

## Helpdesk Research Report: Lessons Learned on Cooperatives

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**Query:** What are the lessons learned and existing global good practices on the role of cooperatives in increasing access for the poorest to markets?

**Enquirer:** DFID

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### 1. Overview

There is a great deal of literature available discussing the internal factors and structural conditions that affect the relative success or failure of cooperatives. This reflects a seemingly growing concern with maximising the potential of cooperatives to contribute to poverty reduction goals. Successful cases of co-operatives increasing poor people's access to markets are widely cited in the literature. Nevertheless, there is limited 'lessons learned' type material available on the technical aspects of supporting cooperatives to this end, and very little on the experience of donors in administering cooperative support programmes.

Cooperatives can help overcome some of the barriers to poor people's access to markets by generating economies of scale; opening up access to information through better market networks; pooling resources and improving individual bargaining power through collective action. They promote social as well as economic goals, have been used to educate local citizens about health issues, and are widely viewed as beneficial for conflict resolution, peacebuilding and social cohesion (e.g. where they bring together people of different religions and ethnic groups). But cooperatives face real challenges in the form of over-control and regulation by government; limited access to credit; inability to scale up their activities; and inability to penetrate markets.

One expert suggested that in order to increase co-operatives' access to and engagement with markets, donors or governments can support improvements in infrastructure, distribution networks, communications technologies, storage, or support tax incentives for large-scale buyers to trade with cooperatives. Less specifically, the following factors are commonly associated with the success or failure of cooperatives:

- The amount of capital that can be accumulated by credit co-operatives operating at the local level is usually quite low, but access to credit is often seen as necessary for success (see the Ethiopia case study by Assefa 2007 below).
- Cooperatives have failed without a market-driven approach that allows them to compete. Cooperatives need to achieve a competitive advantage through professional management, operational and financial efficiency, high quality

products, and competitive pricing. Prices must be set by prevailing market conditions (rather than an altruistic rationale - e.g. see failure of credit cooperatives in Burkina Faso World Bank 2007 below). One expert suggested that coops that are focussing on one product (e.g. coffee, cacao, bananas) perform better than coops that deal with many products.

- The Fair Trade Movement has assisted cooperatives to gain access to markets in some contexts. In Rwanda US technical assistance helped two cooperatives qualify for fair trade status, which greatly increased their profits (see OCDC, 2007, below).
- Autonomy and freedom from government control: Emerging from domination by repressive government has been a major challenge for cooperatives in many developing countries. While government support can be helpful, governments should avoid overregulation. Cooperative autonomy is positively associated with success. In Ethiopia, US technical assistance has helped overcome this legacy (see Assefa 2007 below).
- Ownership: Many cases note that successful cooperatives are locally embedded voluntary associations. One expert commented that a top-down approach to cooperative financing in Indonesia has distorted this sense of ownership.
- Reaching scale and emerging from dependency: Many studies note that cooperatives must take steps to achieve scale. In some settings failure to achieve scale has inhibited cooperative's capacity to address other obstacles to their growth as independent businesses.
- Effective governance: Cooperatives must develop professional management, be democratic, inclusive, fair, transparent and they must have strong leadership.
- It's important to put in place measures for increasing women's participation. Efforts to increase the inclusion and democratic participation of women can make a significant impact (e.g. the case of India, the Women's Dairy Cooperative Leadership Program).
- An enabling legal environment is key. It must protect democratic member control; autonomy and independence; voluntary membership; and economic participation in cooperatives. It should provide a level playing field for cooperatives to compete with other enterprises (e.g. there should be no pricing limitations on cooperatives).
- Successful cooperative cases have purposely increased collaboration with other cooperatives. Cooperative networks can help cooperatives to rapidly gain scale and can support better governance and training. A number of development agencies adopt a network and systems approach which aims to foster consensual networks among cooperatives.

International guidelines on supporting cooperatives emphasise much of the above; for example, they recommend special consideration should be given to increasing women's participation in the co-operative movement at all levels. In terms of donor support to the development of cooperatives, more than one expert commented on the need for a strong education and training component and a focus on developing the capacity of cooperatives for self-governance. Others seem to recommend that donors should establish long-term working relations with cooperatives, since institution-building takes time. Overall, there is broad consensus that support to cooperative development that creates dependency undermines the mutual self-reliance that is central to cooperation.

