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## RESILIENCE OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN CO-OPERATIVES AMIDST FOREIGN CO-OPERATIVES: A REFLECTION ON TRADITIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ORGANISATIONS IN THE SUKUMA COMMUNITIES OF TANZANIA

**Audax Peter Rutabanzibwa**

Lecturer, Researcher and Consultant, Department of Law, Moshi Co-operative University.

Email: [ruttta05@gmail.com](mailto:ruttta05@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*A cooperative organisation is considered to be resilient when it demonstrates ability to adjust to shocks or mitigate their effects while taking advantage of emerging opportunities and maintaining adherence to basic cooperative values and principles. This paper hypothesises that the resilience of traditional cooperatives in most African communities, even after introduction of foreign pattern of cooperatives, is an indication that some members of the respective communities still value them and that if promoted according to universally acceptable cooperative values and principles, would develop into more sustainable cooperatives than foreign cooperatives. The colonial pattern of cooperatives enforced in Africa was introduced to aid European settlers or to drag local people into externally controlled monetised economy, where they could easily be taxed and produce for the export markets. The pattern discourages traditional cooperatives while emphasising on government-controlled cooperatives. Amidst hostile environment, African traditional cooperatives continue to attract more rural youths as they continue to withstand measures aiming at stifling their development. This study analyses values in the Sukuma youth traditional cooperatives of Tanzania in relation with the ICA cooperative values and finds out that they are generally matching. Lastly, it recommends that African governments should formalise and promote indigenous traditional cooperatives because they are youths inclusive, are based on universally acceptable cooperative values and may reflect the true African cooperative society.*

**Key words:** Resilience, traditional cooperatives, foreign cooperatives, cooperative values.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Traditional cooperatives in many African communities are still operating in tandem with what are referred to as foreign cooperatives. The latter mean cooperatives that are established according to the respective countries' cooperative legislation and the former are generally understood as the cooperatives that existed before foreign pattern of cooperatives was introduced in Africa. While the universally acceptable definition of cooperative societies may, arguably include both foreign cooperatives and traditional cooperatives,<sup>1</sup> the traditional cooperatives are not registerable under the current cooperative legislations of most African countries because their formation and operation procedures may be different. This paper hypothesises that the resilience of traditional cooperatives in most

<sup>1</sup>According to the International Cooperative Alliance, "Statement on Cooperative Identity", 1995 a cooperative is an association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprise. When one compares establishment of the Tanzania Sukuma tribe traditional cooperatives (*nganda*) studied infra in this paper, with the cooperatives established under the cooperative society's legislation, it may be found out that the *nganda* fit better in the ICA definition than the formally established cooperatives.

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African communities, even after introduction of foreign cooperatives, is an indication that some members of the respective communities still value them and that if promoted according to universally acceptable cooperative values and principles, would develop into more sustainable cooperatives than the 'foreign cooperatives' which were 'received' by local people from external traditions. Besides, the case study of traditional cooperatives of some tribes in Tanzania indicates that traditional cooperative organizations may be more youth attractive in African rural communities than the foreign cooperatives, as the latter continue to be engulfed with absence of members' sense of ownership and commitment (member felt need) because of the top-down nature in their establishment, which African countries inherited from colonial governments.

To partially exemplify the above arguments, this study uses data collected by students from Sukuma tribe, studying cooperative law and policy at Moshi Cooperative University (MoCU), Tanzania. The students were among youths members of the Sukuma traditional cooperatives studied. The information they provided was collaborated by their parents and other relatives, who were past members of the respective traditional cooperative organisations. The other part of the data is secondary data collected through local and online library research. The study uses a qualitative methodological approach to analyse the collected data and then with the assistance of peers from the Sukuma tribe, it isolates cooperative values from the studied traditional cooperative organisations, which are later interpreted in the light of the universally acceptable cooperative values and found out that they are generally matching.

The second part of the study analyses the concept of resilience in cooperative organisations, particularly in the African traditional cooperative organisations, pointing out how they endured colonial measures that aimed at stifling their development. The third part looks at traditional cooperative organisations, which have managed to exist alongside foreign cooperative organisations. It uses a case study of traditional cooperatives of the Sukuma tribe of Tanzania. The fourth part makes an analysis of values in the traditional cooperatives in relation to the ICA cooperative values and lastly makes a case for promoting African traditional cooperatives as a foundation for development of a sustainable African cooperative movement.

## 2.0 THE CONCEPT OF RESILIENCE IN COOPERATIVE ORGANISATIONS

Resilience generally means the ability to withstand and cope with shocks and crises.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a cooperative organisation is considered to be resilient when it demonstrates an ability to adjust to shocks or mitigate their effects or cope with their consequences, while taking advantage of opportunities emerging from those shocks or crises.<sup>3</sup> Authors who have analysed the concept of cooperative resilience argue that a cooperative society which demonstrates high degree of members' sense of identity, commitment and cohesion is more likely to be resilient than those which lack the said attributes.<sup>4</sup> Others have considered factors which lead a cooperative society to becoming resilient to include: (i) innovation and collective skills development, which incentivise members to continue being tied or bonded to the cooperative as they enable a cooperative society to adapt to new survival mechanisms at times of crises, without giving up the organisation;<sup>5</sup> (ii) networks which establish horizontal or vertical affiliations aimed at augmenting or improving the quality and quantity of products of member cooperatives.<sup>6</sup> Networks also include integrated cooperatives which manage to survive and operate efficiently because of integrating production cooperatives with other types of cooperatives such as housing cooperatives and financial cooperatives or SACCOS,<sup>7</sup> and (iii) government conducive environment, which allows a cooperative and its members to operate undisturbed and thereby maximise the benefits accruing from cooperative efforts. In the

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<sup>2</sup>See Borda -Rodriguez Alexander and Vicari Sara, "Rural co-operative resilience: The case of Malawi", *Journal of Co-operative Organization and Management*, 2 (2014) 43–52

<sup>3</sup> Borda-Rodrigues bid.

