

# Review of International Co-operation

*Volume 105/2019*

## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE:

Xavier Bartoll  
Carlos Enrique González Blanco  
Mohit Dave  
Fiona Duguid  
Sara Elder  
Isobel M. Findlay  
JoAnn Jaffe  
Lou Hammond Ketilson  
Judith Harris  
Virginia Hunter  
Jeffrey Moxom  
Johnny Mugisha  
Diana Namwanje  
Mercy Nimusiima  
Bernard B. Obaa  
Erick Obongo  
Laia Ollé-Espluga  
Gerrie Prymak  
Arielle Romenteau  
Ezechiel Sentama  
Priscilla Settee  
Shannon Sutton  
M. Derya Tarhan

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Committee on  
Co-operative Research

# Review of International Co-operation

*Volume 105/2019*

This special issue of the Review includes seven peer-reviewed, original research papers and a co-editor introduction addressing the theme, Co-operative Strength in Diversity: Voices, Governance, and Engagement. Papers reflect on the complex intersections among diversity, voice, governance, and engagement that challenge and invigorate co-operatives in Canada and internationally. They document co-operative strengths as well as ongoing challenges in achieving reconciliation and justice for all.

## **Editors of this special issue**

Sara Elder, Isobel M. Findlay, Judith Harris, Fiona Duguid, and M. Derya Tarhan

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## **Address**

International Cooperative Alliance  
Avenue Milcamps 105  
1030 Brussels, Belgium

## **Graphic design**

Andrea Vizcaya Russo - Señales Ltda.

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# Co-operative Strength in Diversity: Voices, Governance, and Engagement

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*Preface*

## Special issue edited by the Canadian Association for the Studies in Co-operation


*Sonja Novkovic*

This 105th issue of the Review represents a collection of diverse experiences and uses of the cooperative model. The common factor to all essays is humanity that cuts through the poverty, marginalization, conflict, and the injustices of colonization. Cooperative contributions to sustainable development and sustainable communities in different corners of the globe are represented in this volume, illustrating once again the power of cooperation.

*Sonja Novkovic*  
*Chair, Committee on Co-operative Research*

# Introduction to Special Issue of the Review of International Co-operation

Judith Harris, Isobel M. Findlay, Sara Elder,  
Fiona Duguid, and M. Derya Tarhan



Co-operative enterprises involve diverse groups of individuals gathering and working toward a common goal. Research has shown that this diversity of voices, backgrounds, and perspectives comes with challenges but can also be a significant strength for co-operatives. This co-operative advantage can be maximized in cases where governance structures enable inclusive meaningful engagement from members. In this Special Issue of the *Review of International Co-operation*, focused on “Co-operative Strength in Diversity: Voices, Governance, and Engagement,” we reflect upon the interplay of diversity, inclusion, and social justice with co-operative enterprises in Canada and beyond.

Critical global and local challenges that call on us to work together towards peace and sustainability require relationship building and partnering at all levels of organization across the differences that may separate us. This collection of papers demonstrates the potential of enterprise founded on co-operative values and principles to promote inclusion, decent work, positive work-place relationships, co-op to co-op alliances and concern for the wider community to bridge difference and address super-ordinate goals.

The authors draw on historical and current examples to illustrate both the opportunities and the continuing barriers that face co-operatives given the cultural, gender, geographic, and livelihood divides that confront, engage, and energize the movement.

The first essay by Priscilla Settee on “Indigenous Knowledge, Human Rights, and the Principles and Values of Co-operation” importantly adds to the academic literature on co-operative and Indigenous thinking in the context of ongoing human rights struggles within neoliberal globalization. Its unique contribution to this special issue lies in its sharing of lessons learned in personal and professional, academic and activist, formal and informal engagement with the impacts of colonial and neo-colonial monocultures that have been so damaging to communities, but especially Indigenous communities still fighting for basic human rights, including safe housing and clean water. Her writing brings home the need for Indigenous and co-operative values and principles to work together to bridge different communities, to remember shared histories of struggle, to “stand up to the bullies of profit” that have put nature in crisis, and to humanize

discourses and practices. Practitioners, policy makers, and academics can all benefit from lessons learned about the importance of different worldviews and knowledges in the interests of healthy people and planet. Building on the work of Odora Hoppers (2012), the essay makes a strong argument for unlearning old colonial ways and for learning a new vocabulary that is as compassionate as it is creative in enhancing socio-economic and cognitive justice for all.

A Canadian case of Indigenous-led development is presented by Judith Harris and Gerrie Prymak in their article entitled "Reclaiming Community: An inner city village co-operative," an account of the establishment of the Village Co-operative in Winnipeg's North End. This co-operative initiative was the idea of women, grandmothers and other caregivers who had for many years been attending the weekly North End Stay and Play (NESP) program. In the process of attending this program, women developed lasting friendships and built capacity that led them to pool their resources and establish the Village Co-operative—a nourishing space for grandmothers, mothers, children, and the broader community alike. Harris and Prymak examine the basic elements of the community co-operative model (Mori, 2014) and determine how it might fit with and provide guidance to this new inner-city Village Co-operative. Building on this analysis, they consider the establishment of this co-operative as a way of returning to the traditional village model and reclaiming community functions for Indigenous community members in the North End of Winnipeg. Winnipeg, as the most Indigenous urban centre in Canada, is the site of on-going efforts to come to terms with the nation's violent history of racism and practices that some have labelled genocide.

In his own analysis of co-op development in spaces of identity-based conflict, Ezechiel Sentama presents the case for employing

co-operative development as an effective tool for "relationship transformation". "Co-operatives and Reconciliation after Violent Conflicts: Lessons from post-genocide Rwanda" sheds light on the potential for co-operatives to facilitate socioeconomic change within a context of ethnic conflict. Through a qualitative study of the case of post-genocide Rwanda, Sentama provides a valuable contribution to the academic literature on co-operatives as agents of social development. He convincingly argues that by providing a space for positive interaction between conflicting parties and guiding values and principles that bind members, co-operatives can contribute to reconciliation without the need for a third party. In Rwanda, the co-operatives studied engaged both genocide survivors and former genocide perpetrators, effectively providing a space to connect and re-humanize the other. The paper highlights the contribution co-operatives can make alongside public and third party-based mechanisms toward reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

This essay is an important addition to the literature on the co-operative role in promoting positive socio-economic change in general and peace in particular. Exploring the case of post-Genocide Rwanda, Sentama builds on literature on social arenas' potential to disrupt and displace othering processes that support social exclusion and violence (Hewstone & Hughes, 2015; Kiyala, 2015; Lederach, 1997; and Schulz, 2008) to argue for co-operatives as a key social space for positive inter-group interaction, for reconciliation and positive relations across ethnic and other divides. Adding to literature on co-operatives as a means of re-humanizing the economy, the essay documents how co-operatives as a key relational space can play a humanizing role in everyday acts of survival. If previous studies have emphasized psychosocial processes, Sentama underlines the need also to address material and symbolic aspects of intergroup dynamics. Drawing

on contact theory, Sentama's essay fills a gap in the literature by probing the co-operative role in response to traumatic violence, exploring whether and how "the co-operative difference" matters as a tool of reconciliation through the qualitative study of people's experiences of co-operative contact within two co-operatives: *Peace Basket Cooperative* and *Abahuzamugambi Coffee Cooperative*.

Gender differences and the lack of women's voices and participation in co-operative enterprise, particularly in rural agricultural societies, is a theme that runs through three of the articles. Despite the fact that fair trade organizations have adopted co-operative principles as a fundamental element of their governance structure, including non-discrimination on the basis of gender, Shannon Sutton's primary research in "Female Participation and Voice: Cases from Tanzanian Fair Trade Co-operatives" demonstrates that women's voices are still not fairly represented in membership and leadership in Tanzania. Sutton provides us with the results of interviews with managers and small-scale producers from three well-established fair trade coffee unions: Kilimonjaro Native Co-operative Union, Kagera Co-operative Union, and Karagwe District Co-operative Union. Securing interviews with women in traditional communities without interjections from husbands, itself a challenge, motivated the author to conduct women-only focus groups. The research findings highlight the prominent role of women in the process of coffee production and yet the continuing reality that the man of the family is considered "the owner when it's time to sell" and it is he who gets to vote in the union. Managers recognize that barriers such as patrilineal customs that pass the land on to sons, traditional household responsibilities, and an educational requirement that few women can meet, are slowly changing. Quotas are useful but more significantly, sensitivity workshops and training offered by the unions, the government, and the

fair trade system are changing attitudes and giving women opportunities to voice their opinions in fair trade organizations.

The fact that gender segregation and exclusion is a persistent issue in co-operatives is a theme that is repeated in Espluga and Bartoll's article on "Health Status and Job Satisfaction of Worker Co-operative Members." This paper is a valuable addition to the literature for those interested in the social economy and alternatives to the market economy in general and in worker co-operatives, Mondragon, and the failure of Fagor in particular. In the context of the current stresses and strains of the gig economy, it importantly sheds light on vital issues of job satisfaction and good quality work and their implications for health status in worker co-operatives as opposed to conventional businesses. It does so by drawing on the 2013 Health Survey of the Basque Region at a time of economic crisis and significant uncertainty for management and workers, worsening working conditions and intensifying job stresses. While previous studies have explored job stability and decision making and participatory practices of worker co-operatives, the article adds a valuable gender lens to the analysis of health impacts that will be invaluable both for those within organizations trying to understand and address work-related stresses and those interested in different forms of organization.

The outcomes of the article by Jaffe et al on "Co-operatives, Agricultural Livelihoods, Gender, and Differentiation in Rural Uganda" are of particular interest to development practitioners and academics looking to better address gender and poverty concerns related to co-operative participation. This paper is a timely contribution to the literature on the role of co-operatives for rural livelihoods and development with a particular focus on the integrated co-operative model. Their findings reveal



the complexity and nuance of how co-operative membership can change the conditions of farmer livelihoods in the Global South. The authors show that co-operative membership can provide opportunities for higher incomes and land accumulation, but that this does not necessarily translate into improved food security or education for households, depending on household spending priorities and the labour demands of household farming operations. Women participating in co-operatives are not realizing the same income and land benefits as men. The study highlights the need for attention to interacting economic, social, and agronomic dimensions of producer livelihoods and context, in order for co-operatives to effectively contribute to poverty reduction and improved gender equity.

The final paper in this collection, by Moxom, Romenteau, Dave, and Blanco, focuses on “Co-operatives and the Sustainable Development Goals: The Role of Co-operative Organizations in Facilitating SDG Implementation at Global, National, and Local Levels.” Since the late 20th century, global co-operative congresses have prioritized environmental values and called attention to the wider social impacts of co-op production and consumption,

emphasizing the triple bottom line. The ICA (2018) presents Roelants and Eum’s synoptic view of the co-operative movement’s main contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals noting “what’s most needed is adequate policy for which we need to create advocacy instruments.” Towards that end, this paper provides an action analysis of initiatives at global, national, and local levels of co-operative organization. The authors describe how co-op actors are well placed to facilitate implementation of SDGs related to gender equality (SDG #5), decent work (SDG #8), sustainable producing and consumption (SDG #12), ending hunger (SDG #2) and eradicating poverty (SDG #1). At the global level the authors observe that co-op umbrella organizations employ regional platforms and policy linkages that create trickle-down effects. Larger national co-ops monitor and report on the advancement of a number of SDGs. Co-ops are particularly effective at bringing communities of diversity together around activities such as local investment, education, services and employment. Moxom et al. conclude that the co-operative principle of co-operation among co-ops can strengthen the role of the movement as a “crucial actor” in strengthening partnerships (SDG #17), increasing the pace of SDG implementation.

## Final word

This collection of seven articles has highlighted the socio-economic impacts of co-operative enterprises that foster participation and create space for reconciling differences and the colonial residues and conflicts that arise from ethnocentrism, patriarchy, and classism. The authors demonstrate the potential for reconciliation of identity-based conflicts through co-operative peace building and highlight continuing efforts to promote women’s participation through sensitivity training and education. This focus on the co-operative advantage in embracing diversity calls attention to the unique and critical role that co-ops are beginning to play in addressing sustainability through partnering at all levels of organization and in humanizing global discourses at what is emerging as a pivotal point in human history.



# Indigenous Knowledge, Human Rights, and the Principles and Values of Co-operation

Priscilla Settee

## Abstract

*This essay brings together co-operative and Indigenous thinking to advance struggles for human rights in the context of the still unequal impacts of neoliberal globalization on Indigenous peoples. Situating the work within the author's own intellectual/activist itinerary, the essay elaborates shared struggles for human rights and the role of co-op values and principles. The essay argues for a new vocabulary with creativity and compassion and an unlearning of old colonial ways that impeded diverse thinking and action. It argues for a relearning process to engage with Indigenous values, knowledges, and needs so that co-operatives can address effectively the current challenges of neoliberalism through cross-cultural solutions and acts of solidarity in the interests of healthy people and planet.*

*At Congress 2018 I was invited to give the keynote for the Canadian Association for Studies in Co-operation. I was delighted as I come from a long line of co-operators through my original Swampy Cree community of Cumberland House in northern Saskatchewan that in the 1930s and 1940s led some of Saskatchewan's first co-ops in the fishing industry. My talk addressed the issue of Co-operative Strength in Diversity: Voices, Governance, and Engagement. This paper is an expansion of that talk and begins with a description of my own intellectual and activist itinerary to situate my work before elaborating shared struggles for human rights and the principles and roles of co-ops. The paper describes not only the need for social and economic inclusion but also the need for society in general and co-operatives in particular to engage with and embrace Indigenous values, knowledges, and needs. It contends that these knowledges will have benefits in restructuring the impact of the current neoliberal political system and globalization. The paper discusses current challenges of Indigenous communities in relation to capitalist development, the need to re-examine principles of current co-operative behaviours and to engage with and impart values and strengths of Indigenous communities. From the literature it is clear that a great cultural divide currently exists within Canada between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and, if co-ops are to be all they can be in addressing challenges, cross-cultural solutions are greatly needed. Finally, I describe some of the projects and teaching that have been designed to work with communities and to inspire solidaritous actions by others.*

## Background

My perspective comes from my work in academia/Indigenous food work/Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous and feminist research methodologies, and from a new initiative to teach and research about social economies (Indigenous Studies 361, Indigenous Development into the 21st Century). But it is also from the perspective of someone who believes that academia must be firmly planted in and reflective of the needs of communities. As a young woman I sought out the discipline of Indigenous studies and attended the first program in Canada at Trent University in Peterborough. At that time, although it was largely an outgrowth of anthropology, I had the opportunity to be taught by some of the early notable Indigenous professors including Elder Ernest Benedict, Walter Currie, Marlene Brant Castellano, and Harvey McCue among others. It was a nerve point and centre of intellectual and activist people and events seeking to carve out a place in academia and to hone our intellectualism and book/writing/speaking skills. The theory of C. Wright Mills (1956) and Louis Riel (n.d.) was enhanced by the stories on the ground in the region and by some of the impacted students from the James Bay area. I learned about the meaning of political resistance as the James Bay Cree were halting the building of the first James Bay Dam that was having such a devastating impact on the environment and Indigenous livelihoods and taking their stories to the international stage (Marsh, 2011). At one point we participated in and helped coordinate a blockade of the bridge that joins New York with Quebec. This experience stayed with me for life.

In addition, I have had the unique opportunity to learn from leading-edge environmentalists, Indigenous leaders, trade unionists, and global revolutionary thinkers. After graduation and through the formal organizations of local, provincial, and national Indigenous

women's organizations, we challenged patriarchy and challenged woman and child abuse head on by calling out batterers and by establishing safe places for women and children. When a judge continuously addressed our kids and families disparagingly in court, we challenged his behaviours under the Provincial Court Act and had him removed through a euphemistic "early retirement". When our young women suffered disproportionately in prison, we closed down the infamous Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston, Ontario, a place where 13 young women had killed themselves or had died under mysterious circumstances thousands of miles away from their prairie and northern homes. Our prison closure effort was facilitated through the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC, 2019), an aggregate of thirteen Indigenous women's organizations within Canada and non-profit organization founded in 1974 representing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women. This was the impetus that established the "healing lodge" model of correctional institution embedding Indigenous values and concepts. As a prison abolitionist, I don't endorse healing lodges any more than I endorse other jails, but it was one way for young women to at least have contact with family and friends.

Always on the side of labour and the respectful treatment of and compensation for workers, we within the Saskatchewan Native Women's Association through the 1970s and 1980s established linkages with trade unions to help dismantle apartheid in South Africa, to fight miserable working conditions and secure decent wages for grape growers in California and liberation movements in Nicaragua to gain independence from U.S. imperialism. I saw this first hand when after graduation and a teaching stint in northern Saskatchewan, I travelled solo but under the guidance of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), an organization founded in 1974 by George Manuel. WCIP was established to work

with Indigenous organizations to address Land Rights, International Agreements and Treaties, Land Reform and Systems of Tenure from Mexico to Ecuador. There I learned the murderous impacts on Indigenous peoples standing up for land rights. In tiny El Salvador I witnessed the machete slashes in people's houses, reminders of the thousands of Lenca and Nahuatal Pipil peoples who were killed in the rural regions of El Salvador. Adrian Lisco who was president of Asociacion Nacional Indigena Salvadorena (ANIS) spent many years in exile in Guatemala for to return to El Salvador would have meant death for his work demanding land and human rights for the Indigenous peoples of El Salvador. We understood that the colonialism and imperialism that plagued Indigenous and other citizens impacting our communities in North America were related to similar struggles in other regions of the world. In the late 1980s we organized with Sarahkka in Karasjohka, Samiland, probably the first international Indigenous women's conference to be represented at the United Nations Women's Conference in Beijing, China.

Indigenous studies reflect many of these experiences and similar ones from colleagues with similar life experiences, knowledge, and training. In the past close to half a century the discipline of Indigenous Studies continues to be a rapid growth area with leading-edge research on Indigenous human conditions looking at critical areas of governance, economic development, gender, environment, decolonization, health, worldviews, curriculum development, and pedagogy shifts (Laliberte, et al., 2000). Leading up to this as a young developing academic, I have benefitted from both formal and informal education and learned much from the field in different places of the world which I describe in a variety of books and other publications. Today the field of Indigenous Studies continues to grow locally, provincially, nationally, and internationally. The publication record

has been impressive as departments have grown from undergraduate to graduate programs producing cadres of young intellectuals. The field of Indigenous Studies is poised to develop co-operative training for Indigenous scholars and the extended community.