## 2. Lessons learned and good practice

Develtere, P., Pollett, I., and Wanyama, F., (eds), 2008, 'Renaissance of African Cooperatives in the 21st century - Lessons from the Field', Chapter 2 in *Cooperating out of poverty: The renaissance of the African cooperative movement (forthcoming in December 2008)*

See: <http://www.ica.coop/outofpoverty/regions.html>

This book chapter draws on extensive country case study material to discuss the historical development and current status of cooperatives in Africa; including issues of management, membership, relationships with government, and other factors contributing to their relative success or failure. It is observed that most cooperatives have not been able to help members break out of mere subsistence, but some success has come where the social capital of cooperatives extends beyond the group of the poor. For example, "the relative success of some Jua Kali ("hot sun") cooperatives in Kenya, the shoe shiners' cooperative in Uganda and the Young Christian Workers' cooperatives in Rwanda is related to the fact that some not-so-poor members adhere to and invest in these cooperatives." (p.16) The authors observe that yearly membership fees can prevent the very poorest from participating. Also, most cooperatives are initiated, composed and dominated by men.

Factors associated with the success of cooperatives in Africa include:

- Successful cooperatives are locally embedded voluntary associations. Members have a group identity and participate in the associative life of the cooperative. They are part of the social economy.
- It is generally accepted that a homogeneity of interests is a crucial factor in the social dynamics of the groups involved in cooperatives.
- Frequent contacts and interactions among and between members, management and directors is essential for enhancing trust and loyalty. Investment in member-relations management is important.
- Successful cooperatives are results-oriented and creative in finding solutions to the daily problems of the members.
- Profitable cooperatives invariably function as demand-driven and market-oriented businesses with market niches and marketable products. They invest in quality management, and their pricing as well as interest rate policies are inspired by the prevailing market conditions (rather than an altruistic rationale).
- The experience of the Githunguri Dairy Farmers Cooperative Society demonstrates that an accommodative and cordial relationship with the local state bureaucracy is important for preventing government intrusion into the cooperative's operations. International support in the form of a low-interest loan further helped the cooperative in expanding its operations considerably.
- Successful cooperative cases purposely increased collaboration with other cooperatives. Not one developed in isolation or limited its working relations to one particular partner. (p.20)

The role of donors in supporting cooperatives is briefly discussed. It is noted that many agencies have opted for long-term working relations with a selected number of cooperative partners in lieu of short-term commitments towards a broad range of cooperatives. A number of agencies (particularly in the north) show preference for a network and systems approach which means fostering consensual networks among cooperatives and investing in adapting the policy, legal and fiscal environment in which their partner cooperatives have to operate. "Nowadays, most agencies stress the fact that cooperatives have to be considered as private economic actors that have to make a surplus or profit. Emphasis is now more laid on issues such as financial management, solvency, profitability, financial sustainability, market penetration or return on investment. This more business-oriented approach also goes hand in

hand with new support tools such as revolving loans funds, bank guarantees, loans or equity capital.” (p.25)

**OCDC, 2007, 'Cooperatives: Pathways to Economic, Democratic and Social Development in the Global Economy', US Overseas Cooperative Development Council, Arlington**

[http://www.acdivocacoopex.org/acdivoca/CoopLib.nsf/dfafe3e324466c3785256d96004f15a8/360d9e4d0d2ced648525725d0053dd20/\\$FILE/OCDC%20Pathways%20Paper%20August%202007.pdf](http://www.acdivocacoopex.org/acdivoca/CoopLib.nsf/dfafe3e324466c3785256d96004f15a8/360d9e4d0d2ced648525725d0053dd20/$FILE/OCDC%20Pathways%20Paper%20August%202007.pdf)

This paper discusses factors contributing to the success of cooperatives, noting that results in developing countries have been mixed; particularly where cooperatives have operated in extremely challenging environments (e.g. where there is a negative legacy); where cooperatives have previously been instruments of the state, or subject to tight state control or repression; or where cooperatives have been unable to rapidly gain scale through interlocking co-op networks. Despite these challenges, successful examples are: dairy cooperatives in India, with 12 million members; rural electric cooperatives in Bangladesh that serve approximately 28 million people; credit union movements in Ecuador and Kenya, both with over a million members; and Fair Trade-certified coffee cooperatives in Ethiopia, Rwanda, East Timor, and Central America that link thousands of smallholder farmers directly into global markets with premium coffee prices.