<sup>4</sup> See Birchall, J. (2012). The potential of Co-operatives during the Current Recession; Theorizing Comparative Advantage. Article presented at the EURICSE Conference '*Promoting the Understanding of Co-operatives for a Better World*. Venice, 15-16 March. and Münkner, H-H. (2012). Co-operation as a Remedy in Times of Crisis. Agricultural Co-operatives in the World. Their Roles for Rural Development and Poverty Reduction. *Euricse Working Paper No.41 / 12*. Trento: EURICSE.

<sup>5</sup> Borda -Rodriguez Alexander and Vicari Sara op. cit

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See Anastase B and Chambo S, et al, (2016) "Examining Success Factors for Sustainable Rural Development through the Integrated Cooperative Mo.pp.lplp.p,891, IDRC.

general analysis resilience in a cooperative organisation is dependent on adherence to the cooperative basic values and principles.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.1 Resilience of Cooperatives in Africa

There is a paucity of literature on resilience of cooperatives in Africa and almost non-existent on resilience of traditional cooperatives. Authors who have attempted to document on resilience of cooperatives in Africa tend to talk about resilience in foreign cooperatives.<sup>9</sup> Others have written on the so-called ‘renaissance’ of African cooperatives after most of them had been ‘strangled’ by government policies, some of which culminated in their disbandment in 1970s, only to be re-introduced a decade later.<sup>10</sup> A few literatures have acknowledged existence of traditional African cooperatives, but have been reluctant to investigate into reasons for their survival.<sup>11</sup> There are however, literatures which indicate that different colonial governments discouraged promotion of traditional cooperatives, which would have otherwise developed into true cooperatives because of the reason that they could have contradicted the general purpose of colonisation.<sup>12</sup> This was attained through two generally uncoordinated facades. The first was to portray a picture of African traditional cooperatives as being obstacles to foreign cooperative penetration into rural communities for purposes of ‘taking’ development to the peasants.<sup>13</sup> It depicted African traditional cooperatives as being reluctant to economic transformation of their respective local communities.<sup>14</sup> This included publication of studies which indicated that traditional cooperatives were fatalistic and hostile to change.<sup>15</sup> The studies eventually contributed to the discouragement of traditional cooperatives by international donor organisations<sup>16</sup> and eventually by African governments that mostly depended on donor support.

The second disguise was a deliberate introduction in African colonies of a distorted foreign cooperative setting, which colonial governments knew that could eventually not mature into true, independent and economically viable cooperatives. This setting was different from the one which was being implemented in their countries (former colonialists). In many African colonies cooperatives were introduced by the colonial powers “to aid European

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<sup>8</sup> Münkner, H-H. op cit. fn. 4

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Borda-Rodriguez, A. and Vicari, S. (2013a) ‘Resilience and Ugandan co-operatives: a literature review’, *Working Paper No 64*, Innovation and Knowledge Development Centre, The Open University and The Co-operative College, UK.

Borda-Rodriguez, A. and Vicari, S. (2013b) ‘Coffee co-operatives in Malawi: Building Resilience through Innovation’, Paper presented at the Academy of Innovation and Entrepreneurship International Conference, *Innovation and Entrepreneurship for Inclusive and Sustainable Development*, Oxford, August 29<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Chambo, S., Mwangi, M. and Oloo, O. (n.d.) ‘An Analysis of The Socio-Economic Impact of Co-operatives in Africa and their Institutional Context’, Kenya, ICA and CCA. Develtere, P., Pollet, I. and Wanyama, F.O. (eds) (2008) *Co-operating Out of Poverty – the renaissance of the African co-operative movement*, Geneva, ILO.

<sup>11</sup> Most of these authors refer to them as ‘informal cooperatives’ or ‘mutual aid organisations’, see Msongazila M (2013) Gender, Cooperative Organisation and Participatory Intervention in Rural Tanzania: Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of doctor at Wageningen University; Hyden G. (1973), Efficiency Versus Distribution in Eastern African Cooperatives, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi 1973; Craig, J. (1993). *The Nature of Co-operation*, Black Rose Books, New York; Richards, P., 1985. Indigenous agricultural revolution: Ecology and food production in West Africa. Hutchinson, London.; Richards, P., 1993. Cultivation: knowledge or performance? In M. Hobart (ed), *An anthropological critique of development. The growth of ignorance*. Routledge, New York, 61- 78.

<sup>12</sup> The general purpose of colonization was to establish dependence of African producers on colonial markets, see for example, Holmen supra at fn. 17 and Develtere supra at fn. 19

<sup>13</sup> See Flores XA. Institutional Problems in the Modernization of African Agriculture. In: *A Review of Rural Cooperation in Developing Areas*. Pp 199-275. UNRISD, Geneva, 1969 at pg 229

<sup>14</sup> Long N, 1980, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Rural Development*. Tavistock Publ. London, 1980. at pg. 146

<sup>15</sup> See for example Barke M & O'Hare G, 1984 Barke M, O'Hare G. *The Third World--Conceptual Frameworks in Geography*. Oliver & Boyd, Singapore, 1984.; See also Mabogunje A, 1980 Mabogunje A. *The Development Process-a Spatial Perspective*. Hutchinson & Co. London, 1980. *Geography and the Dilemma of Rural Development in Africa*. Geografiska Annaler, Vol. 63B, No. 2, 1981. pp 73-86. See also Komba, D. (1995), Contribution to Rural Development: *Ujamaa* and Villagization, in Legum C and Mmari G. (1995) (eds) Mwalimu, *The Influence of Nyerere*, Thomas Press, India pp. 32 -45

<sup>16</sup> Komba D. Ibid.

settlers or to drag the natives into externally controlled monetised economy, where they could easily be taxed and produce for the export markets”<sup>17</sup>. This ‘mission’ was attained through different approaches, depending on the colonisation policy of a particular colonial government. For example, in former Portuguese colonies (Guinea Bissau, Angola and Mozambique) priority was to acquire land for mining and establish settler plantation companies for engagement in commercial agriculture, rather than encouraging local people to establish own cooperatives.<sup>18</sup> Thus, indigenous people were forced to work as minors and plantation workers.