## Principles of Co-operatives

While the conditions that led to the development of the co-operative movement in North America were not as desperate and bloody as the conditions were/are for Indigenous peoples, they nonetheless came out of a struggle for human rights and difficult living conditions and bear some similarities to Indigenous condition, knowledge systems, and similar values. In terms of theoretical development and practice, I believe that both disciplines (Indigenous and co-operative studies) can be strengthened by considering the parallel and similar histories of struggle, development, and need for solidarity:

The attempt to solve common problems by combined action is at the root of cooperatives, but empowerment, shared ownership, and democratic control are also key concepts of cooperative ideology. Members become bound to each other through values and principles as well as through their shared experiences in the cooperative. (Wilhoit, 2005)

Co-operative values and principles are intended to support the structure of the co-operative, which in turn supports the structure of society:

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Co-operatives are guided in putting their values into practice by the seven principles:

- Voluntary and open membership
- Democratic member control
- Member economic participation
- Autonomy and independence
- Education, training, and information
- Cooperation among cooperatives
- Concern for community (ICA, 2019)

Indigenous peoples have similar values that hold communities together and work for the betterment of all. These values are described in greater length in my book *Pimatisiwin: The good life, global Indigenous knowledge systems* (2013), which aims to support struggles for decolonization and social and intellectual justice. Indigenous peoples are guided by traditional laws and values based on kinship, love, respect, and above all care for others and care for the natural world. These are embodied in the Cree concepts of *wakotawin* (we are family), *kisakhitin* (love), *wichitowin* (doing in a good way), among others. Parallels exist between these values and similar ones that helped establish the formation of Canada's early co-operatives. Other aspects of co-operatives are sustainable production of high quality goods.

However, both systems have over the recent and not so recent years faced difficult times as a result of current rapacious neoliberalism and globalization reflective of the present day socioeconomic and political systems. One question we must ask is: How do we rise to the challenges that we are faced with as academics and as community-minded people? Is it possible for co-operative conditions to exist given that new large industries rely on unfair labour practices in order to meet production quotas? And what obligations do we as citizens of the world have to speak out and act on conditions of lack of work/employment or loss of control

over working conditions that mean long hours, unsanitary workplaces, low pay, and no mechanisms for claiming worker rights and addressing the frustrations of other larger issues? And what tools are available to us? Recently two major strikes by prominent Canadian unions (the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the United Food Commercial Workers Local 1400 in Saskatoon) have called on both the Canadian government and the Saskatoon Co-operative Association to deal fairly on pay equity, employment conditions in regards to worker safety and equity for women and rural workers (Chen, 2018; MacPherson, 2019). The unfortunate situation that is communicated to the public by both employers is that business must go on as usual at any cost, and transparency on actual budgets and how workers are being cheated is never revealed.

Within this system Indigenous people are the canary in the coalmine and quality of life statistics are alarming and known to many Canadians. High unemployment and poverty reflective of permanent structural unemployment are conditions that face many First Nations communities today (Statistics Canada, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2018). Sadly, too few other Canadian citizens act in actual solidarity with Indigenous peoples to alter those statistics. A blame the victim (Hanson & Hanson, 2006) is often what too many Canadian citizens choose when faced with the tough realities of Indigenous daily life and health inequities and disparities despite a long history of Indigenous health knowledge pre-contact. In terms of life expectancy Indigenous peoples live a decade less than other Canadians, have an infant mortality rate three times the national average, chronic disease including diabetes at three times the national rate, more heart disease suffered at a younger age, infectious diseases such as tuberculosis at rates 6 times higher than for the rest of the population, HIV/AIDS growing fastest within this population, and water-borne diseases such as dysentery

and shigellosis are common (National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2013). Add to this record high, structural unemployment rates, epidemic prison rates, lack of safe water, affordable foods, devastated natural environments and preventable illnesses. Early death, through conditions that can be alleviated, health care, housing, loss & degradation of traditional economies, no royalties, cultural residential school, early and current governance policies of exclusion, end of social housing, disintegration of treaty rights, dragging land claims/non-settlement, land grabs, loss of land, livelihood, culture, language and natural resources are part of Indigenous Peoples' realities (National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2013). These social problems are epitomized by suicide rates among teens and disappeared Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW)—all of which begs the question of the myth of full "Canadian" citizenship. These issues are somewhat similar to reasons that Saskatchewan doctors and others rallied around and eventually established socialized medicine as part of the co-operative health movement (Leviten-Reid, 2009). Even though they live within a socialized medicare system, Dr. Ryan Meili outlines how Indigenous peoples are marginalized and still not reaping the health benefits enjoyed by other Canadians (Meili, 2012).

Co-operative Studies, similar to my disciplines of Indigenous Studies and Women and Gender Studies, was developed and continues to develop to address dimensions of governance, diversity, fairness, and quality of life. These disciplines have a mandate like many academic disciplines to develop new and improved versions of what Odora Hoppers (2012) calls "epistemics of governance, based on transparency, revisited ethics," one that is holistic, nonracist, and includes new and inclusive ways of knowing to put an end to "cognitive injustice" (p. 89). These values are meant to strengthen the

diversity of thinking and communities by drawing on Indigenous knowledge and advocating for those in the margins. It is an approach that can challenge the ethics of maldevelopment, to revisit citizenship definition/policy in terms of a new vocabulary—one that uses creativity with compassion, one that joins up with the current courageous movements that are being led on the ground, many by Indigenous Nations, youth, women, and other forward thinkers (Settee, 2011). Current ecological challenges require us to think deeply, act courageously and collectively, and in many cases engage in a relearning process.

I contend that the conditions required to keep what has become known as the 1% who enjoy obscene and record profits (Macdonald, 2018) fly in the face of co-operative principles and require people of conscience to stand up to the bullies of profit. This same profit system is one that we see producing record unemployment, or employment that earns workers lower and lower wages. Ultimately we must believe in our potential to develop solidarity among colleagues and fellow academics, to understand the importance of alliance building, to demand accountability of official knowledge and finally, building a better world, I believe, requires a discussion and more about the spoils of capitalism—about Nature in crisis. The following section looks at several areas that impact Indigenous peoples over and above other citizens and details some of the specific issues mentioned here. Because these problems are located in rural and remote communities, they are out of the public eye and don't receive the attention they deserve.

## Some of the Challenges

In her book *Boiling point: Government neglect, corporate abuse, and Canada's water crisis*, Barlow (2016) states: "Water Will Teach Us How to Live Together." Barlow,



the author of 18 books and a research associate with the Council of Canadians, a national research think tank, documents the extent of Canada's water crisis and argues water policies will become the defining issue of the next decade:

It is time to abandon our false beliefs that Canada has unlimited supplies of water, that Canadians have taken care of this water heritage and one another or that we still have lots of time to do so. We need a strong, national plan of action based on a new water ethic that puts water protection and water justice at the heart of all our policies and laws.

Generations have abused water, dumping toxins in it, over-extracting it for chemical-laden food production, and diverting it for convenient usage by industry and urban populations. Diversions have ruined healthy ecosystems, wetlands and canals have been dredged, and hundreds of dams built, moderating watershed levels and waterway survival, all for economic prosperity always beyond the impact site. My tiny community of Cumberland House is a case in point and is an example of how a downstream dam created environmental and cultural challenges for hunting, trapping, and gathering peoples. The social and cultural impact swept the community and a traditional economy and way of life into discord from which they have never fully recovered (Settee, 2013). When I was teaching there in 1981, attempted and completed suicides were not uncommon among the youth due in part to high unemployment, desperation, and a type of anomie brought on by western development.

We know that the world is running out of accessible water. The United Nations reported in 2015 that demand for water will increase by 55% over the next 15 years (UNESCO, 2015). By that time, global water resources will meet only 60% of the world's demand. A plan is needed in Canada as we face over-extraction, water contamination,

eutrophication (over-enrichment with nutrients), climate change, and glacial melt. Water protection regulations across the country are either non-existent, generally inadequate, or uneven. Canada faces renewed pressure to allow bulk commercial water exports to companies such as Coca-Cola, Dasani, Nestle, and drought-stricken states south of the 49th parallel.

In Saskatchewan *Canadian Geographic* has called the South Saskatchewan the most threatened river in Canada and reports that it has lost 12% of its flow in the last century due to over-extraction (Casey, 2010). Many of the country's large free-flowing rivers such as the Skeena, the Athabasca, and the Mackenzie Deh Cho (Dene) will follow if immediate action is not taken.

Contaminants such as mercury, Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and pesticides stalk the community of Grassy Narrows which is the site of one of Canada's worst environmental disasters that has continued for a half century. In 1971 as an undergraduate student I wrote a paper on Grassy Narrows' mercury poisoning. At that time Grassy Narrows gained notoriety when similarly pulp-mill-impacted people came from Minamata, Japan, to share their stories, impacts, and solidarity. I have continued to write about this tragic history. Mercury contamination has plagued the English-Wabigoon River system since a paper mill in Dryden, Ont., dumped 9,000 kilograms of the substance into the river systems in the 1960s. The contamination closed a thriving commercial fishery that devastated Grassy Narrows' economy. Grassy Narrows is still hitting the news. Today we learn that the physical and mental health of people living in Grassy Narrows is "significantly worse" than other First Nations since being impacted by mercury, a new health survey suggests (Poisson, 2018).

The community commissioned the survey to examine the impact of eating fish caught from their mercury-contaminated

waters. It found that there are “fewer elders” in the community, which means that people are “dying prematurely” at Grassy Narrows: “The results provide clear evidence that the physical and mental health of (Grassy Narrows community) members is poorer than that of other First Nation communities in Canada and Ontario,” said the report. The health and well-being of the community “cannot be understood without taking into account their history of mercury poisoning and its consequences,” it said (Germand, 2018). It also found that 33 per cent of residents have lost family members or close friends to suicide, making it five times the rate documented in other Ontario First Nations. Twenty-eight per cent had attempted suicide which is more than double the rate of other First Nations. “If any of you have ever had a family member or a close friend who has committed suicide, you know the anguish that it creates for each and every one of us,” said Donna Mergler, a mercury expert at Université du Québec à Montréal, who conducted the study (Germand, 2018). Those over the age of 50 who reported consuming more fish as children also had experienced poorer success in school and were twice as likely to earn less than \$20,000. More than 80 per cent of community members participated (300 adults ranging in age from 18 to 80) in the survey, which included a lengthy questionnaire and took place between December 2016 and March 2017. Mergler’s report is “the most comprehensive assessment of the health of the community to date” and included comparisons to First Nations regional health surveys done in 2008 and 2010 according to community officials (Germand, 2018). The report also said those being diagnosed by a medical professional with mercury poisoning were almost six times more likely to suffer from neuropsychological disorders, five times more to experience stomach and intestinal problems, and three times more likely to have vision problems or blindness (Germand, 2018).

Yet Judy Da Silva, the environmental health co-ordinator for Grassy Narrows states, “I don’t want to appear the victim, because we’re not, we’re fighters. We are going to keep fighting, we’re going to keep doing what we have to do to bring justice to our people” (Germand, 2018).

“Through a long process of deception and force by the Canadian Government,” according to FreeGrassyNarrows (2019), Grassy Narrows “has been dispossessed of their lands by Provincial legislation.” Despite inherent Aboriginal and treaty rights, past and present governments have allowed “multinational corporations like Weyerhaeuser the rights to clear-cut log Grassy Narrows’ area,” resulting in stripping “intact forest regions . . . into chunks of 20,000 barren acres or more” (Free Grassy Narrows, 2019). Addressing Weyerhaeuser and Abitibi, Grassy Narrows is demanding corporations to “Immediately cease and desist from all logging and industrial resource extraction on our territory. Terminate all logging, buying, selling, investing, financing, and profiting from the desecration of our homeland by Weyerhaeuser and Abitibi corporations and their subsidiaries. No development will occur on our territory without the full, free, prior, and informed consent of our community” (Free Grassy Narrows, 2019)

While this situation has killed many people of the region, other killings in other parts of the world are more direct. Berta Cáceres was a renowned Indigenous environmental activist from Honduras. In 2016 she was murdered. The killing of Berta Cáceres and other members of her organization, COPINH, in Honduras was in response to their opposition to the construction of the Agua Zara hydroelectric dam. International Indigenous Treaty Council (IITC) noted that this assassination was carried out even after the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples called attention to



the death threats against Berta and other members of her organization, and called upon Honduras to ensure her safety along with others under similar threats in that country.

Because of a range of political and economic interests, Canadian and other world governments are not prepared to address the criminal activities within their midst and many may have corporate ties such as serving on boards. One thing is certain that Indigenous peoples cannot settle these escalating problems alone, that it will require other citizens to speak out and act in concert with Indigenous peoples. Here we look at several examples.

## Teaching from the Indigenous World View, Building Stronger Alliances for Human Survival

### Indigenous Food Sovereignty

The issue of food cannot be separated from the health of the land as is demonstrated in the Grassy Nations example above. Food has the capacity to unite humanity, but it is first important to recognize what Indigenous people bring to the knowledge base. Many if not most of the world's food sources are attributable to the world's Indigenous peoples but today food has become a critical sovereignty issue because of threats to its very existence both physically and intellectually. Indigenous and small farmers have critiqued the power relations reflective of today's current food systems. For decades both groups have been educating themselves and others on intellectual property rights, patents, and the tension between those "protections" and freely gifted knowledge. They have launched a critical examination of an industrialized and energy-based food system, as one that is totally dependent on oil and as a result linked to climate change (Colombi 2009; Thomas, 2009; Whyte, 2013).

Every year more than 35 mil kilograms of herbicides and pesticides are applied on agricultural lands, 84% of it on the prairies in Canada and the chemicals have been found in the water sources all over North America (Barlow, 2016). Many are linked with animal and human health. Glyphosate is the active ingredient in Monsanto's herbicide Roundup, the top pesticide ingredient sold in Canada; its use tripled between 2005 and 2011. In April 2015, the World Health Organization announced that it now deems the chemical as "probably carcinogenic to humans" (Barlow, 2016, p.12). Atrazine, a well-known hormone disrupter widely used in Canada on corn has been banned in the European Union since 2004 due to widespread groundwater contamination. Yet in Dec 2015 Health Canada reapproved atrazine, a 2018 US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) study found that it is likely impairing most species of plants and animals in the U.S (EPA, 2018).

Indigenous Food Sovereignty concerns have been clearly detailed and identified in the Atitlan Declaration (2002) that was produced in a meeting in Guatemala (proposing that States implement a Right to Food and strengthening ties of cooperation among Indigenous Peoples) and in a Corn Declaration at Tecpán's 3rd International Indigenous Peoples Corn Conference (Tecpán, 2017). Both documents declare absolute sovereignty over Indigenous foods, intellectual property rights, and ways of life. They further decry international trade deals, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement and others signed by the wealthy nations of the world as they undermine local sovereignty. They address the use of agricultural chemicals that poison lands, waters, and the foods that rely on them, and they support the use of local production and benefits to local communities. Several reports now confirm the loss of (as many as 26,000) species at an alarming rate (International Union for the Conservation

of Nature [IUCN], 2018; Watts, 2018). Food sovereigntists are busily saving and protecting seeds, reviving traditional forms of food production, and addressing and raising awareness to land and water destruction through uncontrolled and unmonitored resource extraction.

In the spring of 2018 I was invited to write the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Food Policy for the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations (Settee, Maskeekee Michowin, FSIN Food Security Report and Literature Review, 2018). As part of the process three geographic meetings in Saskatoon, Fort Qu'Appelle, and Lac La Ronge were organized. We conducted three separate focus groups designed to identify food challenges and related issues of Saskatchewan First Nations communities. The findings and recommendations have been written up in an 87-page report and reflect what many news reports and studies have previously told us.

In 80 fur blocks spanning the northern two-thirds of Saskatchewan, 2,400 trappers still live off the land. Teaching how to respect nature's gifts, living a healthy lifestyle, and caring for and enjoying the fruits of the land have been hallmarks of a trapper culture that sustained Aboriginal people for millennia (Pattison & Findlay, 2010). Hunters, trappers, and gatherers are describing drastic changes to the quality of land, water, and animal life. They described incursions by industry that are largely the cause of the destruction of their homelands. Trappers in particular told of speculators coming in and laying waste to their trapping areas. They also described how cancers and other illnesses are more common and affecting younger people, something they have not seen in the past. Southern trappers and hunters described that since the 1990s they have noticed animals with sores under their fur and the people are worried and have decided that they will not eat such animals. This has caused food security stresses

and have made people move away from traditional foods and ways of life. Large-scale farming has destroyed traditional trapping grounds through the destruction of grasslands and native prairie plants and pollution from agricultural runoff. Although Indigenous communities' cultural needs are to be protected by a clause of the UN *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) through "Free prior and informed consent" (UN, 2007), this is not happening for the land-based peoples I talked with. Before any incursions take place on their lands, Indigenous peoples must give their consent, freely and prior to any activity taking place. In an unprecedented move a Lac La Ronge Band Councillor was able to force the government to notify trappers before any speculation took place giving the trapper one month to respond. *Sakawaskiy* company established Lac LaRonge Indian Band Lands and Resource Management Board in 2011 because members were getting overwhelmed with notification letters coming from the provincial government and trappers complaining of industry incursions and violations. Before that speculators could simply come onto traplines and begin clearcutting, drilling, and destroying trappers' cabins. One thing worth noting is that some communities have increased their production of buffalo and used it as a cultural teaching tool with the services of cultural worker and elders within the school. This has kept culture alive and current.

These many stories and statistics that impact Indigenous peoples could give rise to an enriched and revitalized co-operative movement if given the right support. Indigenous Peoples are no strangers to the principles and values reflected in co-operatives. First Nations people "exercised co-operative development long before the co-operative business structure became popular in Canada and elsewhere." While the word co-operators is not used, in many practical terms, First Nations were

among “the first co-operators” (SFNEDN & SCA, 2015, p. 15). For example, according to a guide produced by the Saskatchewan First Nations Economic Development Network (SFNEDN) and Saskatchewan Co-operative Association (SCA) (2015), the first Aboriginal fishers’ co-op was incorporated in 1945 in Saskatchewan. In Stanley Mission through a government initiative, the Co-operative Association was established in 1949. Eventually, by 1959, there were six co-ops operating in northern Saskatchewan: La Ronge, Stanley Mission, Deschambault Lake, Cumberland House, and Wollaston, which were known as the Northern Co-op Trading Services Ltd. (p.17). Later, incorporations of Aboriginal co-ops were popular in the 1970s and 1980s, and to some extent, in the 1990s; by 2001, “Aboriginal consumer co-ops were growing at a rate almost twice that of the retail sector or other consumer co-ops” (SFNEDN & SCA, 2015, p.15).