Cooperatives help *economically* by improving incomes and creating value and investment opportunity along product supply chains in today's global economy; *democratically* by providing firsthand experience with democratic governance, transparency and member participation; and *socially* by increasing trust and solidarity, leading to stability in the face of adversity and conflict. Case studies from India, Bangladesh, Philippines and Argentina demonstrate how cooperatives can stimulate competition by generating economies of scale; open up access to information through better market networks; help reduce barriers to market entry through the pooling of resources and improve individual bargaining power through collective action. Efforts to increase the inclusion and democratic participation of women can make a significant impact (e.g. the case of India, the Women's Dairy Cooperative Leadership Program (p.19)). Cooperatives can also contribute to recovery from conflict (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina), in bridging ethnic, religious and political divides (e.g. in India, the dairy cooperative movement), and in drawing together different linguistic, caste, religious and political groups. Moreover, cooperatives have been successfully used for health campaigns. For example, in India, where family planning was rolled out through cooperative networks of women who already had strong social ties and participated within efficient management systems. Another example is HIV awareness in Ethiopia supported by USAID.

The paper notes that success factors for cooperatives are:

- “Laws and policies that are favourable
- An economy that permits all types of competitive businesses
- Membership that is open to users (some have limitations on membership)
- Equity from the first day of operations and principally from members
- High equity/debt ratio
- Member-centred services
- Board of directors elected by and from members only (no government representatives)
- Organization around a resource base and service sufficient to sustain the cooperative as a viable business
- Professional management
- Access to markets
- Accountability of all employees to the cooperative (no seconded personnel)

- Management training
- Membership education
- Willingness to use modern technology” (p.26)

Chapter VI (p.26) discusses overcoming obstacles to the success of cooperatives:

- Creating an enabling legal and regulatory environment: Viable cooperative businesses must operate on the basis of sound commercial principles and a level playing field (there should be no pricing and market limitations on cooperatives; they should not be used as providers of government services without recovering the full costs). The legal environment must protect democratic member control; autonomy and independence; voluntary membership; and economic participation in cooperatives. It should promote equitable treatment of cooperatives as other businesses in the same sector. It should promote access to markets.
- Accessing markets (Local, Regional and Global): Cooperatives have failed without a market-driven approach that allows them to compete. It has been essential for cooperatives to attain competitive advantage through professional management, operational and financial efficiency, high quality products, and competitive pricing. This has been greatly assisted by the Fair Trade Movement. In Rwanda, US technical assistance helped two cooperatives qualify for Fair Trade which greatly increased their profits.
- Moving from government to member control: Emerging from domination by repressive government has been a major challenge in many developing countries. In Ethiopia, US technical assistance has helped carry out plans to privatize business and industry by assisting agricultural cooperatives in becoming farmer-owned and farmer-controlled, profitable and governed in a democratic fashion.
- Reaching scale and emerging from dependency: cooperatives must take steps to achieve scale. In developing country settings, cooperatives have suffered from small economic scale, a characteristic that has also inhibited their capacity to address other obstacles to their evolutionary growth as independent businesses.

#### Donor support to cooperatives

#### **USAID, 2001, ‘Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Support for Overseas Cooperative Development Act’, USAID, Washington**

[http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PDACJ894.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACJ894.pdf)

This report notes several important lessons learned from USAID's more than forty years of partnership with CDOs [note that Tom Carter, USAID commented that “not much of it would have changed in the years since”]. These lessons are:

- “[There is a link] between cooperative success and cooperative principles, most especially those of member centrality and control;
- Cooperative autonomy is associated with success; cooperative subservience to external interests is associated with failure;
- Cooperatives function best when law and regulation provide a level playing field for competition with other enterprises;
- Governance structures must be strong, transparent and honest;
- Cooperatives must perform: to survive, endure and thrive they must be important to their members, their community, and sector of the economy;
- Support to cooperative development that creates dependency undermines the mutual self-reliance that is central to cooperation;