The introduction of cooperatives in the Anglophone African colonies followed what was termed as British Indian Pattern of Cooperatives (BIPC). The typical characteristics of this pattern included: (i) At first, they had a cooperative legislation that allowed only white settlers to establish and operate cooperatives and barred indigenous people (blacks) from establishing cooperatives. This was done in Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe<sup>19</sup> up to the end of Second World War. (ii) After the War in 1946 there was provision of a Model Cooperative Ordinance<sup>20</sup> which was copied by all British colonies and which was characterized by strong government control over cooperatives, giving enormous powers to the registrars of cooperatives in the respective British colonies to engage in promoting as well as regulating cooperatives.<sup>21</sup> The objectives of this kind of legislation was to contain African peasants,<sup>22</sup> to enable white cooperative officers led by registrars of cooperatives to conduct tutorage on cooperative to the ‘natives’ who were considered ‘ignorant’ of essential cooperative basics; and to assure availability of cash crops, which could better be aggregated through cooperatives.<sup>23</sup> Cash crops were required by European industries after the devastation caused by the Second World War.<sup>24</sup> For reasons mentioned above,<sup>25</sup> the BIPC model of cooperative law did not allow flexibility that would accommodate registration of traditional cooperatives and in many aspects did not respect universally acceptable cooperative principles. Ironically, the same pattern of cooperative law is still apparent in many Anglophone African countries, several years after independence.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2 Resilience of traditional cooperative organisations in African Communities

Traditional cooperation is identified as one type of early cooperation in many world communities.<sup>27</sup> It simply means a kind of cooperation in the social economic organisations that was practiced by communities before establishment of formal or foreign cooperatives.<sup>28</sup> There are literatures which indicate that foreign or formal cooperatives in developed countries developed from traditional cooperatives.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Holmen H (1990) “State, Cooperatives and Development in Africa”, The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies Uppsala, 1990 at pg. 22

<sup>18</sup> Holmen Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Develtere, P. (2008), “Cooperative Development in Africa up to the 1990s”, in P. Develtere, I. Pollet & F. Wanyama (eds.), *Cooperating out of Poverty: The Renaissance of the African Cooperative Movement*, ILO, Geneva.

<sup>20</sup> Which was Similar to the 1902 Indian Rural Cooperative Credit Act, which was drafted after the Raiffeisen Rural Cooperative Credit Model Law

<sup>21</sup> See Develtere P. (1992) *Co-operatives and Development, Towards a Social Movement Perspective*, Centre for the Study of Co-operative, University of Saskatchewan available at <https://usaskstudies.coop/documents/occasional-papers/co-operatives-and-development.pdf>, accessed on 9th October 2021

<sup>22</sup> who had started riots against white settler exploitation in some British colonies

<sup>23</sup> To this effect colonial governments issued directives that all cash crop farmers, even those who were not members of cooperatives to market their crops through cooperatives. According to Prof. Msanga (op cit fn... at pg. 29) the Tanganyika colonial government passed some rules under the Native Authority Ordinance of 1927 which made it illegal to sell cash produce otherwise than through cooperatives

<sup>24</sup> See Develtere and Holmnes fn. 17 and 20 infra

<sup>25</sup> Infra at pg. 4

<sup>26</sup> Cooperative legislation of many African countries still give enormous powers to government officers and politicians to exercise control over cooperatives. See Develtere, at fn. 19

<sup>27</sup> Craig, (1993) Craig, J. (1993). *The Nature of Co-operation*, Black Rose Books, New York; Hyden (1973) Efficiency versus Distribution in East African Cooperatives, East African Literature Bureau, Msanga I. R (1982) *Cooperatives, Policy and Law in Tanzania With Special Reference to Multi-Purpose Cooperative Societies: The Case Study of Same District*, LLM Dissertation, University of DSM at pg. 19

<sup>28</sup> Craig Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> For example, in Britain and France

In the categories of social economy organisations, traditional cooperative organisations may be found between formal cooperatives and other social organisations.<sup>30</sup> Some traditional cooperatives manifest organisational traits similar to those featuring in foreign cooperative societies in the sense that they are established to pursue both social as well as economic activities. Yet some demonstrate social-cultural elements or features and are still much involved in upholding societal social duties, most of which are determined by the culture of a given community. During the pre-colonial Africa, different kinds of cooperation demonstrated themselves in different informal self-help groups, which ranged from rotating saving and credit services groups to burial societies. These included the *idir*, *meredaja* and *mahaber* of Ethiopia,<sup>31</sup> the *Nnobia* of Ghana,<sup>32</sup> the *ubuntu* of Southern Africa<sup>33</sup>; the *Harambee* of Kenya<sup>34</sup> and *Ujamaa* of Tanzania.<sup>35</sup> All these involved the following forms of cooperation: mutual aid cooperation; joint community services cooperation such as security, maintenance of common facilities or amenities such as rivers, roads and joint production; commercial activities cooperation such as joint farming, harvesting and grazing; social-cultural joint events such as funeral, marriage and age groups initiations.

Most of these traditional cooperatives followed traditional unwritten rules as to membership, management and operational procedures. The rules and operational procedures were inherited from one generation to another through storytelling or direct participation of younger and elder members of the community, with elders being leaders or supervisors of the groups. Further, although there was no gender discrimination in some group activities, especially those which were economic oriented, in social-cultural activities there were some degrees of division of labour, which depended on the gender orientation of members. For example, when men members were engaged in the construction of houses of members in need of group services/assistance, women members would prepare food or fetch water for the group. Some social-cultural group activities demanded that only men or women should be members.

The basic principles which guided members operations were *mutual trust, mutual aid and reciprocity*. The mutual aid principle recognized the fact that each member who had felt a need of joining the group was entitled to group assistance, starting with the one who mostly needed the assistance, on a rotational or revolving basis.