Under the current co-operative model, according to the guide, co-operative businesses can be a way for First Nations communities to improve economic conditions while keeping decision-making powers and control with local people. The guide further states that co-operatives are designed according to the needs of the community it serves, so each co-op has a specific and locally-focused way of working. (SFNEDN & SCA, 2015, p.16) It is the role of the SCA to educate young people about co-operative, leadership and teamwork and co-operative development.

In the western provinces the co-operative movement has been a supporter of food and farm issues. Federated Co-operatives Limited (FCL) “is a co-operative that supports other co-operatives that serve people in Western Canada” (FCL, 2019). As a parent body to many co-operatives throughout the western provinces, FCL has a great opportunity to lend solidarity and expertise with Indigenous communities that could benefit from the practice of co-

operative principles. Indigenous peoples could gain important knowledge from the workings of the various food stores, gas bars/convenience stores, agro and home centres and could help bridge the great cultural divide that currently exists. So the question is why are there not more co-ops in Indigenous communities? In fact the number of co-ops is shrinking according to recent statistics (Canadian Co-operative Association, 2012). Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson (2001) explain that because of Canadian colonial history there are trust issues coming from Indigenous communities. Similar to many rural communities training in areas of leadership, governance, business and economic planning, accounting and business development skills remains an issue. In addition, they identify lack of knowledge of co-ops as well as jurisdictional issues whereby First Nations in particular are impeded by the Indian Act and the inability to obtain loans. Education is required on both sides. Some solutions they recommend include that groups of First Nations communities and other rural communities could link up to form co-operative initiatives. In many rural communities the cultural divide is great and so this would necessitate possible cross-cultural training and interaction and planning sessions. FCL’s funding of the Co-operative Innovation Project (2016) went some way to achieve these goals in its exploring of co-op development in rural and Indigenous communities. Its funding of Co-operatives First (2019), a co-op development organization similarly focused on rural and Indigenous communities, also offers hope of transformative futures. The next section explores how postsecondary training could teach awareness to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to raise awareness about the benefits of the co-operative movement and agencies.

### Social Economy Teaching and Practise

A new theoretical approach that could be of use to academics and universities that considers both co-operative values and Indigenous world views could be social economic development training. This year I had the opportunity to develop a course on social economies for Indigenous communities using the Lewis & Conaty (2012) book that has been the basis of Lewis's inspiring workshops throughout the globe promoting local control over local economies. In their book *The Resilience Imperative: Cooperative transitions to a steady-state economy*, Lewis and Conaty (2012) reflect on the concept of resilience when they describe the need for community revitalization and development in response to the "profound imbalance caused by unfettered growth" (p. 2). They maintain that it is important to invite and keep capital close to home, so that ownership of process and production is ensured, is democratic, and based on citizens' rights: It is important to work for diversity "in all forms" to resist 'homogenizing the world' (p. 19) and "nested relationships that are functional and tied to specific geographies and local demographics". These types of associational linkages will reinforce and support innovation and knowledge transmission over space and time—and will reflect resilience principles. What they describe as social and human capital is the connective tissue that supports and reinforces knowledge transmission and improvement over time.

Mondragon Co-operatives established in Spain in the 1940s to address poverty and decline in the wake of the General Franco regime is such a model that inspired Lewis & Conaty. Mondragon's statistics are impressive. Schools offer co-op education, technical training and education that focus on the management of democratically-owned business. Support systems for workers and their families include social and health security services and a co-operative development

bank provides access to "patient capital". In terms of Mondragon's collective equity accounts, 10% is distributed to local charitable organizations and other non-profit services, 40% is invested in Mondragon reserves for ongoing research and product development, and 50% goes to individual worker accounts to ensure adequate pensions. These percentages represent "just price" through fair wages (Lewis & Conaty, 2012, p. 249). In order to maintain an intellectual lead, staff work on research and development in business, industrial products and agriculture, food and service industries. When problems erupt, "specialist staff would intervene" (Lewis & Conaty, 2012, p. 250).

Mondragon's business model is based on people principles and the sovereignty of labour. Mondragon proves it is possible to develop proactive companies "rooted in solidarity, with a strong social dimension," and excellent businesses. In 50 years only one has failed (Lewis & Conaty, 2012, pp. 250-251). As part of the social contract regional government, municipalities, business and trade unions and co-op sector organized a think tank in 1976 to strengthen the regional economy and continue the role as a diagnostic research and development agency. This think tank included higher learning and technical colleges as part of the formalizing and development education process.

## Conclusion: Creating a sense of hope

Colleague Catherine Odora Hoppers from University of South Africa at Pretoria states:

“the democratic imagination, that emphasises the plurality of cultures, enhancing the relation between knowledge and democracy by linking it to livelihood and citizenship, develops out of Ubuntu/pimatisiwin, a theory of caring and humility; but it will be global in the sense that it seeks to identify theories of “caring” and humility that exists variously in the global setting so that the violence of exclusion that permeates is brought and discussed in public” (Personal email communication, 2018). She argues that the current model of governance is unnuanced about suffering and the exclusion it creates but a governance system based on traditional knowledge links memory and innovation. I first met Dr. Odora Hoppers while attending a conference in northwest South Africa, where I was taken by her ability to frame a rational world order within principles of humanity, caring, and deep critical thought. Later I interviewed her for my Ph.D. research and we became life-long colleagues. She advises that we need to search for a new language beyond current economics and the governance that ensues from it by introducing a sense of locality, context, and relevance. She sees Indigenous Knowledge Systems and their contributions to higher learning and society in general as key to regaining our humanity, caring, and priorities. For the past twelve years Odora Hoppers has served as the lead of the South African Research Chair Initiative in Pretoria where she has worked throughout the globe in many related roles advising and directing initiatives in Indigenous knowledge systems. Important international linkages with scholars like Odora Hoppers can help push our related work forward.

Finally, Pattison and Findlay (2010) in *Self Determination in Action: The Entrepreneurship of the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Co-operative* (NSTAC) describe the values and benefits which serve as a strong cultural expression that is both economic and co-operative in nature. They state that there is synchronicity between traditional Aboriginal and co-operative values which can be mutually reinforcing:

In the current context there are opportunities as well as obligations to educate everyone, including the public and policy makers, on the meanings of trapping — to link with, learn from, and leverage trapping teachings in social enterprises for knowledgeable economies and sustainable communities. In the global context of resource depletion, environmental degradation, growing inequality, and concerns about food security, healthy living, and sustainability, the key roles of the NSTAC in the traditional as well as the social economy need to be broadly communicated. Trapping should be understood not as a residual cultural practice, a curious legacy of the past, but as an important player representing the values of both the on-going and revitalizing traditional economy and the social economy. The social economy is associated with alternative development models and concerned with people before profits; with community economic development and multiple bottom lines; with autonomous management, inclusion, and democratic participation; and with sustainable environments and livelihoods. (p.36)

Dr. Findlay and her research assistant have lent support through their work with the NSTA which serves as a solidaritous challenge to others.



Clearly there are human rights reasons for using the co-operative model to try to improve the quality of life for not only Indigenous peoples in Canada but for the quality of life of all peoples. Research shows that when life improvements take place for the most marginalized, then all of society benefits. Co-operatives were originally organized around values whose roots are foundational to Indigenous culture. Clearly at this stage of human development that is both wanton and excessive, these values now more than ever need to be revisited and revitalized.

Priscilla Settee is a member of Cumberland House Swampy Cree First Nations and a Professor of Indigenous Studies where she teaches an Indigenous Food Sovereignty course as well as other courses. She is the author of two books *Pimatisiwin, Global Indigenous Knowledge Systems* (2013) that looks at global Indigenous Knowledge Systems and *The Strength of Women, Ahkameyimohk* (2011) that examines the role of Indigenous women's stories in establishing truth, reconciliation and social change. Dr. Settee's new co-edited book on Indigenous Food Sovereignty will be published in 2020. Her other research includes gang exiting Indigenous youth and Indigenous social economies

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# Reclaiming Community: Active Citizenship through an Inner City Village Co-operative

Judith Harris, Gerrie Prymak, and Virginia Hunter

## Abstract

*The Village Co-operative, an enterprise in the early stages of development in Winnipeg's North End, focuses on creating a safe neighbourhood for families and suggests a return to the traditional village. Indigenous grandmothers who take on many tasks related to caring for both their children and their children's children, by pooling resources, can support each other and, by meeting the need for safety, benefit the general public. Caregivers, who accompanied their children to North End Stay and Play in Winnipeg's inner city over the past 10 years, have benefited from capacity building where once they experienced exclusion and isolation. Against the backdrop of historic exploitation of the original peoples of the Hudson Bay Basin, we present an opportunity for reclaiming community functions. Mori (2014) tracks the evolution of the co-operative model and describes new Community Co-operatives which, we argue, are closer in their values and principles to many traditional Indigenous communities. We examine how that model might fit with and provide guidance to our new inner-city Village Co-operative.*

## Introduction

The Village Co-operative was the idea of women, grandmothers, and other caregivers who had for many years been attending, with the children in their care, the weekly North End Stay and Play (NESP) program in Winnipeg's inner city, an urban designation "not officially recognized by the City of Winnipeg. The Core Area Initiative, a tri-partite government agreement to combat decline in the inner core, first defined the Inner-City area in the 1980s. The official Downtown area is included in the Inner City" (City of Winnipeg, 2001). Two generations of North End Winnipeg children have benefited from this program and a philosophy that is important for the child's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development.

North End Stay and Play has clear benefits for children in the low-income Pritchard/McGregor neighbourhood but it also contributes to the well-being of caregivers who may be isolated and lack opportunities for socializing. NESP is an opportunity for bonding with the children. Many might take this relationship for

granted but it is an emotional connection that has been lost for grandparents and parents who experienced residential school and the sixties scoop<sup>i</sup>.

Selkirk Avenue, a roadway that runs east-west through the North End, was at one time a busy local shopping area with a butcher, bakery, music store, furniture store and restaurants. Long-time residents remember the feeling of excitement when they went shopping “downtown” on Selkirk Avenue. Today, many Winnipeggers consider the surrounding streets to be unsafe for anyone past sundown.

Ten years ago, the NESP caregivers and children who had moved between church basements and recreational centres, hefting boxes of toys and supplies, had a question for Gerrie Prymak, the primary school educator who initiated the program: “why can we not have a space of our own?”<sup>ii</sup> That was the beginning of a campaign to raise funds for a childcare centre for babies to 5 year old. The Little Stars PLAYhouse will employ the stay and play model with spaces for caregivers, a focus on language, conversational reading, and enriched care giving (see Kiansky [2017] on the Abecedarian early childhood approach).

A number of the caregivers linked to the campaign had formed strong working relationships. Some of the most vocal were grandmothers who found themselves caring for their children and their children’s children—providing back-up for parents dealing with the fallout of provincial policy that fragmented families. They themselves had lived with the challenge of raising kids in fractured communities and had experienced the social and economic exclusion that exists in a racialized city (MacDonald, 2015).<sup>iii</sup> They had a vision—to create safer neighbourhoods for their children and safer streets for families in general. Their concern was that they could not rely on municipal and provincial governments to protect their children.

Our paper describes the emergence of a village-based co-operative in Winnipeg’s North End and anchors the social justice rationale for reclaiming the public good, safety, in Rothney’s (1975) history of the depletion of the resources of the Hudson Bay communities. We discuss Mori’s (2014) claim that co-operatives provide a means of reclaiming capital wealth, not just for a limited membership but also in the interest of the wider community. In envisioning the development of the Village Co-op we examine a list of seven “basic elements” that Mori uses to distinguish the Community Co-operative concept and consider whether the values and principles that frame the Village Co-op converge with this evolving model.

## The Vision of a Village Co-op

Our co-op development group met weekly during 2018-19 on Fridays at the Merchants Corner, a refurbished education centre on Selkirk Avenue in Winnipeg’s North End<sup>iv</sup>. Our one and a half-hour sessions had to fit between school lunch break and child pickup time for caregivers. The aim was to define the basics of a co-operative and to reach agreement on values, principles, and services. Guided by Elaine Issac (a Sagkeeng First Nation Social Worker), Elder Ruth Norton (personal communication, March 13, 2018), and Metis grandmothers Vivian Spence and Joyce Ferland, we identified ways that the co-op could build on the experience of the traditional village. The group also employed Reconnaissance Management Consulting to outline co-op development steps and communicated on Skype with Michele Bianchi (personal communication, June 15, 2018), a doctoral student researching Italian Community Co-operatives. From these discussions, we arrived at the following framework.

The Village Co-op membership would be comprised of caregivers who have been bringing children to NESP and residents of

the Pritchard/McGregor neighbourhoods. We would form a co-op enterprise of safety, which will wrap around the children. Co-op members would provide services to others. Consumer members would be recruited through co-op pop-up information tables at crossroads in the neighbourhoods. The NESP would transition into a new space at the Little Stars PLAYhouse, a provincially regulated childcare centre.

The values of the co-op are based on the sacred teachings as explained by Elaine Isaac, an Anicinabe Ojibway member of the group.

- Physical care: making sure children are feeling okay and are safe.
- Cognitive: ensuring the child learns about what they are interested in and exposing them to different topics and information.
- Spiritual: determining who is each child in this large universe and recognizing that they are imaginative and creative and that there are things they see which adults can't.
- Personhood: ensuring children have a good sense of who they are, including basics such as hair and eye colour, identity, culture, family, siblings.
- Being relational: so that the children know who they belong with and what parental, friendship, and community-based relations they have.
- Love: showing and demonstrating love in a visible, emotional, physical, and spiritual way and showing love without conditions.

Our co-op services will create a safe community: child minding, housekeeping, household fix-up, transportation, doing laundry, providing cheap essentials, and establishing a community kitchen.

Members will be producers, consumers, and supporters (from Pritchard/McGregor neighbourhoods). Our members need services and will also be workers providing services. Services may be provided in return for cash (our rate of pay is \$15/hour) or can be bartered. A time-banking system will be used to keep track of exchanges.

Developers of the Village Co-op have provided the following interpretation of the seven ICA Principles:

1st: All Are Welcome—no pressure and no discrimination

2nd: One Member One Vote

3rd: No Free Rides – all members contribute equitably

4th: Self-control – there are only members and no “parents” looking over your shoulder

5th: Share, Learn, Grow—we will train and educate our members

6th: Co-ops Help Co-ops—the TEAM approach means “Together Everyone Achieves More”

7th: Concern for Community—we build strong communities toward sustainable development

There is a social justice rationale that underlies our interest in a co-operative model. Much was taken from the people of the Hudson Bay Basin and for the women who have attended NESP there is an understanding that the safety of the children must be reclaimed by the community (see McKnight and Block [2010] on functions of the competent community<sup>9</sup>).



## Depletion of the Hudson Bay Basin Communities <sup>vi</sup>

The Red River Settlement in the Hudson Bay Basin (also known as Rupert's Land) gave birth to the City of Winnipeg (Artibise, 1975). The settlement grew westward from the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, the traditional meeting place of the Cree, Ojibwa, and Saulteaux peoples. The English and French encountered Indigenous peoples in the 1600s and trading relationships intensified over the following two centuries. Description of the people and their ways of life are often biased, reflecting the underlying worldviews and commercial motives of those who made the journey over ocean and land to the heart of the continent. The Hudson Bay Company (HBC) was established in 1670 by Royal Charter and by that time the people had been trading furs and fish for decades. By 1870, the herds of buffalo had been greatly diminished and the economy and the way of life of the original communities were changed forever. As an economic historian, Rothney (1975) presented a more informed and less ethnocentric depiction of life during the fur trade than is found in many early accounts. Based on the archives and records of the HBC, he describes the gradual shift in the balance of power between settlers and the original peoples from 1670 to 1870.

Guided by a values code, that was taught from an early age, the peoples of the Hudson Bay Basin lived a life of sufficiency. Rothney (1975) explains how this proved to be of great financial benefit to the European merchants. Rothney calculates that 20 million pounds sterling was extracted from the economy and sent to England during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In current dollar purchasing power, this amounts to roughly Can \$3.7 billion.

Historians often fail to acknowledge the value of women's work and in the Hudson Bay Basin, the value of Indigenous women's work. Rothney quotes Matonabee,

Chipewyan chief guide, "there is no such thing as travelling any considerable distance or for any length of time without their [women's] assistance." Communal concentration and organization of women in the prairies "was important in maintaining a comparatively high social standing for women (Morgan & Engels as cited in Rothney [1975], p. 34).

Our point is that Indigenous women have the right to reclaim the surplus that was historically expropriated from the work of their ancestors and that institutions continue to rely on in the case of the informal, un-remunerated work that today props up public and private institutions. We call attention to a causal connection between historical theft of surplus production from the Indigenous community in the Hudson Bay Basin and the current lack of wealth in Winnipeg's inner-city Indigenous neighbourhoods and in Northern Indigenous communities. A further consequence of this historical impoverishment has been the apprehension of children due to financial conditions in the home: "Manitoba has the highest per capita rate of children in care in Canada and seizes one newborn a day." Of the children in care, 90% are Indigenous. Recently, Bill 223 to amend the Child and Family Services Act was introduced in the Manitoba Legislature by Bernadette Smith "ensuring that children cannot be seized solely because of poverty" (Malone, 2018).

The grandmothers and mothers who raise children in Winnipeg's Indigenous inner-city neighbourhoods are dealing with the long-term impacts of the colonial appropriation of wealth, residential schools, and the sixties scoop and to challenges that arise from persistent racialized policies and practices. A study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative makes the claim that "it takes all day to be poor" (CCPA, 2009). The families and caregivers who bring their children to NESP can verify this conclusion. They value the "stay and play" model where caregivers stay and ensure their children's safety.



There are mixed evaluations in the literature and local and historical perspectives on the value and cultural fit between Indigenous communities and co-op development. We propose that a village co-op modelled after the Community Co-op described by Mori (2014) and Bianchi (2017) fits with the vision and values of the NESP caregivers. A brief review of perspectives on co-ops and women's roles follows.

## Grounding in the Co-op and Community-Development Literature

Aside from the Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson study (2002), "there exists no comprehensive inventory of Indigenous social enterprise in Canada" (Sengupta et al 2015, p.109). Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson (2002, pp. 23-28) sampled 133 Aboriginal Co-operatives in Canada, listing the following characteristics common to both Aboriginal Economic Development and Co-operatives:

- driven by the needs of the membership, inclusive and respectful
- based on democratic principles and reaching consensus through thinking and talking together
- deepen relationships over time through members' involvement
- address historic dependency on government
- based on member and community needs, a democratic structure and deepening of member participation
- stress autonomy from politics and private enterprise, making room for people to develop their own solutions and respect collectivity
- have deep attachment to communities and show concern for culture
- develop gradually, recognizing the complexities of personal and community relationships

Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson reference an earlier report in which Anderson observed communitarian rather than individualistic values among Indigenous families:

"Overall, individual First Nations and Inuit and Metis communities exhibit a predominately collective approach to economic development that is closely tied to each group's traditional lands, its identity as a nation and its desire to be self-governing" (Anderson as cited in Hammond Ketilson & MacPherson, p.19). Self-sufficiency, socio-economic circumstances, and the protection of culture are key motivators of development. These authors suggest that there is a convergence of principles and values and that a co-op model is a good fit in Indigenous communities.