- Cooperatives must develop professional management in order to adapt, innovate, and take rational risks to satisfy the expectations of their owners; cooperatives succeed when they consistently deliver value to their owners; and
- Institution building takes time, normally more time than project cycles allow.” (p.3)

**DFID, 2005, ‘How to Leverage the Co-operative Movement for Poverty Reduction’, Department for International Development, London**  
<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/how-to-cooperatives.pdf>

This note briefly asks what lessons have been learned in supporting cooperatives. It observes that cooperatives have not had enough engagement in development debates. Governance and auditing issues can emerge if the existing regulatory structure is weak. Donors have to be careful not to distort members’ incentives for creation and continuance of the enterprise and thus negatively impact on the ownership and governance of the co-operative.

#### Support to financial cooperatives

**World Bank, 2007, ‘Providing Financial Services in Rural Areas: A Fresh Look at Financial Cooperatives’, World Bank, Washington**  
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTARD/0,,contentMDK:21485106~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:336682,00.html>

This report presents case studies of four financial cooperatives in Burkina Faso, Brazil, Sri Lanka, and Kenya to consider the determinants of their success or failure. It concludes that for financial cooperatives to function as sustainable institutions, governments need to provide an enabling environment, not exercise excessive control that restricts growth and consolidation, and not use them as channels to provide subsidized credit. Integration into networks has wide-ranging benefits for financial cooperatives, ranging from improved governance to the ability to provide a wide range of services. Failures have come where financial cooperative systems are unsustainable, subject to political influence or used by governments for their own purposes.

An extensive discussion of lessons from the case studies is provided in chapter 3 (p. 11). In Burkina Faso, more than half of the co-ops are not profitable the primary reason for the losses appears to be the low uniform interest rates applied on all loans, which are significantly lower than that applied by microfinance institutions (MFIs) in the region. In Sri Lanka, a principal problems has been lack of autonomy: the government restricts the growth and consolidation that is required to achieve sustainability.

A sound legal framework is key to sustainable growth and expanded outreach of financial cooperatives, along with appropriate regulation and supervision. As financial cooperatives grow into broader financial institutions, they should progressively come under financial sector regulations based on best practice prudential norms and ratios. Internal governance and strong leadership are also key. Access to network support can help build this capacity. External support can contribute to developing, motivating, and training human resources. (p.12)

The most successful external interventions have been long-term and focused on developing institutions to the point where the sector can stand on its own feet. Assistance should not undermine the financial profitability and savings-based business model of financial cooperatives. (p.12)

Entry points for external support are discussed in relation to three areas:

- The enabling environment: External agencies have a comparative advantage in this area and create policy dialogue; support for the development of an appropriate legal, regulatory and supervisory framework; strengthening of regulation and supervision capacity; and the development of prudential norms and standards. External partners can also support development of new products, particularly those of practical value to financial cooperatives.
- Support at the network level is best implemented through a long-term, technical assistance relationship, notably sector-to-sector twinning, with the agenda driven by demand from the national financial cooperative networks. Externally financed activities could include helping with design of programs to safeguard customers' funds, developing information technology, supporting education and training programs, and helping to set up apex institutions.
- At the grass roots level, improving the outreach of financial cooperatives should be the final objective of external assistance. Support to financial cooperatives could include help in conducting demand assessments and preparing a strategy for outreach, support for the establishment of new financial cooperatives, support for expanded physical outreach of existing financial cooperatives, underwriting the costs of outreach for poorer or more dispersed clients, and aiding informal groups to grow into financial cooperatives.

