

**THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTIONS
IN STUDENTS CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT IN LESOTHO.**

By

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1.0 Background

The co-operative sector and organization in particular, have undergone major transformation and painful restructuring in the last twenty-five years since the beginning of the Structural Adjustment programs and consequent liberalization and competition as business competition became the order of the day, it has been very clear that the old model of government protected and controlled cooperatives, is declining.

giving way to the development of a new generation of market driven co-operatives across the globe.

During this period, we are also witnessing a new thinking about how we mould the co-operators of tomorrow by introducing the co-operative idea into the school system and the youth in general. Over thirty years ago, the co-operative idea was introduced in the school system using special projects in East and Central Africa. The objective of introducing co-operative projects in primary and secondary schools, was to provide room for the children to learn the practical side of cooperation so that they became good co-operators when they left the school system -It was one of the ways of inculcating the organizational culture of the cooperative enterprise The project approach of introducing co-operatives at school in those years, could not take root in the school system in all countries in the region because the co-operative movement outside the school system started demonstrating poor performance. On the other hand, it was observed that the cooperative movement out there could not attract young members, due to a set of artificial restrictions such as ownership of land and specified crops marketed by co-operatives. The movement remained an old man's club..

In 1984, the ICA Regional Office for East Central and Southern Africa, made an attempt to produce a co-operative primer to serve as basic reading material for both secondary and primary schools. The primer was published, but was not delivered into the school system because the primer project, ran short of funding. In 1995 the International Co-operative Alliance and the International Labour Organization (ILO), organized two workshops in Namibia and Lesotho to plan and put up suggested learning material for co-operatives at school.

There was general consensus that there was need to introduce the concept in the school system and that such material needed to be graduated at all levels of the school system, starting with primary, secondary, college vocation training and universities. There were two important projections in the 1995 initiative; first, it was believed that co-operative knowledge offered an alternative to self employment. It was one of the best forms of organization that offered clear opportunities for self organization in the social and civil society economy. The second projection was the fact that co-operative leaning and experience, would create a pool of future co-operators, leaders and managers, when they left school.

The 1995 initiatives especially after Maseru in November, was received with different perceptions in different countries. In Tanzania for example, the process went up to organization of inter ministerial workshops to get the concept accepted. The idea was accepted but ended at the Institute of Education where the next step would have been the production of training material and curriculum development. The former Director of the Institute accepted the idea but it would not get off the ground for lack of funding. In Kenya the idea ended at the formation of co-operative stake holders committee to oversee the gradual development and institutionalization. The Kenyan process ended at the committee.

There are however, two successful initiatives which moved into more advanced steps which appear to work to date. Namibia and Lesotho went into real action though differently. Namibia's Co-operative Ministry went ahead and produced reading materials which are useful in the school system. Lesotho went ahead and the Ministry responsible for co-operative development, started to promote co-operatives in secondary schools. The co-operatives are working and provide more grounded experience than many countries in the African region.

The questions in this presentation are; to what extent are student co-operatives sustainable and what is the role of Human Resources Development institutions in students' co-operatives. I will take the context of Lesotho to answer the two questions and divide the presentation in four main parts: introductory Background, Conceptual Discussion, The Education System and the Economy of Lesotho, Why Student Co-operatives in Lesotho, The Role of Human Resources Development Institutions and Conclusions.

2.0 Conceptual Discussion

Co-operative Human Resources Development Institutions are those mandated organizations with the responsibility of delivery and supporting skills development attitudes and general compactly building in a systematic and structured manner for the co-operative movement. (Chambo 2006). The systematic approach produces outcomes where the members, employed staff and leaders all work for improved performance of their co-operative organizations. The systematic human resources development is usually offered by Co-operative Colleges But according to the co-operative principle of education, human resources development processes, can also be delivered by non-structured institutions such as co-operative societies themselves.

The training and education offered by co-operatives, is normally short term needed to fill short term capacity gaps in co-operative organizations. To avoid possible conflict between structured and unstructured human resources development, there is need to harmonize and carry out joint planning so that the two sub-systems of human resources development delivery, complement each other and there is added value of training at each level and event. Technically the short-term training and long-term institutional training are not substitutable. It has happened in co-operatives to take short term training they offer to assume an end in itself. When this happens, co-operatives argue that they have no funds for long term training. But the challenges of globalization demand both short and long term training

Student co-operatives are those co-operative societies organized for students in the school system. The main characteristics of such organizations are that they have temporary membership, they can carry out real co-operative business, the appeal to practical leadership skills and management and are audited internally and externally. Co-operative laws in different countries take student cooperatives differently; In Lesotho, student co-operatives are fully registered under the going co-operative Societies Act. In Tanzania, the law accepts them as cooperative societies for minors. In other countries, they are taken as pre cooperative groups. The legal position of student co-operatives as fully registered societies, has the advantage of taking them seriously and working with them as competent co-operative organizations with acceptable credibility.