Research by Sengupta et al. (2015) presents three cases and explains how non-Indigenous colonizing governments employed co-ops to enhance government control. Early farming co-ops excluded Indigenous peoples or imposed top-down models (pp. 105, 108). The early co-ops focused on gap filling and had damaging effects in following a deficit model. The case studies point to a holistic intertwining of social, environmental, economic, and cultural goals observing that Indigenous social enterprises are guided by a quadruple bottom line<sup>vii</sup>.

Elder Art Solomon speaking in Parry Sound, Ontario, sent a message that highlighted the importance of women in the community. **"It is time for women to pick up their medicine and help heal a troubled world,"** according to Solomon, who believes that **"women are the medicine"** (Hoffman & Solomon, 2009). Art urged women to pick up their power for healing and it is this spirit that infuses the work of the women who have nurtured community development in Winnipeg's North End. NESP and the

Little Stars PLAYhouse are driven by that motivation and now the women of our North End neighbourhoods are the energy behind the Village Co-operative.

In their study, Sengupta et al. (2015) note that it's women who most often undertake the leadership of social enterprise and are addressing "wicked problems" that "by their very nature, cannot be resolved by a single individual or by a singular solution that fits all contexts" (Buchanan as cited in Sengupta et al, p. 110). The Village Co-operative will address the wicked problems that are at the root of their concern for the safety of the children who live in the co-op catchment area. These include racism, poverty, poor housing stock, low levels of education, and drug and alcohol addictions (McCracken, 2017). The centrality of "sustainable self-determination" (Comtassel as cited in Sengupta et al, p. 109) is another dimension of Indigenous entrepreneurship. It is a "process of changing the power dynamics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people" (p. 113).

Cindy Blackstock (2009) makes a similar argument for a collective approach to child welfare and child safety. "Consciousness must move from thinking about child welfare to children's welfare. Structural risk must be considered within the collective context" (p. 43)<sup>viii</sup>.

Larry Morrisette (former Executive Director of Ogijiita Pimatiswin Kinamatawin, a group for at-risk youth) was one of the founders of the Bear Clan<sup>ix</sup>, originally established as a co-operative. Larry saw a convergence between co-ops and traditional Indigenous values and developed a medicine wheel representation that relates the seven sacred gifts to the ICA principles. We build on an earlier discussion of co-op principles and values. What follows, incorporates teachings from Larry Morrisette and Leroy Little Bear (2000).

## Comparing Co-op and Traditional Indigenous Values and Principles

Larry Morrisette discussed with one of the authors the co-op principles and values and whether they might significantly align with traditional Indigenous teachings (personal communication, May, 6, 2014). Larry passed in 2016 leaving a legacy of work on behalf of inner-city residents and justice-involved men and women. Figure 1 presents the results of early discussions comparing the values.

### Voluntary and Open Membership.

Co-ops are open to all who contribute their services and accept responsibilities of membership. Indigenous social organization includes the whole community and ensures that women, children, and elders are cared for. This principle goes beyond current generations and includes everything that is animate, having spirit and knowledge and "all are my relations". (Little Bear, 2000, p.78). Morrisette placed women, children, men, and family in the centre of the medicine wheel.

### Democratic Member Control

All members are accountable and have equal voting rights. Everyone has a say and no one is entitled. Harris participated in a workshop presented by Jim Dumont (J. Dumont, personal communication, June 6, 1990) in Bear Island, Ontario, in which he provided a seven-pointed star to depict the original clan system. He explained the role of leadership.

It is important to recognize here that the role of leadership is not one that is authoritarian or dictative but is a role that is given because of the qualities of one's capabilities as spokesperson for the whole of the clan, of one's ability to communicate effectively with all of the clan and one's dedication to the whole of the clan as determined by

the clan membership (Dumont as cited in Jewell, 2012, p. 16). According to Morrissette the clan system ensures accountability and democracy as everyone contributes their gifts and the community of equals is empowered.

### Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably and consider resources to be indivisible and as common property. Sharing resources creates good will and harmony and strengthens the community.

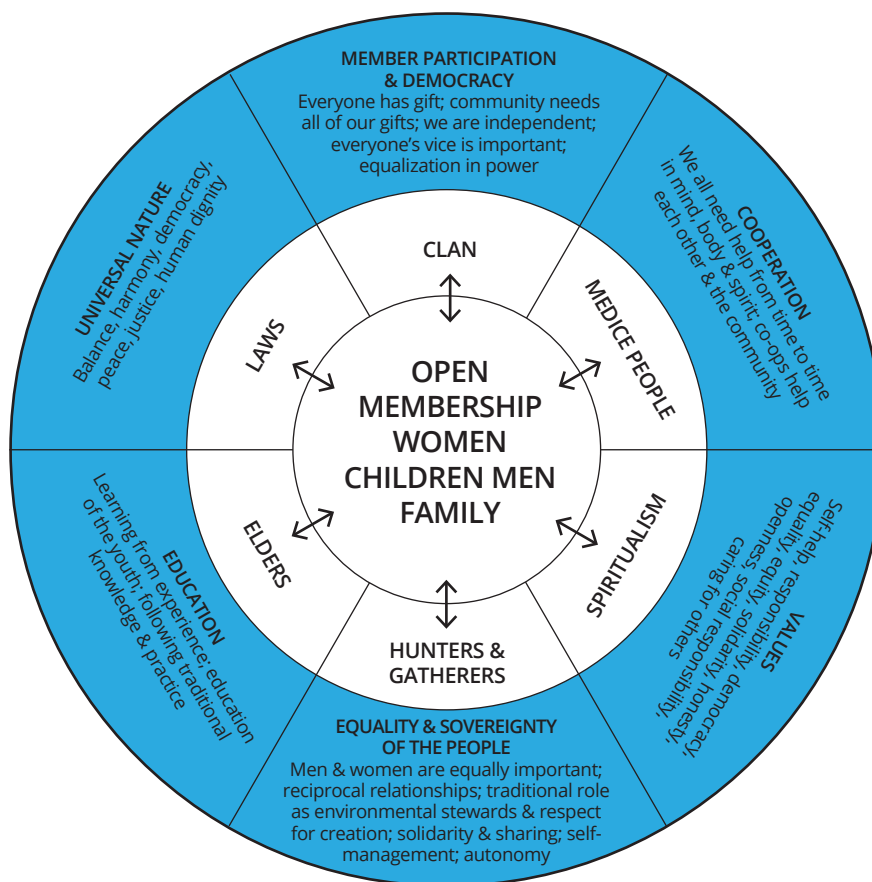
Hunters and gatherers operate on the principle of reciprocity and consider everyone as equally important. Venison is shared with single women and elders who do not hunt, acknowledging their participation in the community. For Morrissette, equality is a fundamental principle of the village with everyone contributing according to their assets.

### Autonomy and Independence

Co-ops are self-help organizations controlled by members. Little Bear speaks of the connection between respect and autonomy. When we respect each other's gifts, the community benefits by achieving greater independence. Independence, respect, and sharing are often identified as values common to many Indigenous Peoples. Based on trust and honesty, Morrissette explains that the community comes together in solidarity, as did ancestral hunters and gatherers.

### Education, Training and Information

Father Moses Coady, who was part of the extension education movement in Canada, urged people in the Maritimes to "Listen, Study Discuss and Act" (1939, p. 8). Education on structural causes of unemployment and on the principles of the co-operative alternative are fundamental to the co-op



Source: Harris, McLeod Rogers, & Morrissette, 2014

Figure 1. Medicine Wheel and Co-op Principles Co-operation among Co-operatives

movement. Training of youth is common to both the co-op movement and Indigenous renewal. Morrisette links education to the knowledge of the elders and the story-telling tradition.

Cooperatives working together strengthen the movement. When human kind and all our relations join together in federations, “they find in association the best arms for the struggle for life” (Kropotkin, 1902, p. 242) Similarly, Little Bear emphasizes the value of wholeness of the forest as well as the trees and points to the pattern of Indigenous social organization based on confederacies of tribes and nations (p. 79).

**The International Co-operative Alliance (2019) lists the values that were identified by the founders of the co-operative movement: self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, solidarity,** honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. The spirit and values of co-operation are shared and provide solidarity among co-operatives. Morrisette (personal communication, May 6, 2014) and Little Bear (2000, p.79-80) emphasize Indigenous spirituality and philosophy that finds practical application in the values of strength/bravery, generosity/sharing, truth/honesty, love/kindness, respect, wisdom and humility. There is a strong correlation between the two sets of values binding people, nations, and organizations together.

### Concern for Community

In discussing the relationship between co-op membership and the community, Ian MacPherson(2012)describesco-operatives as a model of corporate responsibility. But beyond supporting the neighbourhood hockey team, the principle, concern for community recognizes the responsibility of the co-operative to consider the social consequences of what they do (p. 17). In 1995, the wellbeing of society became an explicit aim and essential to the co-

operative identity. Capturing the positive benefits of engaging a wider community, he claims that it is “time to consider openly, the diversity of possibilities that members in their community can provide” (p. 16). In fact, “co-operatives are meeting places for people with many identities” (p. 13).

The notion of sustainability of the community, the environmental and the social dimensions, is central to the co-op movement. In his depiction of the converging principles of co-ops and Indigenous cultures, Morrisette illustrates how the laws of nature give rise to a universal set of practices that over time have provided guidance to all nations and all communities.

Our case study of the Village Co-op may provide an informative example and might also benefit from the experience of more established Community Co-operatives such as those described by Mori (2014) and by Bianchi (2017). This model takes MacPherson’s (2012) analysis of relations between co-operatives and communities to a new level where the co-operative is the community. Mori (2014) provides clarity on the shift from special interest co-ops to those that benefit wider society while Bianchi studies Community Co-ops and social capital. Mori distinguishes old Community Co-ops from new and provides us with a set of basic elements to check against the features of the Village Co-op in Winnipeg.

### Basic Elements of the Community Co-operative

The model of a Community Co-operative has the potential to restructure institutions for the provision of goods and services and to engage active citizen participation. In the case of the Village Co-op, grandmothers who are currently filling substantial gaps in meeting the needs of their children and their children’s children

aim to provide greater security for their families and will pool resources toward a more sustainable and stable way of life.

According to Mori (2014) a number of leading economists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century favoured cooperation as a first step toward distributive justice (p. 332). “The co-operative enterprise was not only a means of furthering the interests of their members but also of social progress since it was instrumental to the overcoming of an unequal wealth distribution” (p. 333).

In Italy, the failure of existing public services motivated citizens to become more involved in providing for their families and communities. Mori (2014) has observed, “[m]any new community co-operatives have arisen in the wake of market liberalization, especially in Europe” (p. 346). Globally, we have witnessed a trend towards privatisation of public services to increase efficiency and address financial constraints. Yet “[o]ver the years this model has shown serious economic flaws” (Mori, p. 346). In North America we have seen proposals for P3s (public-private partnerships) and Social Impact Bonds<sup>x</sup>. Mori points to the negative redistributive impact of and growing opposition to privatization. He concludes, “[c]ustomer ownership is a serious alternative to public and for-profit provision to be considered on par with them not ruled out *a priori*” (p. 347).

Early forms of co-operatives are centred on restricted social or professional groups. Community Co-operatives, on the other hand, are centred on citizenship and citizen participation, serving the wider community. They provide goods and services that are of general interest to residents of a specific community or territory. Most forms of co-operatives might claim to generate some positive externalities but community co-operatives are unique, being explicit that their aim is to generate public benefits beyond their membership.

The trend toward more intentional concern for wider society has been demonstrated by the rapid growth in Italy of the broader category of “social co-operatives” which meet social needs and focus on work integration for disadvantaged groups. Social co-ops have been the fastest growing form of co-op since Italy instituted Law no. 381/91. Community co-ops that take the public service mission a step further, have been operating in Italy, England, and Wales where “residents in small neighbourhoods” are “engaged in running crèches, village stores, laundrettes, community centres” (Mori, 2014, p. 338). New Community Co-operatives are found in a number of different sectors “ranging from personal services —like welfare, healthcare and education —to neighbourhood services (laundrettes and the like) and the classic services already provided by older co-ops (p. 344)<sup>xi</sup>.

The original historical electric co-operatives are an example that serves to distinguish Community Co-operatives from traditional co-operatives; their infrastructure, the electric grid, defines the territory and a community good that is accessed by all residents. Mori compares worker and producer co-ops to emerging Community Co-ops to distinguish this new co-op option (Mori, pp. 240-244). The nature of the Community Co-op is captured in Mori’s seven basic elements, providing a framework that we will employ in order to better define the nature of the Village Co-op.

## The Village Co-op and the Community Co-op Concept

When the Little Stars PLAYhouse becomes operational in 2020, childcare services will be provided by a licensed childcare centre. Caregivers will still be involved in the PLAYhouse, encouraging healthy attachment. The Little Stars PLAYhouse



will have significant, positive impacts on the families of the North End communities. The families involved in NESP see a broader need for safety and want to form a co-op of care. At their weekly meetings, the eight women have been working together to learn more about co-ops and to create a business plan for a co-operative contributing to a neighbourhood that surrounds the children with safety.

The community-based enterprise will engage workers, consumers, and the many supporters who have contributed their time and talents to NESP and the new Little Stars PLAYhouse. The social co-operative model has been a sustainable structure for enterprise in Quebec and British Columbia and has a history of success in Italy's Emilia Romana region (Girard, 2002; Restakis, 2010). We believe that new, emerging examples of Community Co-operatives may provide guidance for the Village Co-operative.

When asked about co-operation in traditional communities, elders and others point out that the traditional village in fact was itself a co-operative (Harris & Hunter, 2010; L. Morrissette, personal communication, May 6, 2012; Sengupta, 2015). The following are quotations from women in the inner city about the traditional village and how these co-operative values might continue to guide the Village Co-op (V. Hunter, G. DeChateauvert, V. Vint, personal communication, August 14, 2015).

- Everyone had his/her work to do. I remember an artist who carved animals and left them around the community.
- Together, communities survived in the harshest of conditions.
- We used to have a feeling of responsibility for each other. Maybe we need to educate each other again about community.
- People talk about informal practices of give and take. When people hunt they bring back venison for the elderly and for single women.

The women describe a strong sense of reciprocity and an asset-based approach that gave resilience to the community. Instead of individual entitlement, a sense of responsibility for those who had less and the practice of reciprocity helped to weave the social fabric and contribute to thickening of social capital (Bianchi, 2017). We now examine the basic elements of the Community Co-operative and consider how they fit the aims and context of the planned Village Co-op. This exercise will help to guide the development of and build on the opportunities that can lead to the success of the Village Co-op.

### **Community has a well-defined identity— It is physical and inhabits a given territory**

The North End in Winnipeg is a well-defined, physical territory comprised of 18 neighbourhoods. It is separated from the rest of the city by the CPR rail yards and has the highest concentration of Indigenous residents in the City. The North End has a reputation for poverty and for unemployment and, as one thing inevitably follows another, for crime. The numbers tell one story of the separation between north and south of the tracks: the numbers of households with incomes below \$20,000, the number of single parent households, and the percentage of the population with no certificates, diplomas, or degrees (see Table 1). For a rough estimate, take the City averages and double them; you will have a description of the four neighbourhoods that are the target for the Village Co-op and the new Little Stars PLAYhouse: Burrows Central; Dufferin, St. Johns, and William Whyte. Residents of these neighbourhoods share an identity and a common struggle.

The challenges and concerns in the North End are territory-based but so is a positive sense of community. "Meet me at the Bell Tower," a regular Friday gathering on Selkirk Avenue is a recent and dynamic expression of a strong undercurrent of resident support within the North

	Burrows Central	Dufferin	St John's	William Whyte	Average	Winnipeg
% of pop. Age 0-4 (number)	6.6 (355)	10.0 (220)	8.8 (740)	9.6 (605)	8.75	5.6
% of household incomes under \$20,000	18.9	30.4	25.5	28.5	25.8	13.7
Single parent households as % of total	28.6	47.7	40.0	47.5	41.0	19.1
% of pop. with no certificate, diploma or degree	37.8	51.0	33.2	49.0	42.8	19.8
Indigenous population as % of total	18.9	50.4	32.9	40.0	35.6	11.0

Table 1. Profiles of Village Co-op Neighbourhoods  
Based on data from City of Winnipeg, Census, 2001

End neighbourhoods. Aboriginal Youth Opportunities is behind this movement that Michael Champagne describes as an “intergenerational neighbourhood classroom” (Champagne as cited in Cuciz, 2017). People know who is who, who is dependable, who are the cooks, who are the musicians and artists, and who are activists who get things done.

The Village Co-op families live near the cross-streets of Pritchard and McGregor where NESP and the new Little Stars PLAYhouse will find a permanent home. Caregivers who have accessed NESP have developed relationships and capacities through the programing, taking on responsibilities over the past 10 years. Families have continued to bring the children in their care to the program over a decade:

*All the caregivers at North End Stay and Play are becoming an attachment village supporting our children under 5. High quality books need to be at the centre of the attachment village we are building around the children. We need our children to be attached to secure and safe people so they learn who is safe and who is not. We listen carefully and closely. Our*

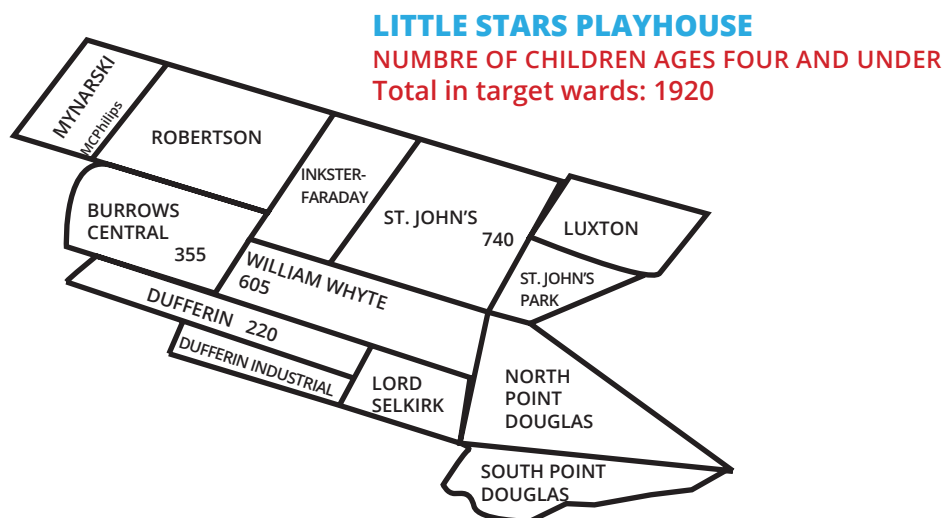
*North End Winnipeg neighbourhood may be poor and sometimes very dangerous—sexual predators luring 9-year old girls and boys—but we have strengths and work together so our children learn who is safe and who is not. We want our children to learn who really loves them and who will be their safety net (G. Prymak, personal communication, November 23, 2018).*

**Need arises in connection with the residents because they live in the territory.**

Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations in Winnipeg’s inner city survey residents every five years and each time “safety” is identified as a priority (Coalition of Manitoba NRCs, n.d.). Bernice Cyr references Marion Gracey, a respected elder who believed that creating a safe community was more important than targeting poverty for marginalized Indigenous people in the city (B. Cyr, personal communication, February 19, 2014; Grandmothers Raising Grandchildren, 2009).