The report cautions that “unless carefully designed, any external support can undermine the very sustainability and outreach it is designed to support. Assistance has to be crafted to avoid distortions and the possibility of dependence. One area where external assistance is usually not necessary—and may even be harmful— is credit lines.” (p.14)

**CGAP, 2005, ‘Working with Savings and Credit Cooperatives’, Helping to improve donor effectiveness in microfinance, Donor Brief no. 25**

[http://www.cgap.org/gm/document-1.9.5254/DonorBrief\\_25\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.cgap.org/gm/document-1.9.5254/DonorBrief_25_Eng.pdf)

This briefing note sets out what donors do to strengthen savings and credit cooperatives:

- “Focus on deposit mobilization first. Support technical assistance to improve savings products and information systems.
- Invest in building capacity rather than injecting external funds for lending.
- Encourage sound governance policies. Even if appropriate governance norms are not required by law, insist that they be part of the performance contract for donor support. Train directors in governance standards, as well as in monitoring and business planning tools.
- Support savings and credit cooperatives that want to learn new techniques to reach poorer customers. Donors can fund technical assistance to help savings and credit cooperatives better understand member needs, and develop and manage credit, savings, payment, and money transfer services appropriate for poorer and more remote clients. Such efforts are more likely to succeed in financially solid cooperatives.
- Keep financial standards at the core of internal management and external supervision. To fulfil their mission of providing members with high-quality services, savings and credit cooperatives need to run a sound financial business.
- Support competent, independent external supervision of savings and credit cooperatives by banking authorities where possible.
- Concentrate resources on savings and credit cooperatives that are willing to implement sound policies and standards, rather than spreading them over all the cooperatives in a country.” (p.2)

<b>3. International guidelines</b>
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**UN, 2007, 'Cooperatives in Social Development', Report of the UN Secretary General submitted to the General Assembly**

<http://www.copac.coop/a62154e.pdf>

This report encourages governments to promote the formation of cooperatives as business enterprises that can contribute to sustainable employment and livelihoods in various economic sectors in urban and rural areas. In particular, to:

- Promote and facilitate the formation of cooperatives among excluded groups for generating employment opportunities and harnessing the potential and productivity of marginalized groups and increase their efforts to facilitate the full participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons and indigenous peoples in cooperatives;
- Engage in policy dialogue with all stakeholders in reviewing and amending cooperative legislation to provide a level playing field for cooperatives vis-à-vis other business enterprises, including appropriate tax incentives, access to financial services and markets;
- Strengthen collaborative efforts to build capacity for cooperative development through training, especially in management, auditing and marketing skills and technical assistance; Governments could help provide resources to start up cooperatives while encouraging cooperative autonomy and independence;
- Encourage the formation of cooperative federations and apex organizations, which can pursue unified and coordinated strategies, such as marketing and purchasing, which benefit individual cooperatives, and encourage partnerships among cooperatives in order to enhance the success of cooperative enterprises;
- Raise public awareness of the contribution of cooperatives to employment generation and to socio-economic development and promote comprehensive research and statistical data-gathering on the activities, employment and overall socio-economic impact of cooperatives at the national and international levels in order to inform both policymaking and the public at large.

**International Labour Conference, 2002, 'Promotion of Cooperatives' Recommendation 193, International Labour Office, Geneva**

<http://www.ilo.org/images/empent/static/coop/pdf/english.pdf>

These ILO guidelines for supporting cooperatives emphasise: voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training and information, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for community.

The role of government is:

- To provide a conducive policy and legal environment.
- To facilitate access to support services.
- To provide oversight of co-operatives in ways which respect their autonomy.
- To ensure they enjoy equal treatment with other types of enterprises.
- To develop partnerships with co-operatives.

In addition:



- National policies should promote core labour standards; gender equality; education and training in cooperative principles and practices; the adoption of measures that provide for safety and health in the workplace; and facilitate access of cooperatives to credit and markets.
- The formulation and implementation of policies and regulations regarding cooperatives should be decentralised where possible, and governments should support best practice on corporate governance within cooperatives.
- Governments should promote the role of cooperatives in transforming what are often marginal survival activities (sometimes referred to as the “informal sector”) into legally protected work, fully integrated into mainstream economic life.
- Co-operatives should be enabled to respond to their members’ needs and the needs of society, including disadvantaged groups, in order to achieve their economic participation and social inclusion.
- Special consideration should be given to increasing women’s participation in the co-operative movement at all levels.