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<sup>30</sup> Social economy organization refers to the set of cooperatives, mutual organisations, foundations and associations whose activity is driven by values of solidarity, the primacy of people over capital, and democratic and participative governance.

<sup>31</sup> Which involved community groups or burial societies established by individuals and households living near each other, Which involved community groups or burial societies established by individuals and households living near each other, see Barzaga Carlo and Galera Gullia (2014), *The Potential of Social Economy for Local Development in Africa: An Exploratory Report*, available at [poldep-expo@europarl.europa.eu](mailto:poldep-expo@europarl.europa.eu) accessed on 21/10/2021

<sup>32</sup> see Salifu, A., G. N. Francesconi, and S. Kolavalli (2010), *A Review of Collective Action in Rural Ghana*, Discussion Paper 00998, Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute and Tsekpo, A. K. (2008), "The cooperative sector in Ghana: Small and big business", *Cooperating out of poverty: The renaissance of the African cooperative movement*., P. Develtere, I. Pollet, and F. Wanyama in (ed), Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Organisation

<sup>33</sup> See Mugumbate, Jacob and Nyanguru, Andrew, "Exploring African philosophy: The value of ubuntu in social work" (2013). Faculty of Social Sciences - Papers. 3266. Available at <https://ro.uow.edu.au/sspapers/3266> accessed on 21/10/2021

<sup>34</sup> It entailed local fund raising to address local problems such as local projects or assist an individual in need, see Godfrey, E. M., Mutiso, G. C. M (1973), *The political economy of self-help: Kenya's Harambee Institutes of Technology*, Nairobi: Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi. See also Mbithi, P. M., & Rasmusson, R. (1977), *Self-Reliance in Kenya, the Case of Harambee*, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

<sup>35</sup> 'Ujamaa' is a kind of traditional cooperation practiced among different Tanzania tribal communities implying 'humanity and brotherhood'. Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania coined the term determining to introduce a general term that would be referred by all the tribes, 'so as to demonstrate that modern development in Africa is possible without sacrificing equality and humanity values, see Temu P., 'The Ujamaa Experiment' in K. S Kim *et al.* (eds), referred by Komba D. 'Contribution to Rural Development: Ujamaa & Villagisation' in Legum C. & Mmari G (eds): Mwalimu: The influence of Nyerere pp. 34 – 45 at pg. 36. Elsewhere, Nyerere considers 'human equality' and 'human brotherhood' as some of the important aspects of cooperation, see Nyerere J.K (1973) *Freedom and Development*, Oxford University Press, Nairobi at pp.130-131

In most African communities, these kinds of cooperation still exist, particularly in rural areas. However, with the coming of foreign cooperatives, some of the traditional cooperatives are transforming themselves into Rotative Savings Credit Associations (ROSCAs) or Rotative Self-help Community Associations (ROSHCA).<sup>36</sup> Also some groups which were purely social-cultural are introducing some elements of commercial activities such as ROSCAs to assist members to meet their member contributions. A question which this study attempts to address is why some form of traditional cooperation has continued to exist in the form and stature that obeys more or less similar values and principles, despite introduction of foreign formal types of cooperatives?

As pointed out above<sup>37</sup> existing literatures discuss only the resilience of foreign or formal cooperatives.<sup>38</sup> Reasons for resilience of traditional cooperatives can therefore be inferred or deduced from the literatures that discuss African traditional cooperation. Several authors have attributed persistence of traditional cooperation among African communities to the shared social-cultural synergies of survival approaches practiced among several African communities, especially those living south of the Sahara.<sup>39</sup> They argue that traditional cooperation is deeply rooted in the *ubuntu philosophy* which is regarded as bedrock of social-cultural and commercial survival of many African communities.<sup>40</sup> According to these authors, consideration of social-cultural dimensions is critical to the resilience of cooperative organisations and therefore contributes immensely to their successful performance.

*Ubuntu* can be described as the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring.<sup>41</sup> The Ubuntu philosophy therefore isolates in any grouping within an African society some of ubuntu values such as **collectivity, solidarity, mutual acceptance, dignity and hospitality** as very crucial for their success.<sup>42</sup> Their resilience therefore is continuously bolstered through observance of those values to the extent that in a situation where a given traditional cooperative disregards them in favour of the foreign cooperative, it collapses.

### 3.0 TRADITIONAL CO-OPERATION AMONG TANZANIAN COMMUNITIES

In many Tanzanian communities, traditional cooperatives still exist, despite the fact that the so-called foreign cooperatives have existed since 1930s when the first formal cooperatives were registered in Northern Tanzania and then spread throughout the country by 1960s. Different kinds of traditional cooperatives are still being practiced among many Tanzanian tribes. For example, traditional cooperation among the Sukuma tribe is known as *luganda or nganda* (plural), *lughanjo* among the pare tribe, *njuna nkujune* among the haya tribe, *kiarano* and *igwondaa* among the chagga. Other tribes still cooperate in social activities such as marriage and burial ceremonies. Although all these kinds of traditional cooperation are practiced guided by same *ubuntu* values, namely collectivity, solidarity, mutual acceptance, dignity and hospitality this study selects the *Luganda* type of traditional cooperation among the Sukuma as its case study. The reasons for the selection of this type of traditional cooperation are as follows: (i) it is an example of social-economic traditional cooperation which has survived the foreign cooperatives, which are established in areas where Sukuma traditional cooperatives exist (ii) it involves youths and gender considerations most of whom prefer it better than foreign cooperatives; (iii) it involves customary/village leaderships as appellate authorities as a sign of legitimacy and recognition, which justifies its normativity.