One story that shows the need for community-based services. A young





Based on City of Winnipeg Census, 2001  
**Figure 2. Area served by NESP, the Little Stars PLAYhouse, and the Village Co-op**

mother must take a child to an emergency clinic and has no child-minding supports. She leaves her three children alone in the care of her twelve-year-old who becomes frightened and runs to a Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata facility<sup>xii</sup>. Staff of Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre have no option but to call Child and Family Services. All four children are taken into care. Families in and around Pritchard/McGregor want to identify local solutions to such situations and are asking for a list of safe child minders in the neighbourhood. This is just one of the co-op services. Care and safety requires provision for a number of basic needs. The vision for this new co-operative is that of a village in which face-to-face relationships are the basis for care, creating a safe neighbourhood for raising children and a supportive community for elders and others who are vulnerable. While people benefit from the work of public sector service providers, there are many functions that are more effectively and efficiently provided at the neighbourhood level (McKnight & Block, 2010). The claim that “it takes a village” to raise a child is taken seriously by our collective.

The on-going work of grandmothers in neighbourhoods where people live in poverty was recognized in a 2009 report

*Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*. This report highlights the value of the invisible work that is shouldered by grandparents: “In BC there are more children being raised by grandparents than there are children in foster care (according to the 2006 B.C. Census)” (p. 15).

Currently many kookums (grandmothers) play a central role in raising grandchildren and supporting adult children. They have hopes for the next generation. Their days are filled: dropping off and picking up children from school, babysitting for working parents, driving relatives and friends to doctors and to appointments, caring for family members at home, cooking meals on a meagre budget, and so on.

**The community good (or service) is of general, universal interest to the whole community within its reference territory.**

Safety is important in the four inner-city neighbourhoods around the Little Stars PLAYhouse; it’s a community good that is valued and prioritized. Beyond those borders, others in the North End value safety because it is related to the universal need for freedom—both positive “freedom to” and negative “freedom from”. To determine the safety of any

living environment, consider whether residents are able to meet—at the level of day-to-day survival—their most basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, education, healthcare, self-esteem, and freedom. Safety and security are lacking for a majority of people globally as for many in Winnipeg's inner city. We live in a society of economic uncertainty where many eat one small meal a day, sleep rough, go without winter clothing, live with little understanding of the world around them, suffer from preventable disease, live alone and lonely, and battle daily to maintain small freedoms.

Safety is identified as a human right in the Preamble to the UN Declaration of Human Rights:

*Disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people.*

MacDonald (2015) documented what the families in Winnipeg's inner city (20 neighbourhoods north of the Assiniboine River) have known for many years. Safety is a concern for all residents of Winnipeg but freedom from fear and want is an everyday issue for many Indigenous citizens regardless of whether they live in or beyond Winnipeg's inner city. Racism affects basic needs such as access to housing, to employment and to a living wage, to health services, to police services, to fair treatment by the courts, to education, and to child protection and early childhood development. MacDonald cites a telling statistic, evidence of violence and health risks: "An Indigenous Manitoban born tomorrow is expected to live eight fewer years than a white boy born in the province" (MacDonald, 2015). Bartley Kives, a journalist for *the Winnipeg Free Press*,

comments on the stark divide in the city affecting young Indigenous women: "white privilege in Winnipeg isn't about getting the best jobs or promotions. 'It means not being worried your daughter is going to be raped and killed because of who she is'" (Kives as cited in MacDonald, 2015).

Our Village Co-op, following the model of the Italian Community Cooperatives will embrace the whole community because it will provide for universal needs such as safety.

**The co-op serves a socially diversified community, has open membership, and non-discriminatory access to the community good.**

The Village Co-op is located in the William Whyte neighbourhood (pop 6,280), an area that is 40% Indigenous (City of Winnipeg, Census 2001). There are more than 18 languages spoken in this area. NESP has always been Indigenous and non-Indigenous and the Village Co-op membership will follow suit.

Community Co-ops present an opportunity to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* (2015). In defining reconciliation, Cindy Blackstock (Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada) emphasizes respect and love and entreats us to "fall in love with our kids" (Government of Canada, Jan. 18, 2018). The grandmothers and caregivers of the Village Co-op—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—are responding to Cindy's plea, in their commitment to create a safe place for all of the children of the North End.

Sengupta (2015), looking through the "lens of class, nation and race," concludes that:

*Even though the cooperative movement in Canada was firmly rooted in colonial practices, contemporary cooperatives have been re-appropriated by Indigenous communities for*

*developing unique forms of cooperatives that are involved in the resurgence of the cultural and economic independence of Indigenous people. (pp. 123-124)*

Our Village Co-op's development is an opportunity to build on traditional Indigenous co-operative values, foster neighbourhood inclusiveness, and take action on reconciling differences.

**Residents have actual or potential access to the community good or service.**

If there are residents who are not using the Community Co-op, it cannot be because one is denied access. Safety, the basic need met by the Village Co-op, is one that is characterized as non-excludable and non-rivalrous—all residents can participate. In fact, the more people involved in the co-operative, the greater the benefit to the community. The Village Co-op is actively recruiting from all of the four inner-city neighbourhoods that are served by NESP. Our promotional strategy has included hosting co-op tours (Neechi Commons and Mother Earth Recycling) and staging "Co-op Pop-up" events.

In Winnipeg, roughly 20% of the population has no certificate, diploma, or degree according to Statistics Canada, while in these four neighbourhoods close to 43% of residents are without formal education above the primary level (see Table 1). Residents are unlikely to have had much exposure to the co-op model—Winnipeggers are generally not aware of the co-op model in our experience. There is clearly a need for co-op education at the secondary high school level to support an environment that is conducive to co-ops. Education and provincial supports for co-op development would increase acceptance and access to co-op enterprise. Workshops offered by the Manitoba Co-op Association and support offered by co-op developers

such as Reconnaissance Management are increasing access by providing training on co-op development. That the Community Co-op model seems to more closely reflect the traditional village model in Indigenous and other cultures augurs well for citizen participations in the Village Co-op.

**The organizational mode is active citizenship.**

In defining the Community Co-operative, Mori (2014) emphasizes, "The discriminating feature here is citizenship as a qualifying requirement for membership and this implies a substantial change in the cooperative's scope: the aim is no longer to meet the needs of a restricted social group, like e.g. a group of workers, but citizen needs" (pp. 340-341). Welch (2016) writes, "indigenous women overwhelmingly dominate grassroots movements...and seemingly run nearly every social service organization, band department, policy shop and community group in the indigenous world." Their work is the active citizenship that can drive a Community Co-operative.

The grandmothers and mothers initiating the Village Co-op are involved in their community. They bring the children in their care to NSEP because they oversee the program and appreciate the focus on developing child language skills, preparing children for school and empowering both child and caregiver.

**Community and citizen-owned and like many new community institutions focuses on production and sharing of costs and on securing economic sustainability.**

The Village Co-op was initiated by and will be owned by the community. The advantage of the Village Co-op for the families of Pritchard/McGregor is that it will formalize and compensate the work of caregivers who have represented and activated the values they learned from the traditional village. They currently

enjoy no financial return for their dedication. Their primary “payment” is in the progress they see in the children, the families and the community toward sustainable livelihoods and greater personal and neighbourhood security.

Mori (2014) compares Community Co-operatives to the ancient institutions that managed the commons while noting key differences:

*However, they considerably differ from the old ones. These were primarily concerned with regulating the use of natural resources and their main task was the definition and enforcement of use rights. Modern services are instead typically produced and the focus of these new community institutions is no longer on use but on production and the sharing of its costs. (p. 243).*

The Honorable Ted Hughes (2013) who led the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry makes the case for both the new Little Stars PLAYhouse and for the Village Co-op.

*It is clear to me that what is needed is a coherent and collaborative approach to supporting families and preventing maltreatment of children before they ever come into contact with child welfare. This means intervening in children's lives early, for best results.*

Hughes emphasizes that we need to:

*Promote social cohesion in neighbourhoods, combat poverty by enhancing families' capacity to be self-sustaining, increase the visibility of young children in their community, and neutralize the conditions that make families vulnerable and put children at risk of abuse or neglect. (Hughes, 2013, p. 397).*

In the case of the Village Co-operative, the members of the group aim to reclaim the service of community safety. The large population of preschool children means parents have a significant peer group with which to build support networks. In recent decades, the North End has been home to an awakening of urban Indigenous culture bringing important knowledge and practices for childcare. For example, it is common Indigenous practice for extended families or community members to care for children when the parents cannot. The tradition is that multiple caregivers are entrusted to build a healthy attachment to a child. Children are sacred. It is the caregivers' responsibility to care for the children meeting their spiritual, emotional, physical, and cognitive needs. The Village Co-op was initiated by and will be owned by this community of caregivers.

## Conclusions: the Village Co-operative is a Community Co-operative

The Safe City Scoping Study (City of Winnipeg, 2013) calls on both the government and civil society to guarantee a “safe city”. NESP over the past 10 years has provided a location in North End neighbourhoods where caregivers and children focus on literacy and relationship building. When the Little Stars PLAYhouse is operational, NESP and the Village Co-op will share space and expand their circle of care in the Pritchard/McGregor area.

The Village Co-op will be shaped by traditional practices and values and is exploring the opportunities presented by the Community Co-operative experience. In June 2018 our group participated in a Skyped discussion with Michele Bianchi who is examining the ties between Community Co-operatives and the social contexts in which they operate, specifically the role of social capital. He points to rapid socio-economic changes that require “a new idea of citizenship, where people are more involved in the promotion of general good” (Bianchi, personal communication, 2018; Bianchi, 2017).

The Village Co-op builds on capacities developed at NESP and engages the Pritchard/McGregor neighbourhoods in creating an organization that will surround the children with safety and care. It will maintain the relationships and group activity after NESP moves to the Little Stars PLAYhouse childcare building.

Indigenous peoples of the Hudson Bay Basin have experienced exploitation since European settlers gained control over the fur trade. We highlight the current struggle of grandmothers (Grandparents raising Grandchildren, 2009) who care for their own children and their children’s children, always on call to babysit and transport children and family members. “It takes all day” in the case of Indigenous grandmothers with visions of education and employment for the next generation. There is clear evidence that North End families are realizing the grandmothers’ (and grandfathers’) vision for the future, yet safety issues still present barriers to the families of inner-city Winnipeg neighbourhoods. The caregivers at NESP appreciate the Abecedarian model of childcare where they are participants in the programming. The federal and provincial governments are investing in the “stay and play” model by supporting the Little Stars PLAYhouse capital and operational costs.

The co-operative model offers an opportunity for the families to pool resources, to reclaim the role of the community, and to compensate caregivers for the services they provide to ensure safety in their community. The Village Co-op will undertake to supply services for payment or for barter.

The co-op enterprise itself and the skills needed to support it present a challenge, as would any enterprise. The Italian experience, given that the public is much more comfortable with co-ops and supported through legislation and tax concessions, is a contrast to the Manitoba context. But the Community Co-op approach is familiar to those with a memory of the traditional community and the co-op values tend to converge with Indigenous teachings.

The Village Co-op encompasses the basic elements of the Community Co-op described by Mori (2014). The community is well defined and has a clear idea that safety is a priority. The Village Co-op will be open to the diversified population of the Pritchard/McGregor area and to the many who actively participate as citizens of the four neighbourhoods. The community good/service has been identified as a need to be met by the co-op and will be owned by the families. Sharing and reciprocity are community practices that provide a foundation for thick social capital in the North End. Our expectation is that given the basic elements of a Community Co-op, and with concerted effort and commitment, our Village Co-op may find some success in the coming years and the families may reclaim the village functions that have been depleted in the past and continue to challenge existing public and private institutions.



Dr. Judith Harris is an Associate Professor in Urban and Inner-City Studies at the University of Winnipeg and has degrees in Economics and Urban and Regional Planning. Focusing on participatory community and regional development, she has travelled and worked in northern Manitoba, Holman Island, Indonesia (CIDA), Tanzania and Ethiopia (FINIDA). Judith has expertise in community engagement and community planning and has initiated a number of local development projects including the Spence Skills Bank, Frontstep Research Workers' Co-op and the Village Co-op in Winnipeg's north end. Judith brought the Walls to Bridges (W2B) program to the University of Winnipeg, offering university courses to campus-enrolled students and incarcerated students who study behind the prison walls.

Gerrie Prymak's educational work has been rooted in Winnipeg, where she was born and has lived for most of her life. She graduated in 1974 from the University of Manitoba with a B.H.Ec. in Nutrition and she received her teaching degree in 1978. Until her retirement, Gerrie taught for 28 years in the elementary grades at the River East Transcona School Division. Her philosophy has centred on the inquiry approach to learning, reading quality books to children, encouraging good citizenship, and doing what is meaningful and purposeful for children.

Virginia Hunter has a life experience which provides her with important insights into the lived experience of urban Winnipeg. She was a worker-member of FrontStep Research Workers' Co-op, where she developed the Sacred Stories approach. Virginia Hunter worked as an editor for Pemmican Publications. She is an accomplished interviewer and her column "Inner-City Voices", co-edited with Mike Maunder, was widely read in the Winnipeg Free Press. Virginia has been a founding member of many Indigenous organizations in Winnipeg.

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## Notes

- i The “sixties scoop” refers to the practice of scooping up First Nations children and placing them in the care of white foster parents in Canada and in the USA. This took place between 1950 and 1980.
- ii Gerrie Prymak is a board member of Woman Healing for Change Inc (WHFC), the charitable organization behind NESP. WHFC, incorporated in 1993, is a cross-cultural, diverse, volunteer-based, expanding circle of Manitoba women. At the centre of all activities is the belief in the empowerment of women and creating change through healing, education, and the development of new skills.
- iii Nancy MacDonald’s article in MacLean’s presents national stories of government failures—names that are etched in our memory— Brian Sinclair, Tina Fontaine, Phoenix Sinclair. Brian died at an emergency hospital waiting for care; Tina reported missing by Child and Family Services was found in the Red River; Phoenix died in the care of her parents at age 5 despite having 13 workers on her case.
- iv Members of our collective are Heather Bourget, Joyce Ferland, Judith Harris, Elaine Isaac, Julieen Keeley, Virginia Hunter, Edda Livingston, Shawna Peloquin, Jackie Parish, Gerrie Prymak, Vivian Spence, Val Vint, and Lauren Webster.
- v McKnight and Block (2010, pp. 18-27) argue that the functions of the abundant community should be reclaimed: safety and security, health, the well-being of children, the environment and land, an enterprising economy, food, and care (nursing etc.).
- vi This historical account of colonial fur trading is drawn from the research conducted by Russell Rothney for his MA in Economics, University of Manitoba, 1975.
- vii Bernice Cyr in Harris & Cyr (2014) has interpreted the fourth bottom line as “safety” highlighting a degree of vulnerability that is experienced by people who face intersecting forms of oppression.
- viii Blackstock identifies common principles between the theory of everything in physics (Steven Hawking, n.d.) <http://www.hawking.org.uk/godel-and-the-end-of-physics.html> and First Nations Ontology: “Both respect historical patterns; both ensure an appropriate balance between dimensions and realities to achieve optimal outcomes; both envision creation as circular; and both discern a reality based on references to the natural world” (p. 31).
- ix The Bear Clan, a traditional volunteer safety group in Winnipeg, was created in 1992 and was re-established in 2015 ([www.bearclanpatrolinc.com](http://www.bearclanpatrolinc.com)).
- x See Loxley & Puzyreva (2015) for a critique of Social Impact Bonds.
- xi Mori refers to community electricity cooperatives in existence as early as the 19th century (Conorzio Elettrico Industriale di Stencico, est. 1905) and some of the new electricity co-ops (Baywind Energy Co-operative Ltd. in Cumbria, UK)
- xii Ma Mawi Chi Itata, established in 1984, is a family resource centre that delivers community-based programs and services. Staff aim to create solutions that build local capacity for self-care.

# Co-operatives and Reconciliation After Violent Conflicts: Lessons from Post-Genocide Rwanda

Ezechiel Sentama

## Abstract

*In general, the literature on co-operatives as agents of socio-economic change has burgeoned. However, the potential for co-operatives to serve as agents of societal change specifically within ethnic or identity-based conflicts has received little attention. This paper aims to address this gap by considering the case of Rwanda after the 1994 Genocide by qualitatively discussing how a co-operative form of organization has the potential to reconcile the divides between Genocide survivors and Genocide perpetrators, as well as their respective family members. Findings indicate that the co-operative, by virtue of its values and the principles that bind members, is a connector that offers a favourable space for positive contact between conflicting parties. The co-operative work takes place within a re-humanizing environment of reciprocal empathetic communication among members, which restores their relationships. In particular, the co-operative provides a space for private and intimate relationships among members without the intervention of a third party. The paper concludes that to promote reconciliation between those experiencing division, public strategies and involvement of a mediator can be supplemented by mechanisms that facilitate private co-operative contact between parties to the conflict.*

## Introduction

In the aftermath of violent conflicts, notably those based on ethnic identities, how to reconcile antagonistic individuals or groups constitutes a difficult challenge. Following violence, conflicting parties separate from one another as fear, suspicion, mistrust, hatred and misperception set in. Relationships that had been friendly, open, and trusting are no longer so as parties move further and further apart (Dukalskis, Taylor & Darby, 2018; Joshi & Wallensteen, 2018; Lederach, 1997; Maddison, 2015; Sentama, 2009; Staub, 2006; Staub, Pearlman, & Gubin, & Hagengimana, 2005). In search of ways to reconcile divisions, solutions have been suggested involving contact between those experiencing broken relationships. Hewstone and Hughes (2015), Kiyala (2015), Lederach (1997), and Schulz (2008) are among the many scholars who emphasized the potential role of social arenas for such contact, which are commonly understood as particular



places or autonomous spaces, in a specific context, that limit the options of 'self' and 'other' and deconstruct the mechanisms of exclusion. Thus, social arenas are represented as places where people can get into contact interdependently and peacefully.