Student Co-operative development therefore is the process of mobilization registration, supervision and monitoring and evaluation of their performance over time. Authorities designated to oversee the process of co-operative development, would normally have specific criteria for gauging the performance. It is however important that for student co-operatives and for general co-operative development in future, the members are well guided in the tools for monitoring and evaluation of their own co-operative societies.

Traditionally, the promotion and external governance has been performed by the government. It is high time now to see that the government considers seriously its role in the direct promotion of co-operatives. This role could be left to designated independent bodies so that students do not get wrong signals in thinking that co-operatives must be promoted and controlled by the government. It is important that the government

demonstrates through student co-operatives that co-operatives are autonomous and member driven organizations.

3.0 Educations stem and the Economy of Lesotho

Student co-operatives in Lesotho, can be looked at in two major contexts- the economy and the education system itself. The economy, provides the basis of production of goods and services, distribution, investment and consumption systems. The way the economy is structured and organized, provides the engine for a country's development. The education system of a country, is the structure of acquisition of formal education as one progresses from lower levels to the highest levels. It shows levels of attainment as graduated from the lower levels onwards, identified by achieved qualifications.

3.1 Economy

Lesotho is a kingdom occupying an area of 30,355 sq.km, with a population of about 2 million people according to 2005 population estimates. Most urban population is located in five major towns including Maseru (173,700), Teyateyaneng (22,800), Leribe (35,000), Mafeteng (32,000) and Mohale Haek (18,000) The rest of the population, about 84% is rural and subsists on agriculture (US BAA.2007). Population growth rate was estimated at 1.4% but depressed by HIV/AIDS prevalence of about 29% (US BAA:2007) The literacy rate is 84:8% and has free primary education in grades 1-7. Employment was estimated at 704.000 or 35% of the population, in 2001.

The G.D.P estimated in 2003 was 1.43 bin U.S.D with an annual growth rate of 3.4 % as estimated in 2004. Per capita income in 2003, was U.S.D 550 with average inflation of 10 %. Lesotho is exporter of water, industrial goods some minerals and agricultural commodities with an arable land of 11%. The contribution of the major sectors to GDP in 2003, was Industry, 43.1% followed by agriculture with a contribution of 16.8%. In its trade sector, Lesotho exports excess labour and water, to South Africa Other exports include diamonds and wool, while 50% of the population earns their living from agriculture. The country is self sufficient in electricity. As a member of SACLJ, tariffs have been eliminated on the trade of good with other member countries —Namibia South Africa Botswana, the other countries of the costumes union are member of the Common Monetary Area where their currencies exchange at parity.

3.2 Education

According to the National Report on the Development of Education in Lesotho (2004) education topped the agenda for national development. The education Act 1995 strived to

make education accessible for all to meet the challenges of the Millennium Development Goals. Basic education was planned to reach 100% by 2015 and eradication of poverty through education by 2020.

Although Lesotho education policy puts a clear emphasis on entrepreneurial skills, education for all and ICT, there are a number of constraints faced by the educational system of the kingdom of Lesotho: Lesotho is faced by the challenges of access, equity and teacher education. As far as access is concerned and before 2003, there were more girl enrolment in primary education than boys. The reasons holding up boys were mainly labour migration and livestock herding.

But crossing from primary level to secondary levels there were more boys than girls due to teenage pregnancy, early marriage and parent morbidity due to HIV/AIDS. However, at higher education levels there is an overall higher admission rates for girls than boys but less girls in technical education institutes than boys.

As far as quality education is concerned, there are three important variables including the number of teachers, quality of teachers and quality of delivery material. While the government can control quality of material and quality of teachers, it cannot control teacher exit quantum. It has been reported that the attrition rate is quite high as well as the severe impact of HIV/AIDS on teachers.

On efficiency the critical area is the movement from primary to secondary due to drop outs and repetitions. Repetitions are at the level of and drop outs at 6% making on ward movement for boys to higher education at 71 % and 78% for girls. The same pattern is almost repeated at higher education levels.