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<sup>36</sup> See Msonganzila infra fn. 44

<sup>37</sup> See supra pg.4

<sup>38</sup> See our literature on fn. 9 supra

<sup>39</sup> See literature on ubuntu philosophy cited supra at fn. 32

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ubuntu language may differ according to a given African tribe/country dialect. For example, in Angola it is known as *gimuntu*, Botswana (*muthu*), Burundi (*ubuntu*), Cameroon (*bato*), Congo (*bantu*), Congo Democratic Republic (*bomoto/bantu*), Kenya (*utu/munto/mondo*), Malawi (*umunthu*), Mozambique (*vumuntu*), Namibia (*omundu*), Nigeria (*mutunchi*), Rwanda (*bantu*), South Africa (*ubuntu/botho*), Tanzania (*utu/obuntu/bumuntu*), Uganda (*obuntu*), Zambia (*umunthu/ubuntu*) and Zimbabwe (*Ubuntu, unhu or hunhu*) but they all point to one thing – an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world See Mugumbate, Jacob and Nyanguru, Andrew (2013) op. cit. fn. 32

<sup>42</sup> See Mbigi, L. and Mare, J.; 1995. *Ubuntu: the spirit of African transformation management*. Randburg, Knowledge Resources.

### 3.1 Traditional Cooperation among the Sukuma in Tanzania

The Sukuma tribe is one of the big tribes in Tanzania along the north-western shores of Lake Victoria spreading south-western-wards to cover five regions, namely; Mwanza, Geita, Shinyanga, Simiyu and some districts of Tabora region such as Nzega district. The tribe has many types of traditional cooperation in social-economic activities such as agricultural (preparing farms, weeding and harvesting) and social-cultural activities (wedding and burial ceremonies).

Traditional cooperation in agricultural activities among the Sukuma is known as “*Luganda*”, which literally means “cooperation” in Sukuma language, and it is practiced almost in all Sukuma regions. ‘*Luganda*’ may be known differently in Sukuma dialects such as *Maramata*, *Lugoye* and *Bhumyengeja*, but it refers to the same type of cooperation.<sup>43</sup> Generally ‘*luganda*’ is a kind of cooperation for undertaking agricultural activities such as clearing bushes, cultivating, planting and harvesting crops. Normally, there exists one ‘*luganda*’ in one village (*nzenzo*), but when the magnitude of the farming work is relatively big and the available manpower in one *luganda* to have the task accomplished is small, then the ‘*luganda*’ in the area would invite other ‘*lugandas* (or *nganda*)’ whereby all ‘*nganda*’ would cooperate to accomplish the job. Normally cooperative farming by the *nganda* is practiced in the members’ farms. However, sometimes the ‘*nganda*’ may farm in a non-member’s farm for cash which becomes a source of income for the organisation.

#### 3.1.1 Membership

Membership in ‘*luganda*’ is voluntary and open to any person without gender discrimination. Total membership of one *Luganda* normally ranges from thirty (30) to one hundred (100) members. However, the prospective member must meet the laid down requirements for membership, which include the following:

**Age:** Age requirement is a very important criterion for a person to become a member. A person qualifies to join the *Luganda* on attaining the age of majority. However, the criteria normally used are whether the prospective member is physically fit to perform the activities of the cooperative, namely being involved in farming activities. He/she may thus sometimes be less than 18 years, provided she/he can prove to other members that he is capable of engaging in farm activities like other members. Equally, the society has no specific retirement age. Members normally leave the membership when they can no longer engage in farming activities. Thus, the age bracket of the *Luganda* may range between 18 and 45 years.

**Ability to work:** Another criterion for membership is ability of the prospective member to perform the society’s main activity that is farming. Therefore, a prospective member who has already attained the age of majority but after being assessed by other members is found to be incapable of performing society’s activities may not be accepted to the membership. Apart from age and ability to work the *luganda* has no other qualifications for membership. Thus, the society accepts male as well as female members and even from other tribes. However, because of the fact that most of the cooperative activities are conducted according to the Sukuma customs, members from different tribes may feel uncomfortable to join.

#### 3.1.2 By-laws of the *Luganda* Society

The *Luganda* society has its rules of operating the society. These rules are not written anywhere but are inherited by young members from older generations. Members do not prefer reducing the rules into writing, even if all the members are able to read and write because they believe each member must understand and put the rules into practice, rather than leaving them in writings as a sign of membership commitment.<sup>44</sup> The cooperative rules stipulate how the society should be operated by members; they include:

**Adherence to working discipline:** The society requires that members should observe work discipline such as arriving in time at work places, participating fully in the activities of the cooperative society, not cheating at work,

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<sup>43</sup> Some groups came together initially as traditional dancing groups, e.g. *Bagalu*, *Bagika*, *Bayeye* and *Bazuba* but recently the dancing groups have begun to engage in reciprocal self-help such as farming and rotational savings cooperative associations (ROSCA) activities, see Msongazila M (2013) Gender, Cooperative Organisation and Participatory Intervention in Rural Tanzania: Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of doctor at Wageningen University at pg. 163

<sup>44</sup> This is also supported by Msongazila *ibid* at pg. 168

just to mention a few. If a member is found to have broken some of the rules of procedure, the society rules also provide for punishment/sanction to the delinquent member as will be discussed later in this study.<sup>45</sup>

**Member participation in community social events:** The society also has rules on how *nganda* members should participate in community social services such as funerals and marriage ceremonies. Some social activities are arranged according to the gender orientation of members. For example, during funeral events male members participate in preparing grave place and female members participate in preparing food for the mourners. Members who decline to participate in community social activities are equally punished.

**Provision of food to working members:** Another rule to *Luganda* is provision of food by the host member (known as '*mwajiri*') to other members working at the host member's farm. According to this rule every member whose farm is being cultivated by the members is required to provide food to members working at the host member's farm. This starts with provision of breakfast in the morning, provision of lunch in the afternoon and refreshments in the evening. But provision of refreshments is not compulsory, depends on the readiness of the host member.

