning jointly among members and between members, and education delivery institutions.

As the business of members grows into more complexity, the members are required to create more structured program for group learning. Group learning or co-operative learning is important for two reasons, first, members tend to learn faster when facilitated by other members through peer learning. But secondly, there is synergy when the learning is directed towards a critical problem faced by the co-operative organization. There is need to develop material for co-operative learning and establishing member co-operative learning programmes. When organizing co-operative learning, it is advisable that members are put into small learning groups to allow for effective communication of different issues.

3.0 Co-operative Education, Training, and Member Empowerment

In many African countries, governments are challenged by the reality whether they are promoting what are termed member-based co-operatives or not. One of the instruments of promotion of member-controlled co-operatives in Africa, is the nature of co-operative policy and Legislation. In a workshop organized by ILO Coop AFRICA program in Manzini Swaziland last week, participants drawn from 14 African countries; governments and leaders of Co-operatives, unanimously observed that recent policies and legal instruments, though accommodative of aspects of self-reliant co-operative development, there were still gaps to be addressed, in the process of making the co operative movement freer and more autonomous from government control.

Apart from the nature of the instruments of policy and law, another important process of making the movement autonomous and independent, is, making co-operative education training and co-operative learning, part and parcel of member empowerment.

Member empowerment is basically a special process of education and training and for making members access power and authority inside and outside their own co-operative organization. Under member empowerment, organizational framework conditions are deliberately created where members have power and authority to take part in decision making in the process of resource mobilization, resource creation, and resource allocation. According to Hendrics (1995) and Levin (1995) member empowerment is the recognition of the rights and responsibilities of members to participate in the creation of resources, the rights to allocate resources and the right to participate in the elimination of restrictive power and market structure in their co-operative organizations.

Members' rights here are the specific entitlements bestowed on the individual members by the constitution of the land, co-operative laws, rules and by-laws if co-operative societies that set

the systems of democratic governance. They are set of indisputable rights and obligations assigned to the individual members of co-operative societies by legal systems of a country.

First, and foremost, such entitlements must be well known to the members of co-operative societies. The constitution, co-operative Societies Act, rules and by-laws must be known to co-operative society members through general co-operative education. But knowledge of such entitlements as such, is not enough. They should be processed in a manner that transforms them as working tools for day-to-day operation while performing economic activities of their co-operative organizations. In an agricultural marketing co-operative society, the system of entitlements starts to operate immediately small farmer members start the planning of what to grow and what and how it should be processed and marketed. In a savings and credit co-operatives, member empowerment process of entitlements starts at the moment they start mobilization of savings. All the time they are at different levels of their co-operative business, they must ask themselves whether they have the right entitlements or not or whether they are fulfilling their entitled obligations or not. Ignorance of such entitlements has always created room for the violation of the basic principles of good governance in the co-operative movement.

The second level of empowerment is getting the right motivations on the members to use their knowledge of entitlements, in carrying out the actions of change or actions that change the real situation on the ground. When such actions are taken, they usually make improvement on members' access to power, authority and legitimacy to increased participation in decisions making in resource mobilization and allocation.

Co-operative education and training therefore, must produce comprehensive programs of action where the members are involved in different action and activities of change. These actions of change are usually visible so that members can evaluate their achievements from time to time. in this way, therefore, the process of member education and training cannot be delivered outside member empowerment.

But, the history of member education and training in Africa shows how it has been executed outside member empowerment. Member education and training did not provide them with the skills and methods to influence change in c-operative organizations and in co-operative business life. The delivery methodology of co-operative education and training has never been directed to problem solving, but an instrument of maintaining the status quo if power relations. Co-operative education and training also, did not produce experts who could make use of

management information from official disciplines to facilitate member' actions in bringing about change from subordinated relationships to equality of status and dialogue about negotiated development. For example, after member education and training-based empowerment programs, members of co-operative societies in Kilimanjaro region in Tanzania were able to interpret budget figures of their co-operative union, and when it could not reflect their wishes, they entered into a new program of change which resulted into the registration of a new G 32 co-operative venture, responding to their practical needs. They refused to succumb to the subordination of their cooperative leadership.

The traditional mode of co-operative education and training delivery was confined to acquisition of technical skills that produced professionals to maintain books of accounts, use of laws, supervise Annual General Meetings, and financial which maintained the status quo and the subordination of members to the older order.