Lesotho government has made a number of positive interventions to promote access, quality and efficiency of the education system. It put in place the National Gender Policy framework to promote gender equality of access. It has also supported the formation of an organization known as the Girl Education Movement to promote girl access to higher levels of education. To address shortage of teachers, the government had to go into employment of unqualified teachers and developing a comprehensive teacher training policy as a long-term strategy. There is also an ongoing strategy to keep HIV infected teachers alive.

For quality improvement, there is an ongoing curricular process review to incorporate life skills, technology functioned numeracy and literacy. There is also an enhanced investment in teacher training, especially in science mathematics and technology.

4.0 Students Co-operatives Development in Lesotho: Opportunities and Constraints

When we link the outputs of the education system in the Kingdom of Lesotho life skills, entrepreneurship, technology, teacher education, access quality quantity and efficiency, we see the efforts of the government to achieve the stipulated Millennium Development Goals. The problem however, comes when we realize that in a country with a relatively small population of 2 mill, Lesotho is experiencing unemployment of about 44%, putting pressure on available resource. Arable land is only 1% coupled with low levels of agricultural technology cannot easily absorb the unemployed population.

Consequently, the production and organizational system of Lesotho need widened diversification in terms of on- farm and off- farm occupations. This is where we have the justification for students' cooperatives as part of a long term strategy for the social and economic diversification of the economy of Lesotho.

4.1 Opportunities for School Co-operatives in Lesotho.

A number of opportunities present themselves to the broad economy when the concept of school cooperatives is embraced at the national level:

First is the need to create future social capital. Most Africa countries have not accepted the reality of building a culture of people's organizations (Rause:1996), student co-operatives offer the opportunity of learning to organize and the need to create fabrics of economic organizational networks across the country. Such networks become an asset to the economy because they are autonomous and take a leading role in the development of self reliance, democracy, indigenous investment capability citizenship participation in developing the economy. Co-operatives are flexible organizations in creating employment opportunities.

They can be formed in all sectors of the economy, be it in agriculture, industry, services and social welfare. They are also flexible in terms of size accommodating small and large sizes of organizations Co-operatives are also flexible in responding to pressing needs of the members at different time periods. Students need to learn right from school about this co-operative flexibility so that such an organizational framework, offer them the opportunity for self employment and employment creation in general. According to UN

estimates, the global co-operative membership is 1.8 billion, employing 100 million staff. Africa's membership is estimated at 10.4 million farmer members, organized around 24,000 co-operative societies, employing about 80,000 staff. (Rause: 1996) One of the reasons as to why Africa occupies a smaller proportion of numbers of co-operative societies and employed staff is the neglect of the youth. That is why This forum is important..

Co-operatives are part of the private sector with a promise of a better society in future students need to learn that co-operatives are a significant part of the private sector of the national economy They therefore provide an important mechanism in responding to the challenges of globalization and competition as they integrate the youth into the productive sectors of the economy. As such, students to see the relevance of co-operatives, both at school as well as beyond their school life, because it creates a pool of prepared indigenous investors. for example, a well performing savings and credit co-operative system in a country, provides the mechanism for creation of investors (Gaboury:2005)

Lesotho has the vocational training capability to provide technical skills needed by the student co-operatives. Such services are offered by the existing government and non governmental organizations. As long as student cooperatives have started, keeping them going and expanding, needs an organizational environment that provides easy access to technical and organizational skills for co-operative development.

4.3 Constraints

Despite the many potential opportunities for school co-operatives in Lesotho, we also observe a number of constraints which should be taken into consideration when the government is planning the promotion of student co-operative development:

First is the perspective of taking student co-operatives as isolated institutional incidents in some selected schools and as an end in themselves. This perspective, takes the student co-operatives as experimental organizations and remain closed at school levels. If they succeed or fail, the government may associate such events to the school environment and not because they are cooperatives in their own right. If such co-operatives are legally registered, then the criteria for judging their performance, should be the same. Or otherwise, the Cooperative Societies Act must give them a special category when it comes to registration and evaluation.

Second, is the historical record of a challenged co-operative movement and organization. All over the world, co-operatives have been challenged by liberalization and competition. Lesotho co-operative movement is no exception, where 80% of existing co-operatives are practically dormant ((Pete Sparreboom Buurger: 1992). Such challenged history, should not send negative signals to the youth. They should rather take them as important lessons of how co-operatives re-position themselves in new competitive markets. The best thing students and the youth can do, is to try to join the existing co-operatives and form new ones at school.