*For further discussion of ILO and UN guidelines on supporting cooperatives, see:*

**Brit-Nippierd, A., 2002, The Potential Role of the UN Guidelines and the new ILO recommendation on the Promotion of Cooperatives, (unpublished conference paper)**

[http://www.copac.coop/fora/mongolia/coop\\_nippierd.pdf](http://www.copac.coop/fora/mongolia/coop_nippierd.pdf)

**ILO, n.d., ‘Gender issues in Cooperatives: An ILO-ICA Perspective’, ILO**

<http://www.coop.org/gender/ica-ilo-manual/topic3.html>

This online gender sensitization material sets out the benefits of increasing women’s participation in cooperatives, and what can be done to integrate women in cooperative development and to enhance their participation in decision-making processes. It states that cooperatives should address equality issues and make a firm commitment in their mandate to correct imbalances where they exist. Through awareness creation, gender sensitization, education and lobbying, cooperatives can help remove the obstacles to women’s equal participation (e.g. membership criteria or legal, traditional, financial, attitudinal constraints). Through training and education programmes which are sensitive to women needs, cooperatives can help strengthen women’s capacities and capabilities, resulting in their increased self-confidence and enabling them to participate more fully in decision-making and assume leadership positions. Other practical measures that can be taken are:

- Cooperatives can review their policies and plans periodically to ensure that they are gender-sensitive and can focus on gender in their action plans.
- Cooperatives can establish "gender committees" or units whose tasks can include identifying gender-related problems and ensuring that gender awareness training programmes are carried out. A gender unit must therefore be part of mainstream activities or have direct access to policy and decision- making levels.
- Cooperatives can use their national organizations and networks to collect gender disaggregated data and help identify different types of projects focused to women’s needs which can help them increase their income-earning capacities and alleviate their work burden. For example, they can investigate how much time men and

women spend on various chores and activities and how this fits in with potential and economically viable and sustainable cooperative activities.

### Legal reform

#### **USAID, 2006, Enabling Cooperative Development: Principles for Legal Reform, USAID Cooperative Law and Regulation Initiative (CLARITY)**

[http://www.acdivoca.org/852571DC00681414/Lookup/EnablingCooperativeDevelopmentPrinciplesforLegalReform-CLARITYReport/\\$file/EnablingCooperativeDevelopmentPrinciplesforLegalReform-CLARITYReport.pdf](http://www.acdivoca.org/852571DC00681414/Lookup/EnablingCooperativeDevelopmentPrinciplesforLegalReform-CLARITYReport/$file/EnablingCooperativeDevelopmentPrinciplesforLegalReform-CLARITYReport.pdf)

This paper presents the CLARITY principles for cooperative law and regulation and provides guidance on their implementation. The report also presents case studies of cooperative law reform from around the world. The clarity principles are:

- Respect voluntary membership: Law must protect the voluntary nature of membership in cooperatives; membership in cooperatives should be determined by each cooperative, not mandated by law or government order.
- Require member economic participation: Law must protect and promote the responsibilities of membership, including the duties to contribute equitably to and democratically control the capital of the cooperative.
- Promote equitable treatment: Law and regulation should be no less advantageous to cooperatives than to other businesses in the same sector, while protecting and being sensitive to the mutuality of cooperatives. Incorporation, law enforcement, dispute resolution, and licensing of cooperatives should be handled in the same manner as for other businesses.
- Promote access to markets: Sector-specific regulations should provide reasonable accommodations and incentives, where appropriate, that enable cooperative forms of business to operate.
- Provide coherent and efficient regulatory framework: Regulatory framework should be simple, predictable, and efficient; should minimize bureaucratic delay and obstructions to business operation; and should avoid conflict and duplication of other laws.
- Protect due process: Cooperative organizations and their members should be accorded due process of law, including applicable rights to hearings, representation, and impartial appeals for decisions of the state that impact cooperatives or their members.
- Avoid conflicts of interest: The role of the state in law enforcement, dispute resolution, license, and promotion should be administered in a manner that avoids duplication, undue influence, and minimizes conflicts of interest.

