

**The Co-operative Movement and African Union: Partners in African Development**  
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**Abstract**

The core objective of this paper is to align the co-operative movements in African development with the African Union (AU) economic objectives, in particular, and the AU objectives, in general. Those economic objectives are mainly two; namely: to promote sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels and to promote cooperation in all fields of economic activity to raise the standards of all African peoples. A general synthesis of the two economic objectives of the African Union is congruent with the definition of the co-operative enterprise. According to the ICA (1995), a co-operative is an autonomous association of persons, united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. The co-operative enterprise promotes economic, social and cultural aspirations. Co-operatives, therefore, have the organizational capacity of inclusiveness of the African rural population in addressing challenges of poverty through education and training, employment creation and entrepreneurship. However, in addressing poverty, co-operatives are confronted with a number of challenges. These include the discovery of new business knowledge and practices, accessing appropriate empowering education and skills as well as strong value-based leadership. This paper argues that there is an organic interface between the African Union and co-operative organisations because while the African Union provides the landscape for linking African countries, the co-operative enterprise provides the most nationalistic organisational framework for economic empowerment of the largest proportion of the rural population in Africa.