Third is the experience of government control over co-operatives. Students, learn about government control on co-operatives from co-operatives at home. If they observe some aspects of a co-operatives driven by a government officer on a daily basis, and do not see demonstration of democratic practice see more government involvement in the promotion and monitoring and evaluation of the cooperatives (Rojas: 1994), such actions send contradictory signals in the minds of the youth. This is because on one hand they are told that co-operatives are free from government control, but on the other they see heavy involvement of government on co-operatives at the same time.

5.0 The Role of Human Resources Development Institutions in Student Co-operative Development

5.1 National Strategy for Student Co-operative Development

There is need for the government to consider co-operatives for students to be cooperatives in their own right and co-operatives in business. This means that there is need to include the promotion of school co-operatives in the current co-operative policy through which a national strategy and programs to involve all schools in the promotion of school co-operatives is put into action. The national strategy for the promotion of student co-operatives, will have to involve the Lesotho Co-operative College and stakeholder ministries of Education and Training, the ministry responsible for co-operatives as host, the ministries of Youth, Health, Environment and Social Welfare. The new policy and Strategy will also look at the promotion of youth co-operatives beyond the school system.

5.2 Strategic Involvement of the Lesotho Cooperative College as Trainers in the School System and Beyond.

In the general strategy for the promotion of school co-operatives, there is need to start with the establishment of cooperative clubs which mature into student cooperatives. Students need to practice co-operation through very simple clubs in the first two years of secondary education and primary school. In the last three years of secondary education, they could then be organized in school cooperative societies and performing real co-

operative business. They offer services to the public and evaluated as any other co-operative in the country. The same idea should continue up to post secondary, college and vocational training. To fulfill this objective there is need to challenge the Co-operative College and support NGOs to carry out the program, funded by the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Cooperatives and Marketing to carry out the program.

5.3 The Production of Teachers with a Co-operative specialization and School

Curricular

In the existing teacher training curricular, student teachers specialize how to teach specialized subjects such as History, Geography and languages. Teacher education can include Co-operative Management and Organization specialization. At the Moshi University College of Co-operative and Business Studies, we are planning to establish a Bachelor's degree in Education with a teaching specialization in Commerce and Co-operative Management and Organization. Currently, the Lesotho Co-operative College in collaboration with the Moshi College, may jointly run orientation seminars for primary and secondary school teachers who will be given the responsibility of running cooperative education classes in the schools. They will be the genesis and critical mass for the development of school co-operatives.

5.4 Curriculum Development and Production of Graduated Reading Material for Schools, Colleges and Vocational Training Centres

The Ministry responsible for co-operative development Lesotho Co-operative College and the Faculty of Education at the National University of Lesotho, should be challenged to develop a joint project for the development of curricular and the production of reading material for the co-operative subjects to be taught in schools, colleges and Vocational Training Centres.

5.5 Field Practicals Program with the existing Cooperative movement.

Existing co-operatives should in collaboration with the Lesotho Co-operative College and the schools, develop a joint program where students would work in co-operatives during vacation. For university students, it could take place in the form of internship, research and field attachments in co-operatives in cooperatives. This field involvement of students, may influence the re-vitalization of the ailing co-operative movement in Lesotho, because while doing their internship, students may be challenged to make suggestions on what could be done to improve performance of such co-operatives.

5.6 Training Need Assessment for school Co-operatives and Design of Appropriate Models for school

The student forming co-operative clubs or student co-operatives, need special kind of member education training and analysis of entrepreneurial talents at school. The Lesotho Co-operative College could carry out a national training and education needs assessment for the would-be members or members of the existing school cooperatives or groups. This would provide an important picture of the actual needs for school cooperative system as a whole.

Another intervention by the Cooperative College, is the design of what would be the appropriate type of cooperatives and their structure. This is important because the school is a closed system where certain modes of cooperative enterprise, can be implemented without much complexity such as consumer type worker cooperatives and savings and credit co-operative models. Other types such as agricultural marketing and housing cooperative modes may not be appropriate for students because of their input-output requirements.

6.0 Conclusion

If we need strong cooperatives in future, we need learning cooperatives at school. But starting at the school system level, calls for a comprehensive strategy for the creation of stable co-operative movement at school, because the students and the youth belong to the present and the future. Lesotho. All African countries are however challenged by the current difficulties faced by cooperatives under liberalized markets as poor examples of functioning cooperative organizations. Countries are also challenged by the control relationships by governments on the co-operative movement, sending confusing messages to students who want to form autonomous member-driven and controlled cooperatives. But there are strong opportunities for students and youth cooperative which call for joint strategies and plan by all concerned Human Resources Development institutions in Lesotho and abroad.

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