### 3.1.3 Management and Leadership of the *Luganda*

*Luganda* has its management structure, which includes members' general meetings and management committee (*Kamati ya uongozi*). The members general meeting is normally held annually and at any time when need arises. The annual general meeting is held every year before the start of the farming season. The function of this meeting, among other activities, includes planning and approving the farming plan for the forthcoming season. It agrees on minimum working tools every member is supposed to have, it agrees on working tools which have to be commonly acquired by the *Luganda* and lastly, it conducts election of the members of the management committee, whose membership tenure is renewed annually. However, members of the management committee may contest and be re-elected if they so wish and if other *Luganda* members still want them to continue. The management committee is made up of four persons, namely; the chairman, the secretary, the treasurer and the store keeper. *Luganda* has two methods of electing its leadership as follows:

#### (a) Election by show of hands

Election by show of hands is practiced by members of *Luganda* in situations where members have feeling that the existing leadership performance has been outstanding and there is no member who has expressed interests of challenging them. In such a situation election is conducted by asking the members who are in support of the existing members of the management committee, one position after the other to raise their hands. Normally, election starts with the position of the chairman, whereby the member who gets the majority votes becomes the chairman and the person who gets the second-best position in terms of votes becomes the secretary. Other leadership positions contested for, namely the treasurer and store keeper are taken by a member who wins the majority votes.

#### (b) Election through ballot papers

The second method of getting leaders of *Luganda* is through ballot papers. This normally happens when the existing leadership is to be replaced with the new leadership. Under such situation, election supervisors are appointed from the members. The supervisors would list the names of the contestants for all the positions, except in case of the position of the secretary because normally the secretary is the person who is elected as second-best on the position of the chairperson. The election supervisors are supposed to prepare ballot papers and announce members whose names have been proposed for contesting for the specified leadership positions. Then the supervisors would distribute the ballot papers to the members for voting. After voting and counting the votes the supervisors announce the winners who are handed over the leadership of the society by the retiring team.

### 3.1.4 Dispute Settlement in *Luganda*

*Luganda* society has rules of dissolving disputes that arise between members and between the society and members. The rules also provide for appropriate punishments to members in default, depending on the nature, magnitude and how the society weighs the gravity of the default. Of much interest is the procedure the society employs in dispute settlement. Particularly, the involvement of community elders who are not members of the *Luganda* but the society seeks their assistance in settling the disputes. The procedure for dispute settlement starts with settling disputes internally, whereby the wrong doer members are required to admit wrongs they occasioned after which the society leaders start seeking for amicable settlement in which case the defaulting members are required to admit their wrongs and apologize to other members. After apology the responsible members are ordered to meet the

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<sup>45</sup> See infra on pp. 14 -16

appropriate punishment as provided in the society rules which normally start with a warning if that wrong has been committed for the first time. Wrongs identified as punishable include the following:

- Being absent during the society's scheduled activities without permission by society leadership;
- Preparation of unacceptable food to the members by the host member when working in his farm; and,
- Inciting chaos and misunderstanding in the society.

### **3.1.5 Punishments imposed by the society**

The punishments which are imposed by the society to persons found to have committed disallowable acts depend on the nature and gravity of the committed wrongs. They start with light punishments which aim at restoration of harmony and good understanding between the responsible member and other members to complete disassociation or 'isolation' of the member from the community (*kutengwa*). The following are the applicable punishments:

#### **(a) Warning**

A member who commits a wrong for the first time is normally warned and required to admit the commission of that wrong and subsequently apologize. He is then put under observation for a certain period, until when it is proven that he has reformed.

#### **(b) Imposition of fines**

A fine in terms of money is normally imposed to members who repeatedly violate the organisation rules such as not taking part in the societies' activities, without permissible excuses. The fines are normally in terms of cash and the paid money becomes the income of the society. If the wrong doer is unable to pay, then he will be required to pay in kind the property which may be sold or may be converted into money.

#### **(c) Administration of corporal punishment (viboko)**

Administration of corporal punishments is normally imposed to some members who occasion chaos or disorder in the cooperative organisation. This is normally imposed to younger members, who because of getting drunk may do the actions which threaten peace and tranquillity in the society. Corporal punishments are normally administered by the village elders.

#### **(d) Disassociation or 'isolation' of a dissident member**

This punishment is normally imposed on a member who after committing one of the above-mentioned punishable wrongs, declines to admit, apologize or to pay an appropriate fine as provided by the society rules. This punishment may also be imposed to a member who repeats the previously committed wrong. For instance, in a case where a host member prepares unacceptable food to the members who are working in the host member's farm, a fine of paying a goat to the society would be imposed on him. If that member refuses to bring the goat, then the said member would be disassociated from the community. Thereafter, that member may be obliged to leave his residential village and stay away from the community. This punishment will also be imposed on any member of the *luganda* or of the community who attempts to associate with the member who has been disassociated. This punishment is implemented by the whole community, including non-members of the cooperative organisation because in arriving at decision to punish that member village elders are involved and also because the activities of the *nganda* have direct benefits to the members of the village and whole village at large.

### **3.1.6 Reasons for Resilience of *Luganda***

Members of the *nganda* who participated in the interviews were young, both male and female, aging between 28 and 50 years. They therefore had reasons why they preferred to join traditional cooperatives instead of joining formal Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Society (AMCOS) which exist in their areas. The general provided answer for joining the *Luganda* was that they inherited it from their parents and become part of their life. However, they had the following specific reasons:

- Joining the *Luganda* is regarded as a part of the Sukuma culture for youths who attain the age of adulthood. The Sukuma culture dictates that a person who attains adulthood should stop depending on his/her parents for earning a living. Joining a *Luganda* therefore is regarded as a school for young Sukuma to learn how to start a self-reliance life.
- They have learnt through experience that working in *Luganda* increases efficiency because all members have to perform farming rhythmically, while singing and encouraging each other. As a result, the farming exercise takes a shorter time and the whole farming activity becomes a combination of economic and social event at the same time.

- Also, participation in the *Luganda* entitles members to earn monetary income from the money paid to the group when the *Luganda* is engaged in farming for non-members. In this case, each member is paid according to his/her participation. Many times a member participates in such contracted farming the more money he/she earns. This creates a spirit of member active participation all the time.
- Participation in a *Luganda* is preferred by youths because it is used by the Sukuma community to judge the behaviours of youths. Youths who do not participate in the *nganda* are judged by the Sukuma community as lacking decency and good temperament in the community. They thus do not deserve respect in the community.
- Lastly, sometimes during evening times members of several *nganda* engage in social events, which involve dancing, singing and taking some refreshments (local beers). Some members end up finding their marital partners, who after marriage start own families which result in strengthening the *Luganda* family bond and cohesion.