*For discussion of the ILO's guidelines on legal reform for cooperatives, see:*

#### **Henry, H., 2006, Guidelines for Cooperative Legislation, ILO**

<http://www.copac.coop/guide-coop-legislation.pdf>

#### 4. Selected case studies

**Assefa, T., 2007, Revitalizing Market-Oriented Agricultural Cooperatives in Ethiopia: A Case Study Conducted In Cooperation with USAID's Cooperative Development Program, USAID**

[http://www.acdivocacoopex.org/acdivoca/CoopLib.nsf/35d0f140112b2c7e8525682a007811b0/8EE899EF07736E7285256F8D005448A4/\\$FILE/Final+Eth.pdf](http://www.acdivocacoopex.org/acdivoca/CoopLib.nsf/35d0f140112b2c7e8525682a007811b0/8EE899EF07736E7285256F8D005448A4/$FILE/Final+Eth.pdf)

This report argues Ethiopia is as an excellent example of how socialist cooperative societies designed to serve solely the interests of the government can be successfully rehabilitated and revitalized as market-oriented private business organizations. This case study specifically compares the growth and progress of the Kolba Farmers' Multi-Purpose Primary Cooperative and the Lumme-Adama Farmers' Cooperative Union as a result of two ACDI/VOCA development assistance projects: 1) The Cooperative Union Project (CUP), a two-year program (1998-1999) with the goal of enhancing food security and rural income, and 2) Agricultural Cooperative Development in Ethiopia (ACE), an extension and expansion of CUP (2000-2004) with major additional components including expanding the participation of women, diversification of cooperative businesses, natural resources management, and an HIV/AIDS intervention. The success is attributed to:

- Democratic participation: Farmer members at the grassroots level freely and democratically elect their leaders without government intervention.
- Salience: By giving ownership of the project to the cooperatives, the Cooperative Promotion Bureau (COPB) and ACDI/VOCA have promoted sustainability.
- Growing professionalism: This case study illustrates the success of cooperatives in managing their businesses efficiently and effectively.
- Access to credit: Through the Loan Guarantee Fund, which has been supported by USAID and the visionary Bank of Abyssinia, cooperatives have been able to access credit and have demonstrated their creditworthiness.
- Change strategies: Several interventions were critical: (1) organizational changes were required including hiring of professional managers to manage the unions, training board members and managers for their duties, and training controllers to conduct regular control; (2) cooperatives learned to operate as businesses in which membership is voluntary and based on profits and incentives such as patronage dividends; (3) cooperatives needed to become creditworthy; and (4) savings and credit services needed to be institutionalized through the establishment of rural SACCOs so that local savings could be mobilized, and primary cooperatives as members of SACCOs could borrow working capital for grain purchases - a major breakthrough in rural finance.

**Bibby, A., and Shaw, L., (eds), 2005, 'Making a Difference: Co-operative Solutions to Global Poverty', The Cooperative College, UK**

<http://www.andrewbibby.com/pdf/making%20a%20difference.pdf>

This paper discusses case studies of successful cooperatives that have helped poor people to provide goods and services which the state or private enterprise cannot provide. The basic premise is of the paper is that the co-operative sector has historically played a significant role in the empowerment of the economically disadvantaged, and that there is a real opportunity now to put co-operatives back on the development 'map'. The story of the Bangladesh Co-operative Milk Producers Union is cited as important, not only because the co-operative helps

many thousands of small dairy farmers but also because of the way it successfully transformed itself from a government-imposed top-down organisation into an accountable co-operative business. (p.28) The paper concludes with a summary of what cooperatives need: autonomy; a level playing field; appropriate legal and political frameworks; and recognition as businesses.

**Birchall, J., 2003, 'Rediscovering the Cooperative Advantage: Poverty Reduction through Self-Help', International Labour Organisation**

<http://www.uwcc.wisc.edu/info/cd/jb1.pdf>

This study explores the relationship between cooperatives, poverty reduction and the achievement of the MDGs, making observations and recommendations based on 11 case studies of cooperatives, in a wide variety of situations, in developed and developing countries (see case studies in Ch3, p.41). The report concludes that a number of conditions must be met in order for cooperatives to achieve their poverty reduction potential; there must be an appropriate environment that enables cooperatives to be true to their principles; there must be a serious promotional effort by the different social actors; and there must be a strong focus on human resource development. The history of cooperatives shows that they flourish best in a society where civil liberties are strong and governments democratic and accountable.