The study on 'Reconciliation and Quality Peace' by Dukalskis, et al. (2018) also suggests that to reconcile societies after periods of violence, it is important to include processes involving a space for democratic participation, a relational approach that calls for attention to material and symbolic concerns, as well as the focus on psychosocial perspective involving intergroup contact dynamics. It is from this perspective that the role of co-operatives has been recommended (Birchall, 2003a, 2003b; Brounéus, 2003; Brounéus & Guthrey, 2018; ILO, 2015; MacPherson, 2015).

For example, MacPherson (2015) argues that co-operatives have contributed to the development of more peaceful communities, while indicating that in many situations, there is a need to better understand how a concern for social cohesion and for the building of a more peaceful world is fundamental to the co-operative quest. In 2009, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) also passed a resolution that reasserted its commitment to the promotion of peace by focusing on the role that cooperatives play in creating links between divided people and supporting social inclusion (ICA, 2009).

The universally employed definition of a co-operative is provided by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA, 1995), representing co-operatives worldwide. According to the ICA, a cooperative 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" (ICA, 1995). Co-operatives operate under basic

and ethical values, as well as updatable principles, which constitute a basis for differentiating a co-operative from other forms of organizations or enterprises.

Ten co-operative values ICA espouses are: self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. Seven co-operative principles, as revised in 1995, intended to articulate guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice are: voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; member economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community (ICA, 1995, 2005).

Despite the breadth of literature on co-operatives as agents of societal change, most notably in terms of economic development (ILO & ICA, 2015; Nadeau & Nadeau, 2016; Williams, 2007), their role in rebuilding societies destroyed and traumatized by violent conflicts is still a rather empirically under-researched issue. Empirical studies that investigate the particular role that cooperatives play in reconciliation and whether this can be attributed to the 'cooperative difference' are thus needed, so as to highlight that cooperatives are an effective reconciliatory tool, a gap which is the focus of this paper.

This paper focuses on reconciliation process in post-Genocide Rwanda, between survivors and perpetrators, as well as their respective family members. It is worth emphasizing that despite its increasingly common usage in a range of diverse contexts, there is lack of common understanding about the definition of reconciliation. The literature on reconciliation touches upon its character by making a distinction between (1) the *intrapersonal reconciliation* concerned with individual trauma healing; (2) the *interpersonal reconciliation* concerned with the reparation of relationships

between victims and perpetrators or their loved ones; and (3) *political reconciliation* concerned with the development of a political culture that is respectful of the human rights of all people (Stovel, 2006).

This paper is restricted to the *interpersonal relationships* dimension of reconciliation involving the transformation or change at the interpersonal relationships level. Although this dimension varies according to individual emphasis, certain concepts are strongly identified with it, including healing, apology, forgiveness, confession, and remorse.

The process involves (1) honest acknowledgment of the harm/injury each party has inflicted on the other, (2) sincere regrets and remorse for the injury done, (3) readiness to apologize for one's role in inflicting the injury, (4) readiness of the conflicting parties to 'let go' of the anger and bitterness caused by the conflict and the injury, (5) commitment by the offender not to repeat the injury, (6) sincere effort to redress past grievances that caused the conflict and compensate the damage caused to the extent possible, and (7) entering into a new mutually enriching relationship (Borer, 2006, p.8). Given the contextual nature of reconciliation, the researcher's positionality as a Rwandan with strong knowledge of the country's context, language, and culture constitutes an advantage towards a fuller understanding of the emotional perspectives of the participants.

The paper draws from the relational lived experiences of Genocide survivors and Genocide perpetrators, as well as their respective family members, who are members of the same co-operative. A goal of this paper is to offer a nuanced perspective on what happens to the relationships between those experiencing post-Genocide division as a result of their involvement in the same co-operative. In particular, the paper explores the following questions:

(1) What was the nature of relationships between post-Genocide sides prior to their involvement in the same co-operative?

(2) What has been the nature of their relationships after their membership of the same co-operative?

In general, the paper explores the following question: In what ways does the co-operative form of organization impact the relationships of divided people after a violent conflict between them?

It should be noted that the Genocide perpetrated in Rwanda between April and July in 1994 targeted mainly the *Tutsi* people and was perpetrated mainly by the *Hutu* government and extremists.<sup>ii</sup> In addition to the extermination of *Tutsi*, other Rwandans, including the *Hutu*, and even foreigners were massacred either for being in the political opposition or for refusing to participate in the Genocide. Straus (2004) estimates that at least 500,000 civilians were killed between April 6 and July 19, 1994 (p. 88).

## Theoretical Framework: 'Cooperative' Contact Theory

Contact theory stands as one of socio-psychology's strategies for transforming interpersonal relations (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003; Hewstone & Brown, 1986; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005, 2006; Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). Such theorizing about the place of contact in transforming interpersonal relations can be traced back to the nineteenth century, whereby theorists began to speculate about the effects of contact between conflicting parties long before there was a research base to guide them (Sentama, 2009).

However, it was after the Second World War that such research first stressed that intergroup contact would maximally

reduce prejudice, provided that a number of conditions were fulfilled (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). It was the work of Gordon Willard Allport (1954) on the effect of contact in his book entitled *The Nature of Prejudice*, which became the most influential. This seminal piece specified the critical situational conditions for interpersonal/intergroup contact to reduce prejudice in the context of the majority-minority groups (Negro-White) in the United States of America.

Allport (1954) emphasizes that prejudice is lessened under these conditions: (1) equal status between the groups within the contact situation; (2) in the pursuit of common goals, interests and humanity; (3) cooperative activity (instead of competition) and thus a superordinate role relation involved instead of a subordinate one; and (4) the contact situation is sanctioned by institutional supports.

The investigation or measurement of contact may look at its nature, notably at its quantity or in its quality (Niens, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2003). The quantitative aspect of contact, on the one hand, implies the frequency, duration, number of persons involved, and variety (Allport, 1954). On the other hand, quality of contact is concerned with how positively or negatively individuals experience their contact with out-group members and how meaningful this contact is to them (Evaldsson, 2007). This paper focuses on the latter level of measurement, which refers to the subjective quality of contact, to explore how those experiencing post-Genocide division in Rwanda experienced co-operative contact and how meaningful this contact has been in their relationships. The paper is thus much more tied to the 'co-operative' condition of contact theory.

As emphasized by Gilmartin (1987), there is a principle in the social sciences which states that whenever the co-operation of two people is enlisted toward the completion of some task that is of equivalent

importance to both (and which cannot be successfully completed except through the close co-operation of the two people), those people will come to like each other, they will become friends, and their values, attitudes, as well as their goals, will tend to become increasingly similar. This is known as the principle of the superordinate goal, describing co-operation to solve mutual problems (Gilmartin, 1987; Love, 1995).

The general argument further asserts that co-operation between conflicting groups necessitated by a situation embodying a superordinate goal will tend, if achieved, to reduce intergroup conflicts, even if the underlying cause of the frustration remains unchanged (Hunger & Stern, 1976). In other words, successful attainment of a common goal, or common goals, by participants in the contact situation must be an interdependent effort without intergroup competition (Allport, 1954; Hewstone, 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

In Rwandan culture, the survival of people has generally necessitated that they join their efforts. This was the Rwandan traditional philosophy of solidarity (Umuganda or Ubudehe) reflecting a number of collective activities performed at the village level. People jointly put up houses, cleared bush, and tilled land for growing crops. Efforts were also combined to defend themselves against common enemies, and neighbours generally came to each other's aid both in times of happiness and times of sadness.

Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that such a spirit of mutual assistance was deeply rooted in the conventions and customs of Rwandan society. It is in this spirit that co-operatives have been created in Rwanda since the 1950s, yet did not survive the 1994 Genocide. However, the national policy for the promotion of co-operatives since 2006 considers these strategic groups as tools for combating social exclusion and promoting peace and reconciliation (MINICOM, 2006). An exploration of their potential

role in post-Genocide reconciliation in the Rwandan context thus falls within the scope of this paper.

## Methodology

This paper draws from a phenomenological case study design, as it aimed to explore the lived experiences and opinions of those experiencing post-Genocide division in Rwanda with regard to the relational outcomes resulting from their contact in the same co-operative. Genocide perpetrators included individuals who had been charged with genocide and released from prisons, notably during the community-driven justice programs (i.e. the *gacaca* proceedings).

This qualitative study was carried out in July and August of 2017. It involved individual and group interviews with only those experiencing post-Genocide division (survivors and perpetrators, as well as their respective family members). Interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda language and were audiotaped. The recorded material was transcribed and translated into English by the researcher. During interviews, the researcher spent one month conducting research with each co-operative by taking part in regular interactions with co-operative members.

Being a native of Rwanda was a research advantage, as the interpretation of subtle cultural non-verbal clues and language required a nuanced knowledge of the country's context. It was thus easy to understand the emotional perspectives of the participants in a way that might have been more difficult for a foreigner to pick up on. The study focused on two co-operatives operating in Huye district, a rural area of the southern province of Rwanda: *Peace basket cooperative*, which focuses on weaving baskets and *Abahuzamugambi*<sup>iii</sup> coffee cooperative, which focuses on coffee production.

The two co-operatives were selected because (a) they respectively belong to the agriculture and handicraft, which are major sectors of livelihood in Rwanda, generally, and in Huye district, particularly; (b) they have been created from below by their members (i.e. initiated without external involvement or financial aid); and (c) they regroup individuals from both sides of conflict, male and female, who also lived side by side before the Genocide.

Additionally, the two co-operatives were selected because they were created soon after the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, but also before the post-Genocide new government embarked on the road to reconciliation in March 1999 with the creation of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC). However, participants also included co-operative members who joined these co-operatives after the creation of the NURC and the instauration of other reconciliatory mechanisms. Bearing in mind that these other reconciliatory mechanisms may also have impacted co-operative members' relations, this study was restricted to the particular impact of the two co-operatives selected.

## Background on the Two Co-operatives

*Abahuzamugambi coffee cooperative* (located in Kizi cell of Maraba sector in Huye district) occupies the southwest part of the district, while *Peace basket cooperative* (located in Buhimba cell of Rusatira sector in Huye district) covers the northeast. The structure of both co-operatives includes the members' General Assembly, which is the supreme body, while the Executive constitutes each co-operative's president and vice-president, advisors, and accountants, all of whom are democratically elected and are co-operative members. Any external financial and technical intervention is strictly prohibited.

*Peace basket cooperative* was created by a widowed Genocide survivor in July 1997, three years after the 1994 Genocide. Its mission was and continues to be to improve the socio-economic living conditions of its members who included survivors and perpetrators, as well as their respective family members. The reason behind the denomination of this co-operative as being about 'peace' was simply that its founders wanted to underscore the co-operative's inclusivity, given the heated division, which labeled Tutsi as victims and Hutu as killers. All 38 co-operative members participated in the study.

*Abahuzamugambi* coffee cooperative was created in January 1999 by coffee farmers with the aim of improving the socio-economic living conditions of its membership, consisting of survivors and presumed perpetrators, as well as their respective family members. Of the 2,326 members total in *Abahuzamugambi coffee cooperative*, 150 were invited by means of both purposive sampling and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling was utilized in order to ensure a representative sample of participants by gender and from both sides of the Genocide, whereas convenience sampling was used to increase the total number of participants who were available and willing to participate in the study.

Ultimately, the total number of study participants from both cooperatives was 188 individuals, representing 62 from the Genocide survivor side and 126 from the side of Genocide perpetrator. The determination of the sample size was not made beforehand, but rather was based on those who were available and had expressed consent to participate.

The study was restricted to the measurement of contact 'quality' (i.e. how positive or negative individuals found their experiences of contact with out-group members, and how meaningful that contact was to them) rather than contact

'quantity' (i.e. asking how frequently a person meets with members of the other community, the duration, and the number of persons involved). Thus, it should be noted that the difference in the total number of participants between the two co-operatives does not make any significant difference, given the qualitative focus of the study.

## Empirical Findings

The presentation of empirical findings begins with a short discussion about the nature of relationships between post-Genocide parties prior to their membership in the same co-operative, as well as the reason(s) that prompted them to form, or join, the co-operative in question. The purpose of discussing the pre-contact context of relationships is to know whether their relations were already restored prior to membership in the same co-operative versus how these relations were affected after becoming members of the same co-operative.

Although aforementioned initiatives by other reconciliatory programs, such as those initiated by either non-governmental organizations or the NURC, may have had an impact on post-Genocide parties' relations, participants were invited to account only for the particular impact of their co-operative. In this way, participant narratives in this study of their experiences were restricted to their relations after the Genocide and before their involvement in any reconciliatory program, including the co-operatives.

### Pre-Contact: Relations Between Those Experiencing Post-Genocide Divides Prior to Participation in the Cooperatives

*After the Genocide! We were animals! We were hyenas! For example, me-- because my whole family has been exterminated--I was a hyena. I mean,*



*I was wicked. I am telling you! I could even eat you<sup>iv</sup>! Eh! I was left alone, you understand! Things were really bad when the Genocide ended! We survivors, we hated anybody who is a Hutu. Nevertheless, we also feared them, as we thought they will kill us again. Fear was everywhere. (Survivor from Abahuzamugambi coffee cooperative)*

*Yes, what she [widow/survivor] is telling you is true . . . After the Genocide, oh! oh! oh! When you were about to meet with a Genocide survivor, you felt your hair is gone, and you could quickly flee and find where you can hide from him or her! Even he or she could flee! Yes, he or she could also flee and hide from you! [all laughing] . . . Even people who had done nothing were afraid because, for example, the Genocide was committed in the name of Hutu. So, all Hutu and their relatives were afraid of survivors. We thought they will [take] revenge or simply kill us because of our relatives [being] Hutu! This [revenge] indeed happened in many ways, and we were afraid and angry, too. (Family member of former perpetrators from Abahuzamugambi coffee cooperative)*

The two statements above summarize participants' general accounts about the nature of relationships between post-Genocide sides before their membership in one of the two co-operatives, or their participation in other reconciliation-focused mechanisms, whereby fear, hatred, mistrust, and the absence of communication between them was the norm.

Indeed, participant accounts describe how the post-Genocide period was characterized by a complete division between parties prior to their membership of the same co-operative. Contact and communication between them was absent, and whenever they were unavoidable,

mutual scorning and insults generally followed. Comments such as "you killers!" and/or "you imprisoned my family!" were common, as indicated by participants in a group interview with *Peace basket cooperative* members.

This state of affairs between post-Genocide sides was perceived as "one of the regrettable relational situations consequent to the Genocide," as described by one of the participants during a group interview with *Abahuzamugambi coffee cooperative* members. It is therefore important to know the reasons that prompted individuals from both sides of the conflict to become members of the same co-operative.

#### **Reasons Behind Post-Genocide Parties' Membership in the Same Co-operative**

*When I initiated the idea of this co-operative, of course, I wanted to re-launch the work of weaving baskets and earn income as it was before, but I also wanted to break with my loneliness given that I couldn't survive while living alone! Loneliness is dangerous! . . . It is actually this [Peace] basket co-operative which makes us live; it feeds us, one can now buy clothes. You see, after the Genocide, I was left alone. It was difficult to survive because I had gone mad! Nevertheless, this co-operative is giving me money; I buy everything I need. Now my living conditions are improved. I am not poor! You see me now! (Survivor from Peace basket cooperative)*

*I decided to become a member of this co-operative after I realized that I am lagging behind in development. I then realized that I cannot achieve anything on my own, and I thought to myself: let me join others in that co-operative, so that I can also be umuhuzamugambi<sup>v</sup>; and I thought that maybe this will be helpful to me*

*with regard to any problem I might be having . . . The other reason that prompted me to join this co-operative--oh! Simply being together with others around an activity, which allows you to meet, you feel you . . . it cannot be described; you break with loneliness! (Perpetrator from Abahuzamugambi coffee cooperative)*

As the above statements demonstrate, none of the parties became a member of the co-operative with a desire to either meet or reconcile with individuals from the other side of the conflict. Instead, their shared harsh living conditions of poverty and loneliness after the Genocide forced them to come together. Parties' membership in these co-operatives was thus in no way motivated by the desire to address their relational problems; they were instead pushed by the impetus to satisfy their individual material and social needs.

### **The Relational Impacts of Co-operatives on Post-Genocide Parties' Relationships**

*Those who thought that killers could not sit and eat together with us [survivors] can now witness that. There is no division in this co-operative. Rather it reunited us . . . Truly, after the Genocide, we were animals; we were beasts. I hated Hutus and especially those who exterminated my family. I am telling you the truth that after we met with people who killed ours, we [Genocide survivors] became very happy, because before [membership in the co-operative], my heart was heavy, full of hatred. But I am telling you that every day, my heart gets soothed little by little, as I feel a fog of hopelessness and hatred is getting away from me. Yes, it is true. I hated them, but the more you get close and get together and converse, the more hatred cools down, as they also*

*repent and express sorrow. This is the minimum. (Survivor from Peace basket cooperative)*

As revealed by the above statement, participant accounts of their experiences generally indicate that the two co-operatives in this study became places for positive relationships between members from both sides of the conflict.