Due to the above reasons, members consider the *Luganda* tradition as a type of cooperation which must continue to thrive. Probably this is why *Luganda* has been resilient since times when the Sukuma tribe was formed and it continues to be practiced through inheritance from one generation to another. Another reason for its resilience seems to be an increasing dislike by the *Luganda* members to join the formal Agricultural Marketing Cooperative Societies (AMCOS). They generally do not like to join the AMCOS claiming that that kind of cooperative is under Government control. Particularly, they dislike the AMCOS because:

- The government through its regulators and other political leaders directs every activity done in the AMCOS, including directing the marketing of their produce, even though they are not members of those AMCOS;
- The government limits the freedom of electing the leaders who are preferred by the majority members. This tendency normally results in electing leaders who do not have membership commitment.
- They also prefer *Luganda* to AMCOS because *Luganda* has its own specific rules, whereas all AMCOS have similar rules, regardless of the activities and geographical location of those AMCOS.
- Also, unlike the *nganda*, AMCOS do not get involved in social activities which concern members such as funerals and marriage events.

Therefore, members of the *Luganda* have a feeling that AMCOS do not belong to them, they belong to the government, whereas *nganda* are their own organisations, they are part of their culture as well as their social and economic lives.

#### 4.0 VALUES OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN COOPERATIVES VERSUS UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTABLE COOPERATIVE VALUES

Values of individual members and their organisations, whether formal or informal necessarily emanate from the community where those organisations originate or are based.<sup>46</sup> Undoubtedly therefore, the values of African traditional cooperatives could be traced to African cultures and local society ideologies as demonstrated earlier through *ubuntu*, *ujamaa* and *harambee* traditions and other social-cultural traditions which are practiced among African communities. Therefore, just like the Sukuma *nganda* of Tanzania traditional *cooperative organisations that are established in African communities share similar values of collectivity, solidarity, mutual acceptance and responsibility, reciprocity, dignity and hospitality.*<sup>47</sup> Below we discuss these traditional values as they feature in the *Luganda* traditional cooperative organisations and as they are reflected in the universally acceptable cooperative values<sup>48</sup>.

##### 4.1 Collectivity and solidarity

Taken together, collectivity and solidarity<sup>49</sup> refer to the ties in an organisation that bind people together as one. Collectivity and solidarity are the basic values of the *nganda* because of the nature of the cooperative activities

<sup>46</sup> See Kenny, T. (1994). From vision to reality through values. *Management development review*, 7(3), 17–20.

<sup>47</sup> Supported by Mugambate J. Nyarangu op.cit fn. 32

<sup>48</sup> There is a general acceptance that universally acceptable cooperative values are the ICA values, namely Self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

<sup>49</sup> Collectivity generally denotes a state of being or operating together. While solidarity reflects awareness of shared interests, objectives, standards, and sympathies creating a psychological sense of unity of groups or classes, from Wikipedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solidarity> accessed on 21/10/2021

executed by the *Luganda*. For example, farming together or attending to member social needs such marriage and funerals. The appreciation of these values comes from the fact that members consider operating in a *Luganda* as having an effect of increasing efficiency and quality of the work output.

Collectivity and solidarity are directly reflected in the ICA cooperative value of *solidarity*. According to ICA solidarity is much more than a collection of disconnected members<sup>50</sup>. It encompasses the concept of interdependence of interests, objectives and outcomes of cooperation. Thus, catering for both collectivity and solidarity may be distinct in the traditional cooperative organisations.

#### 4.2 Mutual acceptance and mutual responsibility

Mutual acceptance and responsibility are necessary for realisation of tangible outcomes by people with shared interests or objectives and who are working together, as is the case of the *luganda*. Mutual acceptance requires each member in a group to accept/tolerate other members' contributions for the whole group to deliver. Conversely, mutual responsibility requires each member to demonstrate his/her readiness of being obliged to take part in the realisation of mutually agreed targets, without cheating. Although members of the group may impose corrective measures to the delinquent members, mutual acceptance and mutual reasonability are supposed to be more attitudinal and morally conceived than being 'policed'. Underlying these values is the element of voluntariness in joining the group. In the *Luganda* for example, members may join the group because of community social-cultural pressure after attaining the adulthood age. But a choice of what type of *Luganda* one should join remains a personal matter.<sup>51</sup> If a potential member does not share interests and objectives with other group members, it is a sign of absence of mutual acceptance and mutual responsibility and that will lead other members not to accept him/her to join the specific *Luganda*.

Essentially the ICA values of *self-help* and *self-responsibility* may be reflected in the values of mutual acceptance and mutual responsibility. The difference is that self-help as an ICA value obliges/encourages an individual person to struggle to satisfy his/her own needs through the cooperative means. The value of mutual acceptance in the African traditional cooperative goes beyond the individual level (*the self*). It recognises the fact that an individual cannot struggle to satisfy his needs through the cooperative without being accepted by other members of the cooperative society. There is thus, *mutual acceptance* as a value in that cooperative. In other words, according to ICA values 'self' is an individual person whose values are realised through joining the cooperative society, while according to the African traditional cooperatives 'self' is a collective "self" whose values are realised through members' mutual acceptance. A more or similar argument applies when looking at the ICA value of self-responsibility against the traditional value of mutual responsibility.

#### 4.3 Reciprocity

A potential member joins the *Luganda* after consideration of what he/she can benefit from the group, compared to what he/she will offer to the group. Conversely, other members of the group accept a potential member after considering what she/he will contribute to the group, compared to what the group will give to him/her. Therefore, the whole exercise of accepting someone into the *Luganda* and the subsequent implementation/actualisation of his acceptance is governed by the value of *reciprocity*. Reciprocity in the group is realised through observation of *equality* and *equity* during the subsequent actualisation. The latter are elements of reciprocity<sup>52</sup>.