**Shima, S., and Ghale, Y., 2007, 'Building Hope While Providing Credit - A Case Study of Women Using Cooperatives to cope with Conflict in Nepal', in Cooperatives and the Pursuit of Peace Joy Emmanuel and Ian MacPherson (eds), British Colombis Institute for Cooperative Studies**

[not available online]

This brief article argues that in spite of the serious character of armed conflict in Nepal, community based savings and credit co-operatives (SCC) have not suffered direct interference or serious setbacks from either the Maoists or the government armed forces for a number of reasons. Cooperatives have been locally owned and autonomous, have set their own interest rates, have been democratically governed. By working with the women's savings and credit co-operatives to link their understanding of democratic processes within their co-operatives to that of the new government, co-operatives can be used to help give women, especially those traditionally excluded, a strong voice in the governance of their country.

See also:

- **Mahanti, Dilnawaz, "Building Capacities Towards Sustainable Tribal Cooperative Enterprise in Mayurbhanj, Orissa", March 2006.**

<http://www.oit.org/dyn/empent/docs/F947954874/TERMINAL%20%20REPORT%20MIGROS.pdf>

[please note this website was unavailable at time of writing, so it was not possible to review this material]

- **USAID Cooperative Development Programme: Success Stories**

[http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/cross-cutting\\_programs/private\\_voluntary\\_cooperation/coopstories.html](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/private_voluntary_cooperation/coopstories.html)

<b>5. Additional information</b>
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**Simmons, R., and Birchall, J., 2008, The Role of Co-operatives in Poverty Reduction: Network Perspectives, Non-Governmental Public Action Working Paper Series, London School of Economics**

[http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/NGPA/publications/WP10\\_RoleofCoops\\_web.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/NGPA/publications/WP10_RoleofCoops_web.pdf)

This working paper examines the relevance of the numerous theoretical perspectives on network formation and network management to the newly-emerging co-operative sectors in the developing world. The paper seeks to provide a framework for understanding the processes that drive the formation of local, national and international networks and partnerships, and asks questions of how such alliances can be governed and managed effectively. This is arguably essential for understanding how to strengthen cooperatives so as to maximise their potential to impact on poverty.

**Smith, J., 2007, Youth Reinventing Co-operatives: Young Perspectives on the International Co-operative Movement, New Rochdale Press**

Available for purchase at: <http://www.bcics.org/content/youth-reinventing-co-operatives>

Abstract: "This book features 40 reflections by young people (and a few recalling more youthful days) considering what co-operatives mean for them and could mean for others. It provides over forty case studies on co-operatives in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America in which young people play important roles; in many instances operating the co-operatives. The book concludes with a series of recommendations about how young people may learn about, and more effectively use, the co-operative model as they seek to shape the world in which they live."

<b>Author and contributors</b>
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This query response was prepared by **Claire Mcloughlin**: [claire@gsdrc.org](mailto:claire@gsdrc.org)

**Contributors:**

Dr Linda Shaw (The Cooperative College)  
Tom Carter (Cooperative Development Program, USAID)  
Patrick Develtere (University of Leuven)  
Andrew Bibby (The Cooperative College)  
Dr Roger Spear (Open University)  
Giulia Galera (EURICISE)  
Joy Emmanuel (Institute for Cooperative Studies, University of Victoria)  
Dr Richard Simmons (University of Stirling)

**Websites visited:**

ILO, CoopAfrica (ILO), Cooperating Out of Poverty, International Cooperative Alliance, Cooperative College, Cooperative Enterprise Programme Cornell University, British Columbia institute for cooperative studies, Richard Ivy School of Business, Small Farm Programme: University of California, Center for Cooperative Studies: University College Cork, Center for the Study of Cooperatives: University of Saskatchewan, University of Wisconsin: Center for Cooperatives, CHF International, European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises (EURICISE): University of Trento, ACIDI/VOCA, ACIDI/VOCA Center for Cooperative Excellence, FAO, IFAD, Land O'Lakes, Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives COPAC, World Food Programme

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