As illustrated in the two participant testimonies below, positive interactions and communication between those experiencing division were established in a way that some members often referred to as 'soothing' or 'healing' interactions:

*My son! This is actually what I told you last time; this co-operative is very important for all of us--the killers and us. Ask them, they will tell you! Our relationships! Yoyoyoyo! It restored everything! If it brought us together, we survivors and those killers, and we now live convivially, what do you want me to say to you, son? It made it! This [Peace] basket cooperative enabled me to get into contact with other people and converse with them. They all now come to our home, and we chat, we sing, we laugh, and when there is food, we share; and this really soothes my heart. This is what I was actually lacking in my traumatised state]. Those conversations soothe my mind and my heart. (Survivor from Peace basket cooperative)*

*For example, me, I got traumatized after the Genocide, but I am telling you that everything started to cool down when I joined this co-operative. Whenever I could come and stay together with co-operative members, talking with them, discussing with each other with jokes, my burden of trauma and that of being an orphan [was] soothed. You see, former killers are in the co-operative, but they had*

*come to me and repented. When they saw me, most of them were in tears again, and I became overwhelmed with pity; then I told them that there is no problem; conversations started and they repented again. Telling you all my experience could take many hours. What I am trying to telling you is that because of this co-operative, getting into contact with perpetrators and interacting every day with them, eating food together and laughing with them together changed our relations positively. We no longer hate each other. (Survivor from Peace basket cooperative)*

*Me! I was in prison, I sinned, [committed Genocide] and I acknowledged that. I repented because my heart was not stable, given what I had done. People forgave me, and I was thus released from prison. When I came into this co-operative, I found all the people there, Genocide survivors, those who are not Genocide survivors, all are in the co-operative! I was surprised. After some days, I realized that they are rather united when we converse. The simple fact that we work together for the same goal is very important . . . We work together without any problem. Can you see that coffee plantation behind my house? When we are in that coffee plantation, people are all mixed and we work in the coffee together. There is no ruse here; we get money and we are happy together; we even celebrate that! Yes, in our convivial parties. (Former Perpetrator from Abahuzamugambi coffee cooperative)*

The above testimonies summarize how the relationship between those experiencing post-Genocide division were restored as a result of their membership of the same co-operative.

Interviews revealed that even though conflicting parties' relationships prior to

participation in either co-operative studied were negative, their membership in the same co-operatives with neighbours from both sides of the conflict has had positive relational outcomes: divisions, mutual anger, suspicion, and hatred, as well the breakdown of communication between them, have all been overcome.

The factors behind this impact have also been emphasized in the above testimonies. They refer to the importance of positive contact, the fact of working together productively, as well as parties' engagement in constructive communication and convivial moments, which is what the next subsection discusses.

### **Factors Behind the Impact of Co-operatives on Intergroup Divisions**

*When divided people meet in an encounter like here, not only do they support each other, but they also get time and space to talk and discuss what divided them, such that one can understand where truth is . . . The secret? It is the conversations . . . Here [in Peace basket cooperative], one gets advice and breaks with hatred. This co-operative is actually a school; it educated us and we are friends and love each other. We have the same objective; we all want to fight against poverty. Therefore, we have to help each other. We are all well together; we have been educated. Actually, when a person gets together with others, the problem or the worry he had on his heart [is] soothed. (Survivor from Peace basket cooperative)*

*This is actually one of the best things this co-operative did: it brought us together again. We survivors were in loneliness, alone--as ours were killed; but now, at least, we have people to talk to. They became our friends, and they help us. The simple fact of getting together and working together in this*

*cooperative, conversing, winking at each other, and laughing . . . Actually, the co-operative brought us together without any discrimination; it includes men, women, widows, [Genocide] survivors, killers; all of us are in the co-operative. When divided people meet in an encounter like here; not only do they support each other, but they also get time and space to talk and discuss what divided them, such that one can understand where truth is. (Survivor from Abahuzamugambi coffee cooperative)*

*When I was released from prison and got into contact with co-operative members, I found [it to be] something that addresses every one's psychological problems, and in his heart, whenever he feels tired in his mind and heart, he gets into contact with others. And the good conversations, which are over there, soothe his heavy burden of problems. In the co-operative, we are equal. This is a thing for which I am thankful in this co-operative. This happened to me. I am now happy. (Former perpetrator from Abahuzamugambi cooperative)*

The above testimonies illustrate how members of the studied co-operatives describe them as encounters without discrimination, as schools, and as a family. More broadly, participants consider a co-operative as a space that enables post-Genocide sides to engage in positive contact and coordinated work for mutual interests, and particularly to take part in constructive interactions and communication.

Not only were Genocide parties able to discuss how to increase production, but they were also able to discuss relational problems related to the consequences of Genocide among them. From this perspective, co-operative members from both sides of the Genocide emphasized

that bringing them together to work interdependently was indeed one of the most important and leading factors that connected them positively.

Positive contact and communication in the co-operatives also led to reciprocal disclosures among members who had previously considered themselves conflicting parties, as they engaged in mutual truth-telling about what happened during and after the Genocide. The wrongs were acknowledged and apologized for, and forgiveness was requested and eventually granted. Thus, such mutual sharing was another factor behind the impact of the co-operatives on their members' relationships with one another.

## Discussion of Findings

This study offers further evidence based on participant experiences in post-Genocide Rwanda that the relationships between survivors and perpetrators, as well as their respective family members, were negative prior to their membership in either the *Peace basket cooperative* or the *Abahuzamugambi coffee cooperative*. Yet, as mentioned in the findings section, conflicting parties' decisions to become members of these two co-operatives were not originally based on the desire to reconcile, but rather by the pressure to meet their basic living requirements, and found that their only option available was to join together in the same co-operative.

This is all the more remarkable because the Genocide had destroyed the social and economic fabric of those from both sides of the conflict, whereby each side was left traumatized and vulnerable. In the aftermath of the Genocide, individuals from both sides of the conflict, who had previously been accustomed to working together or supporting each other, were thus in extreme poverty and loneliness, in more or less similar ways. It was



hardly possible to find a family of either survivors or perpetrators who could sustain themselves and survive easily through individual effort alone. The only viable alternative for individuals from each side of the conflict was to combine efforts, notably through co-operatives, which indeed became embedded once more in Rwanda's culture of survival (MINALOC, 2002).

Despite their initial motivations, this study's findings indicate that participants' membership in the same co-operative with those from the other side of the conflict subsequently impacted their relationships positively, as it enabled them, little by little, to overcome their previously negative and hostile interaction patterns. Successful co-operative work day-to-day and consequently, successful achievement of the mission of each co-operative (i.e. increasing the socioeconomic standard of living for all members) was found to be at the core of the positive impact of co-operatives on conflicting parties' relationships.

These findings were applicable for members from both of the co-operatives investigated. The simple fact of being able to interview conflicting parties while seated together in mixed company with members from both sides of the conflict was itself evidence of the positive impact of the co-operatives. Not only did divisions themselves come to a halt, but also previous de-humanizing attitudes and feelings of fear, suspicion, anger and hatred, were gradually diminished, while re-humanizing attitudes and behaviours (such as positive communication, mutual trust/support, empathy and conviviality) were fostered.

These trends represent a process of relationship transformation, from de-humanization to re-humanization. Since both sides of the Genocide faced a common problem (poverty and loneliness), it was found that their joint

efforts in striving to solve it successfully became an opportunity for them to meet, interact, and work together constructively in a way that enabled them not only to overcome their former hostile, alienating attitudes, but also to develop more genuine willingness to re-connect with people they thought they would never relate to again.

What is especially unique about the relational dynamic in the co-operatives is that unlike the usual narrative in Rwanda about the survivors versus perpetrators dichotomy, respectively associated with the ethnic labels of *Tutsi* and *Hutu*, whereby *Hutu* survivors are not included (Buckley-Zistel, 2006), the co-operatives make the distinction that anyone targeted by genocidal acts is considered a Genocide survivor, irrespective of his or her previous 'ethnic' labeling as either *Hutu* or *Tutsi*. This is a result of the co-operative philosophy, which does not discriminate, most notably because of the co-operative principle of 'open membership', which exemplifies equity and equality.

Furthermore, unlike simple collaboration, which can be ultimately either destructive and/or constructive in practice, co-operation by contrast (in an organization like a formal co-operative) is only constructive, by virtue of its inherent values and principles. For example, the co-operatives' encouragement and nurturing of positive contact, constructive interactions, communication, and co-operative interdependence constitute the building blocks that contributed to positive transformation of relationships between those experiencing post-Genocide division.

As demonstrated by this study, co-operatives have tremendous potential to be inclusive organizations and reconciliation meeting points, or connectors, where members join efforts and share the outcomes of these efforts. Therefore, based on participants' shared



experiences, it follows that creating safe and healthy environments where conflict parties meet and evolve over time seems imperative for reconciliation. The relational importance of co-operation superseding competition between those experiencing post-Genocide division was particularly emphasized in this study. In accordance with contact theory, if two groups share a common or 'superordinate' goal that requires a joint effort for its attainment by both groups, then the relations between their members are likely to be better, and their attitudes towards each other more positive, on average, than if the two groups were competing for a goal (e.g., power, victory) that only one can have (Forbes, 1997; Ryan, 1995).

While we are generally accustomed to the one-way process whereby all turn on the oppressor after a conflict, and he or she is seen as the only party required to reveal information about his or her wrongdoings, this study suggests that reconciliation becomes much more promising when there is the possibility for a mutual (reciprocal) willingness from both sides of conflict to reveal sensitive information about themselves to one another.

Specifically, because of the comfort level the co-operatives fostered between members, Genocide perpetrators gradually revealed their wrong actions and attitudes while expressing remorse, bearing responsibility for them, and asking for forgiveness. Their family members also disclosed their regrettable acts, as well as their own negative attitudes (after the Genocide) toward survivors and/or their family members. In turn, Genocide survivors were also able to acknowledge and reveal their vengeful actions and negative attitudes or feelings toward former Genocide perpetrators and/or their family members. It is through this spirit of reciprocity and reconciliatory behaviour (the two-way formula), notably during daily conversations while working together, that mutual hostility was

disclosed by individuals from both sides of the Genocide, rather than concentrating narrowly on shifting responsibility to each other and so remaining divided.

Thus, co-operatives stand as human value-based and principle-driven connectors, which makes them a haven for constructive ends. Co-operatives as connectors refers to their role as spaces or mechanisms that transform their relationships positively by bringing divided parties together through co-operative interactions. In this regard, connectors can be contrasted with 'dividers' (attitudes and behaviours, as well as structures that keep conflicting parties apart). These findings further validate the contact hypothesis, particularly the principle that intergroup relations can be improved if there is a goal that has a compelling appeal for members of each group involved, but that neither group can achieve without participation of the other (Brewer, 1996; Ryan, 1995).

## Conclusion

This study aimed to provide empirical evidence for the reconciliation impacts of a co-operative form of organization after violent conflicts. The investigation focused on the post-1994 Genocide in Rwanda and explored the relational outcomes resulting from contact between those experiencing post-Genocide division, both survivors and former perpetrators, as well as their respective family members engaged in two co-operatives, Abahuzamugambi coffee and Peace basket.

The study concludes that co-operatives constitute an effective connector across divided groups and spaces, as they provide a favourable opportunity in which negative, dehumanizing attitudes are overcome, while positive, re-humanizing attitudes are fostered: from fear to boldness, from suspicion to trust, from division to union, from anger and resentment to calm, from hatred to attraction and conviviality.

While we are also accustomed to the role of public and third party-based mechanisms, such as tribunals, truth commissions and problem-solving workshops, this study has shown that co-operatives provide an alternative, complementary option alongside these strategies. Not only do co-operatives act as agents of economic change, but also they play an immeasurably critical reconciliatory role as re-humanizing connectors between those experiencing post-violence divisions.

Ezechiel Sentama is Rwandan by nationality. He holds a PhD in Peace and Development Research from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. He has 19 years of teaching and research experience in peacebuilding, conflict, and reconciliation. Sentama has been a lecturer at the University of Rwanda, a Senior Lecturer at Linnaeus University, Sweden, and a Guest Researcher at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Sentama is currently Assistant Professor and Marie S. Curie Research Fellow at Coventry University in the United Kingdom.

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## Notes

- i This statement was adopted during the 1995 Congress and General Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) held in Manchester, UK to celebrate the Alliance's Centenary. Recommended to the Congress by the ICA Board, the Statement was the product of a lengthy process of consultations involving thousands of cooperators around the world (Prakash, 2003, 1).
- ii Discussions about the nature of the genocidal plan, the 'real' perpetrators and 'real' targets, are beyond the scope of this study. It is also important to emphasize that the history of Rwanda depicts it as a society composed of three groups of people—the *Hutu*, the *Tutsi* and the *Twa*. Heated controversial debates, indeed beyond the scope of this study, arise particularly when it comes to whether these categories were exclusive, races, castes, ethnic or socioeconomic groups. Although the *Hutu*, the *Tutsi* and the *Twa* distinction are currently officially proscribed in Rwanda, notably since 1994, history archives often refer to them as closely related to ethnic groupings and emphasize their respective proportions with estimated numbers of 84% of *Hutu*-agriculturalists, 14% of *Tutsi*-pastoralists, and 1% of *Twa*-pygmies (see, for example, Brounéus, 2003; Buckley-Zistel, 2006; King, 2005; NURC, 2004; Straus, 2004).
- iii '*Abahuzamugambi*' translates as 'people with the same purpose/goal'.
- iv By "I could even eat you", the informant does not imply eating a human being as food; rather this is an expression of extreme hatred, rage and anger, which could culminate in killing, injuring someone physically, or any act of hurt.
- v *Umuhuzamugambi* translates as a person who shares a goal or a purpose with others.

# Female Participation and Voice at Tanzanian Fair Trade Co-operatives

Ezechiel Sentama

## Abstract

*Rural women make up one quarter of the world's population yet tend to have smaller and less profitable crops, receive five per cent of extension services, and access only ten per cent of credit. Notwithstanding the International Co-operative Alliance's first principle on open membership and non-discrimination on the basis of gender, female participation remains a governance challenge at many co-operatives. This paper aims to understand female co-operative participation and voice and the barriers that they face. This case study of three fair trade coffee co-operatives in Tanzania finds that female participation is a challenge at both the membership and leadership levels. While some producers gain a voice, issues remain regarding who is involved and how decisions are made. Promisingly, capacity building through training and education emerges as a powerful tool for enhancing participation and promoting gender equality in some of the primary co-operatives studied. However, barriers such as land laws and cultural norms limit access to opportunities for women. There is therefore a role for diverse actors from the unions, fair trade, and government to play in both (i) delivering training and education that can enhance female participation and (ii) working to reduce structural barriers that limit access to these opportunities.*

## Introduction

Inequalities persist between women and men in most societies, related to their household roles, responsibilities, and decision-making opportunities, and women continue to suffer discrimination in every part of the world (United Nations, 2019). This is particularly true in the case of agricultural assets, where rural women make up one quarter of the world's population yet tend to have smaller and less profitable crops, receive five per cent of extension services, and access only ten per cent of credit (United Nations, 2012; World Bank, 2012). While the International Co-operative Alliance's first principle prohibits gender discrimination, levels of female participation at African co-ops are low and these organizations tend to be "initiated, composed and run by men" (Develtere & Pollet, 2007, p. 59). Given the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment to sustainable economic development and well-being, as highlighted in Sustainable Development Goal 5 of the United Nations Agenda 2030, it is

essential to consider the structural issues and barriers that limit opportunities for equality (United Nations, 2019).

In this paper I explore female participation and voice at fair trade coffee co-operatives, considering the roles that women take on within these organizations as both members and leaders, and the barriers that they face.<sup>1</sup> This research focuses on small-scale coffee producers at three large Tanzanian coffee co-operatives, known as unions, which belong to the fair trade system. The co-operative structure is mandatory at fair trade's small producer organizations, and the fair trade system incorporates this model as a fundamental element of its governance structures. As Reed (2015, p. 214) notes, "cooperatives have played a prominent role in the practice of Fairtrade, especially at the level of production (producer coops) and retail (coop supermarkets)." There is also a clear alignment between co-operatives and fair trade. Develtere and Pollett (2007, p. 71) claim that the fair trade movement resembles the co-operative movement's "pursuit of economic development in a spirit of justice and solidarity."

It is therefore helpful to explore what the fair trade literature tells us about female participation within co-operatives. A 2013 meta-analysis of the fair trade literature identified a "lack of explicit gender strategies and implementation policies among fair trade institutions and producer and worker organizations" (Smith, 2013, p. 103) and a 2009 review by Nelson and Pound (2009, p. 33) noted that "in most of the primary co-operatives Fairtrade is not having a significant impact on the prevailing gender inequalities and this is not a primary objective." Within fair trade, women are much less likely to act as leaders and managers than their male counterparts are (Le Mare, 2008; Lyon, Bezaury, & Mutersbaugh, 2010; Nelson & Pound, 2009; Smith, 2013). In general, gender analysis has not been systematically included in studies on the impact of fair

trade, as the system's 2016-2020 Gender Strategy asserts (Fairtrade International, 2016). This research therefore aims to contribute to filling this gap by exploring female voice and participation in fair trade co-operatives.

A 2015 International Labour Organization report on gender equality in co-operatives notes that women occupy less than 50% of management and leadership positions, and possibly as few as 10% in both cases, despite the fact that they comprise over 50% of the membership (International Labour Organization, 2015). The International Labour Organization Promotion of Cooperatives, 2002 (No. 193) states that "special consideration should be given to increasing women's participation in the cooperative movement at all levels, particularly at management and leadership levels" (Marjurin, 2012). Increasing the number of female leaders is an issue of fairness: there is a social justice argument to be made for fostering equality by bringing more women into leadership roles. It is also about effectiveness. Gender diversity on boards can help to expand perspectives at the top and ensure that women's needs are represented, although the category of 'women' is not a uniform one with a shared experience or single point of view and much depends on the attributes and practices of these female leaders. In a 2013 review of the literature on gender and co-operative leadership, Rawlings and Shaw (2013) identify a consensus in the literature on the developed world that there are benefits to having gender equitable and diverse boards, although this is accompanied by a great deal of debate and controversy regarding how best to achieve this. Optimistically, there are examples from the global South of efforts to change this: Marjurin's (2012) work outlines the impact of Ugandan efforts to promote women's participation at the board level and Vicari & Borda-Rodriguez' (2013) study outlines policies in Malawi aimed at encouraging women to join boards.

Any meaningful change, in this case related to female participation as members and leaders will require training and education at the membership level (Chambo, 2009). As the International Labour Organization's 2015 report asserts, training and education can enable women to take on new roles within co-operatives and engage in addressing the larger social constraints that they face. It can also promote knowledge of co-operative values and principles; as the International Co-operative Alliance's (2018) first co-operative principle states that co-operatives are open to all persons without gender discrimination, awareness of this principle could be a first step towards engaging more women as co-operative members. Despite this potential, nearly 50 per cent of the study's 581 respondents said that training relevant to women's empowerment and gender equality is not held at the co-operatives with which they are most familiar (International Labour Organization, 2015). Among other recommendations, the study advised that co-operatives develop and implement tools and resources (such as gender equality training for all members, or strategies that address issues such as the gender wage gap) that can foster equal participation of women, work with government actors and other partners to overcome cultural and structural barriers for women, and track equality indicators around women's participation in membership, governance, and management (ILO, 2015). This is echoed by Rawlings and Shaw (2016) who call for better tracking of women's membership and leadership, as well as support for training to enable the equitable participation of women at co-operatives.