Equality and Equity are among ICA cooperative values. Equality notion denotes that once accepted, each member in the cooperative society is intrinsically valuable, irrespective of his/her inferiority or superiority. On the other hand, 'equity' denotes two interlaced meanings. As an *end* it implies 'fairness' on how the cooperative society treats its members. That is, it is supposed to treat him/her according to that member's preferences or capacity, but not

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<sup>50</sup> See Sidney Pobihushchy, (2002) The Cooperative Values: Their Meaning and Practical Significance <https://columinate.coop/wp-content/uploads/2002/08/7-The-Co-operative-Values-Their-Meaning-and-Practical-Significance.pdf> accessed on 21/10/2021; See also Sonja Novkovic, Cooperative business: What is the role of cooperative principles and values? [file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Co-operative\\_Business\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Co-operative\\_Pri.pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Co-operative_Business_The_Role_of_Co-operative_Pri.pdf) accessed on 21/10/21

<sup>51</sup> This is why in the *Luganda* there are different types of *nganda*. Members' decision to join or establish new ones is based on individual decision/selection.

<sup>52</sup> According to Merriam Webster dictionary 'reciprocate' means mutual or equivalent exchange or paying which implies 'equality', whereas its synonymy is 'requite' which means paying back according to one's preference but not necessarily equivalent, which implies 'equity'.

necessarily equivalently. But when used as a *means* it refers to ownership of property/assets/interests which one contributes and is capable of protecting or maintaining against others. Thus, in a cooperative society equity also implies participation of each member that assures each and all of them fairness in the contribution to and benefiting from the cooperative society. Thus, when looked at from the above understanding the value of ‘reciprocity’ in the African traditional cooperative may reflect the values of *democracy, equality and equity* as they feature in ICA cooperative values.

#### 4.4 Hospitality and Dignity

Hospitality denotes the act of being kind and generous to visitors and guests<sup>53</sup>. However, as far as the *Luganda* is concerned hospitality implies generous services (community works) *Luganda* members offer to the community. In other words, members of the *Luganda* find themselves *socially responsible to care for other* members of the community through participating in community works. As a result of services *Luganda* provides to the community, leaders of the community (village) feel duty bound to get involved in attending to appeals taken to them by the *Luganda* or sometimes participating in executing punishments imposed to delinquent members of the *Luganda*. Conversely, by being a *Luganda* member, a member of the community earns respect and dignity from the whole community. The hospitality and dignity values of Africa traditional cooperatives may be reflected in the ICA ethical values of *honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others*.

#### 5.0 CONCLUSION

Traditional African cooperatives existed since formation of the first African societies and communities and will continue to exist as long as their establishments are anchored on universally acceptable cooperative values and principles. Observations made in this study indicate to the conclusion that although both ICA cooperative values and traditional African cooperative values may be congruent, there may be subtle differences between the two which may be due to Africa social-cultural historical background. While the ICA cooperative values focus on the individual ‘self’, the traditional African cooperative values focus on the collective ‘self’. This may make traditional African cooperative values richer, when analysed from the cooperative perspectives.

Probably on realising this difference, African colonial governments dissuaded establishment of Traditional African cooperatives under the pretext that they were fatalistic and hostile to change. Instead, they were supplanted by the foreign cooperatives. However, the latter were established and operated under the cooperative legislation which was designed to meet colonialist goals and were contrary to ICA cooperative values and principles. They allowed too much government involvement in the regulation and promotion of cooperatives at the expense of members who were supposed to be their prime beneficiaries. Even after independence, cooperative legislation of most African countries still reflects similar colonial patterns. To this regard, it is becoming clear that mere inclusion of provisions that recognise ICA cooperative values and principles may not suffice. As long as the implementers of this legislation (registrars of cooperatives, government officials and politicians) continue to exercise an ‘iron fist’ over the establishment and operation of the so-called foreign cooperatives, the colonial pattern of cooperatives will continue. However, unlike during the colonial times when the enforcers knew the purpose and goals for the enforcement, it may not be clear whose interests the current enforcers are serving.

This study has shown that after realising shortfalls in the post-colonial cooperative legislation, some African countries<sup>54</sup> took drastic measures in 1970s of abolishing cooperative societies. These societies were restored a decade later but without paying due attention on why they were abolished and how they would be appropriately restored.<sup>55</sup> Studies for their restoration were just comparing the situation before their abolishment and the situation after and recommending choice of ‘the lesser evil’. In the process consideration of traditional African cooperatives was forgotten or ignored. More than thirty years have passed after restoration of the colonial pattern of cooperative legislation.<sup>56</sup> There are two clear facts. First, the colonial legal pattern has not provided a solution to foreign

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<sup>53</sup> According to Cambridge Dictionary

<sup>54</sup> Such as, Tanzania and Ghana to mention but a few.

<sup>55</sup> According to Msanga R. op.cit. at pp 96-97 no thorough research was done before their abolition and the legislation/ directives that were passed thereafter had several lacunae in terms of establishment and operation of alternative cooperatives

<sup>56</sup> Taking the Tanzanian cooperative legislation as an example.

cooperative problems. As a result, they are being shunned off by youths, especially from rural areas.<sup>57</sup> The second is that traditional cooperatives, despite of receiving less attention from African governments in terms of conducive policy and legal environment, they continue to enjoy support of the young rural generation and to exhibit endurance.

Thus, in order for African countries to avoid the second abolition of ‘foreign cooperatives’, research and studies should be conducted into traditional African cooperatives to determine appropriate policies and legal environment for their promotion, their basic values and principles and how they can be improved to meet the current challenges. The present study has attempted to demonstrate that much as there may be what are known as universally accepted cooperative values and principles, there may as well be African cooperative values and principles which may be developed from consideration of traditional cooperative values and principles.

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<sup>57</sup> Other problems include ignorance of basic cooperative values and principles, mismanagement and cooperative assets embezzlements.

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