Building on these findings, this paper explores capacity building, particularly training aimed at achieving women's empowerment and gender equality, as a means of understanding how participation and voice can be enhanced for women in co-operatives. It explores

the relevant training and education provided to producers by various bodies in Tanzania (including government, union and fair trade actors) in order to better understand how capacity building can foster opportunities for women to participate in their co-operatives as members and leaders, thereby enhancing voice. While 'training and education' can typically refer to both i) technical assistance related to coffee cultivation and (ii) broader training on themes such as gender equality, leadership, or public speaking, the focus here is on the latter as it is particularly pertinent to this discussion of female participation and voice and because gender equality training aimed at enhancing women's empowerment and gender equality emerged as a focus during interviews. I also consider the challenge that barriers such as land ownership and cultural norms pose to these efforts.

## The Tanzanian Context

With a population of 55 million, life expectancy of 63 years, and a maternal mortality rate of 398 per 100,000 live births in 2008, Tanzania ranked 154 of 187 countries on the UNDP's 2018 Human Development Index (UNDP, 2018; CIA, 2018). Tanzania's turbulent political landscape has played a large role in determining the nature of the country's co-operative movement and the rich history of African socialism and support for the co-operative sector. As well, its contemporary policy environment post-liberalization makes for fascinating research. The past century in Tanzania has seen the development of Africa's first native coffee co-operative, post-independence co-operative support followed by disbandment of the co-op sector, and post-liberalization capitalism<sup>ii</sup>. Also, as the country with the most fair trade producers in the world at the time of research, Tanzania presents an interesting focus (Fairtrade International, 2012).

This research explored three case studies, all of which are coffee co-operatives in order to hold the commodity constant: fair trade unions Kilimanjaro Native Co-operative Union (KNCU), Kagera Co-operative Union (KCU), and Karagwe District Co-operative Union (KDCU), and several breakaway groups that separated from KNCU<sup>iii</sup>. The three unions have all been established for over fifty years and had been selling fair trade coffee since the 1990s, and I intentionally sought out organizations that had some female leaders and managers so that these individuals' narratives could be captured in the findings. The three unions reviewed in this research are extremely large, with two of them comprising between 60,000 and 70,000 individual farmers, and they differ according to size, structure, coffee type, and various additional attributes (see Table 1). The first union in this study, the Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union (KNCU), is Africa's oldest coffee co-operative union (KNCU, 2013). It

consists of approximately 70,000 farmers organized into 67 primary societies around the foothills of Kilimanjaro. The ethnic group in Kilimanjaro is the Chagga; this group maintains a patrilineal system of descent and inheritance (Mtei, 2012), which has implications for coffee ownership and female participation. Of KNCU's 70,000 members, only 6% were female at the time of research and there has never been a woman on the union's board. The second case, Kagera Co-operative Union (KCU), originated in the 1930s as the Bukoba Native Cooperative Union and is located near the Ugandan border. Today, it has 60,000 members at 126 primary societies in the Kagera region, but does not track the percentage of female members. The third union is Karagwe District Co-operative Union (KDCU) in western Tanzania near the Rwandan border, which was previously a member of KCU but broke away in 1991. KDCU has 22,000 coffee farmers, of which nearly 18% are female.

Characteristic	KNCU	KCU	KDCU
Members	70,000	60,000	22,000
# Primary Societies	67	126	80
Region	Kilimanjaro	Kagera	Karagwe (District in Kagera)
Primary Coffee Type	Arabica	Robusta	Robusta
Year Established	1933	1950	1950 as KCU; 1991 as KDCU
Joined Fairtrade	1993	1990	1990 (as part of KCU)
% Organic	16%	20%	20%
% Female	6%	Unknown	18% (4000)
Processing	At individual farm	Central processing	At KDCU factory

**Table 1. Overview of KNCU, KCU, and KDCU**

Source: Author's own data; KNCU (2013); KCU (2013); KDCU (2013)



## Methodology

I locate this research within both a social justice and feminist framework. Using a social justice approach, I aim to present different lived experiences and perceptions and demonstrate that diverse voices must be heard and valued (Stockdill, Duhon-Sells, Olson, & Patton, 1992). Given the importance of capturing multiple voices, particularly those of women, I take a qualitative approach to engage in a collaborative construction of meaning. I locate the discussion within an interpretive paradigm in order to examine “the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman, 2001, p. 264); rather than distancing myself from participants, I interact with them. This allows me to recognize knowledge production as an ongoing process and to consider and reflect on my own biases.

As I set out to learn about “voice,” I give added weight to the viewpoints of those with less power and privilege (Weiss & Greene, 1992). One example of a marginalized group in African agriculture is women and I therefore aim to capture and report their experiences. This has implications for the project design, such as the decision to over-sample female producers; while between 6 and 18% of co-operative members were female, the interview sample featured 44% women and focus groups comprised 43% women. As a researcher adopting a feminist standpoint, I aim to minimize the power differences between myself and interview respondents (Harding & Norberg 2005). To do this I incorporate feminist methods, which Harding and Norberg (2005, p. 2013) note may provide a means of turning individuals in disadvantaged social positions into “powerful intellectual and political resources.” Interviewing is particularly valuable to feminist researchers who wish to gain insight into the world of their respondents, and is useful when one wishes to learn about the lives of respondents living in a particular

community (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). I used interviews in this research and also considered reflexivity in my approach, which I elaborate on below. As Hesse-Biber (2007, p. 117) explains:

*Research that gets at an understanding of women's lives and those of other oppressed groups, research that promotes social justice and social change, and research that is mindful of the researcher-researched relationship and the power and authority imbued in the researcher's role are some of the issues that engage the feminist researcher.*

I conducted the research in 2011 and 2012, including six months in East Africa for three field trips. I held 120 interviews with fair trade and Tanzanian key informants, co-operative managerial staff and board members, and small-scale coffee producers (30 female, 38 male). I also hosted five focus groups (involving 13 women and 17 men in total), reviewed documents such as membership lists and financial data, and engaged in direct observation<sup>iv</sup> of farmers' fields and homes, co-operative meetings, weighing stations, the coffee auction, factories, conferences, and fair trade premium projects. I adapted my approach to interviewing depending on the individuals, who were organized into four categories as outlined in Table 2.

For Groups 1 and 2 (International and Tanzanian key informants), I used an informal, conversational format that ensured maximum flexibility and allowed the questions to flow from the immediate content, probing with questions that were relevant to particular individuals (Patton, 2002). For Group 3 managers and leaders at the unions I used a semi-structured approach based on an interview guide (Appendix A). The interviews with Group 1, 2, and 3 respondents provided me with the information I required to develop the questions for Group 4 interviews

with producers (Appendix B). All interviews were done in person, and through an interpreter as interviews were typically in Swahili or local Bantu languages. I employed three research assistants for this project, who also acted as interpreters, and therefore results are somewhat filtered by the role that these individuals played. Their gender (one female and two male) likely also played a role in the collection and interpretation of findings, as the interpreter's gender, just like mine, may have influenced access to, as well as interactions with, respondents.

Group	Description	# Interviews	Interview location	Interview format
1	Fairtrade Key Informants	16	UK, Tanzania, Kenya, Ghana, Skype	Informal, conversational
2	Tanzanian Key Informants	40	Tanzania, Ghana	Informal, conversational
3	Union Managers and Leaders	15	Tanzania (various)	Guide (Appendix A)
4	Small-scale Producers	68 (38 male, 30 female)	Tanzania (various)	Questionnaire (Appendix B)
5	Focus Group 1	6 (6 male, 0 female)	Kibosho Central primary society, KNCU	Guide (Appendix A)
6	Focus Group 2	6 (0 male, 6 female)	Kibosho Central primary society, KNCU	Guide (Appendix A)
7	Focus Group 3	6 (4 male, 1 female)	Kyengia primary society, KNCU	Guide (Appendix A)
8	Focus Group 4	6 (3 male, 3 female)	Mamsera primary society, independent	Guide (Appendix A)
9	Focus Group 5	7 (4 male, 3 female)	Kasharu primary society, KCU	Guide (Appendix A)

**Table 2. Interview Groups**

Source: Author

The location of the interviews was a major factor in this study. As I often waited at coffee weighing stations for interviewees, I did not always have control over who was listening in and when I interviewed women often noted that the male Secretary-Manager would pop by frequently to 'check' on everything. At other times I had to travel for hours by car or foot to reach someone's home, and curious neighbours and children would often come by to listen in. Men typically wanted to stay with their wives, and in some cases would even jump in to answer for them. I addressed this issue by having my interpreter explain to everyone that I was primarily interested in the woman's responses, and would interview the man separately afterwards if he wished. While

in the next section I outline the barriers that women face in the coffee sector, it is worth noting here the challenges of securing private interviews with women and the impact that this may have had on responses. As women may have avoided discussing gender disadvantages, it is possible that I did not adequately capture experiences with gender discrimination in interviews. For this reason, I also held five focus groups: one all-female, one all-male, and three mixed gender. Leavy (2007, p. 173) claims that the main appeal of single-gender focus groups for feminists is the ability to engage with "disenfranchised groups and the ability to access subjugated voices." This technique is a useful means of accessing knowledge from a marginalized group,

and therefore allowed me to explore gender disadvantages I may have missed during individual interviews.

Feminist methods are holistic and incorporate all stages of the research process, from the development of the primary question to the findings (Hesse-Biber, 2007). I endeavoured to make this project participatory where possible as a means of treating respondents as subjects or agents, rather than objects, of research. Sharing the findings with the communities studied prior to publishing was one means of ensuring accuracy in how respondents are portrayed. I interviewed fair trade key informants prior to selecting the research topic and question, developed the producer questionnaire in consultation with some of the producers, organizations, and stakeholders involved, and communicated the findings with respondents in Tanzania for their feedback. As Eberhart and Smith (2008) explain in their *Methodological guide for assessing the impact of Fairtrade*, participatory approaches serve to avoid the imposition of preconceived notions, to ensure that important effects or observations are not overlooked, and to recognize the heterogeneity of individual perspectives.

There are limitations to any research project such as being limited to interviewing only those who give consent, those who are accessible, and those who have the time to be interviewed, as well as my role as an outsider. Reflexivity, the process through which a researcher “recognizes, examines, and understands how his or her social background and assumptions can intervene in the research process” (Hesse-Biber, 2007, p. 129) is a key component of feminist research. As a significant figure in the research, I determined the collection, selection, and interpretation of data (with input from study participants at the unions and university who reviewed early findings) and reflected on my values, attitudes,

biases, lived reality, and experiences throughout the entire research and writing process (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Given potential issues such as gaining access and the politics of reporting (Buch & Staller, 2007), I considered how my gender, race, ethnic background, and social class affect the research process. I was mindful of the power and authority imbued in my role, and aimed to minimize these differences by practicing reflexivity throughout, as well as sharing back early findings with the unions and Tanzanian academics to ensure representation of the researched (Hesse-Biber, 2007). As a woman, my gender at times posed advantages, such as allowing me to interview female respondents who might not have felt comfortable with a male interviewer. However, it also posed challenges with regards to how I was perceived—particularly by men in male-dominated Tanzanian society. My race is also an important consideration, as I was viewed as an outsider and there were constant references to me as *mzungu* (person of foreign descent). This may have had an impact on the information that respondents shared or the nuances that I picked up on during interviews and moments of direct observation.

## Findings

During the field research I discovered that **women are highly visible in coffee cultivation but are not necessarily participating as members (Finding 1)**. There are multiple barriers that exist, pertaining primarily to land ownership and cultural norms. Although land ownership is not a pre-condition for membership in Tanzania, co-operative members must own coffee plants. Men are the typical landowners in Tanzania and tend to pass land down to sons rather than daughters following patrilineal customs; as a result, co-operative members tend to be male. Very few women are members

of the unions and widows tend to be the primary exception, although they often register the land in a son's name. This is notwithstanding the fact that women can today own their own land in Tanzania; the country's 1999 Land Act and Village Land Act permitted them equal access to land (Sundet, 2005)<sup>9</sup>.

Women in Tanzania have many household responsibilities including child rearing, food preparation, and water collection, which all contribute towards their triple burden. Despite the fact that they do not tend to be co-operative members, cultural norms also dictate that women in Tanzania are predominantly responsible for coffee growing and care. The male chair of the KNCU board explained that women do 75 per cent of the coffee-related work: tilling the farm, putting manure down, picking coffee, and washing coffee—everything except pruning, which is considered a 'man's job'. Respondents elaborated:

*It's the background of Chagga men. Women take care of the farm. But the husband is the owner of the coffee when it's time to sell. If you take coffee to the primary society, it's under the husband's name and he gets to vote. Even though the women take care of the farms, family and everything. A husband needs to be dead for a woman to have [a membership] card. (Female Fairtrade Liaison and Export Marketing Officer, KNCU)*

*The co-operative business is the man's business in Tanzania. They are the owners of the home. It takes time to change this. Women have a big input so they should own it too. Both women and men participate from the beginning. But when it comes to reaping, it belongs to men. For men, this is 'my property'. (Male lecturer, Moshi Co-operative University)*

Given these challenges to female membership, it is not surprising that **there**

**are few female leaders and managers at Tanzanian co-operatives (Finding 2).** Any woman interested in running for the board requires her own membership identification number so she must already be participating as a co-operative member. Given the importance of culture and tradition in these regions, I asked women in a focus group at KNCU if their husbands would encourage them to be leaders. Of these six women, four said no. I asked them to elaborate and responses included: "My husband wants me to stay home and take care of the family (Female producer, 58 years, Kibosho Central primary society, KNCU) and "My husband wants me to feed the animals at home" (Female producer, 78 years, Kibosho Central primary society, KNCU). As a KNCU female manager explained, men must be part of the solution and gender equality training may help to change attitudes:

*We are trying to sensitize them to tell them that [when it's time for] the election they need to put priority on women. We have four women who are chairs of primary societies but it's still few. But KNCU has improved and are also improving the number of women on the primary society boards. However, there's still no woman on the KNCU board, and there never has been. (Female Fairtrade Liaison and Export Marketing Officer, KNCU)*

Individuals must be able to read and write, and to add another barrier to the equation, the government's District Cooperative Officers in Tanzania (who collect and screen applications for board positions through a centralized process) require board members to have a Standard 7 level of education. This clearly has the potential to discriminate against many people, especially women, who did not have the opportunity to attend school. Generally, rural women tend to have less education than men, and this is especially true in the case of older women (Smith,

2013). Of the 68 producers I interviewed, 15 did not possess the level of education required to run for the board; of these, 11 were female. When I asked these women why they had not continued in school, five of them responded that their parents had died and no one else could afford to send them. As a KNCU producer explained: "You must at least be educated to be a leader. Capacity is a problem. You need at least Standard 7. There are no customs that limit us, we just need education" (Female producer, 47 years, Kibosho Central primary society, KNCU). Unfortunately, the barriers are high for those producers who do not meet the government's minimum educational requirements to run for leadership positions.

For those who do qualify to run for leadership positions, KCU had a quota system in place within its union board requiring at least one woman to be on the board. The male General Manager noted that they 'recommend' to primary societies that they should also have one female board member in place. KCU managers expressed their support for this, and according to a male manager at KCU:

*Things have changed in Tanzania; we have female [Members of Parliament] now. But it takes time. A woman can do the same job as a man. In Tanzania we have a lot of women who are managers. In the past, women couldn't even read. (Male Assistant Export Manager, KCU)*

KNCU and KDCU did not have quotas, although I was told by KDCU's female Export Manager that KDCU had quite a few female board members at primary societies. I interviewed a female chair at a KDCU primary society who stated: "I was chosen and elected. I competed with men. They chose me because I'm trustworthy, and this is why they re-elect me. It's important to have women in leadership positions because we are trustworthy and hard workers" (Female chair, Mabira

primary society, KDCU). Quotas can be a useful tool for getting more women into leadership roles. Of course, simply 'adding women' will not get at the root causes of gender inequality or address the power relations and cultural traditions that permeate these organizations. As Cornwall (2003, p. 1330) reminds us, "Increasing the numbers of women involved may serve instrumental goals, but will not necessarily address more fundamental issues of power." This requires changing attitudes around the role of women and there are, optimistically, signs of change. At KCU and KDCU, for example, members seemed more knowledgeable about land ownership opportunities for women and highlighted the importance of including women as members and leaders. There were also female board members at the union level in these two cases, and although not as obvious there were some signs of increased female participation in KNCU as well. What might have led to these changes? At the first focus group I held, an all-male group at KNCU, a respondent noted: "At the beginning, coffee was only for men. Now that we have education about gender equality, women began to turn up [at cooperative meetings]" (All male Focus Group 1, Kibosho Central primary society, KNCU). This led me to further explore the training aimed at achieving gender equality and enhanced female participation.

Throughout the research, some promising examples of education and training fostering opportunities for women to become both members and leaders emerged<sup>vi</sup>. This demonstrated that **capacity building via training can create opportunities for female participation and voice, although barriers remain (Finding 3)**. In the case of Tanzania's coffee farmers, capacity building primarily comprises the training and technical assistance that is delivered by the union, the Tanzanian government, the fair trade system, and external organizations. These services may be provided to members,



board members, or managers, and can lead to both enhanced success as farmers (for example, when technical assistance about coffee is provided) and increased involvement as members (when skills such as public speaking or leadership are taught). Most relevant to this discussion is the support for gender equality training that producers voiced during interviews, and I therefore focus on this here. Respondents frequently referenced the importance of training and education during discussions of female participation:

*At the beginning because of male dominance [women] couldn't own property. Now because of education men are starting to know that women can own land. Also the law has changed. (Female producer, 52 years, Mamsera primary society)*

*Female membership has increased since men are getting educated on the importance of giving their wives coffee trees. They learn from KDCU. Now they give women coffee. (Male chair, Nyakayanja primary society, KDCU)*

*When women are promoted it is felt by the whole family. We need seminars and training for women leaders. It is difficult to become the female chairperson. More training will help us. If I get more training I can do better. (Female primary society chair, Kyengia primary society, KNCU)*

Other respondents shared thoughts on the type of capacity building that is needed. In my interviews with co-operative managers and leaders, a few mentioned a lack of confidence among women and referred to the soft skills required to participate in these co-operatives. The male General Manager of KCU highlighted the importance of teaching women skills such as public speaking, so that they might gain the confidence required to participate and have a voice in discussions:

*We are thinking of starting a project to empower women. We want to teach them how to talk in public, as they're currently very shy. We have 375 delegates at the KCU AGM, so for a woman to speak up is difficult.*

The mention of training on gender equality and the importance of female participation came up in my conversations with union managers at both KDCU and KNCU. The male General Manager at KDCU claimed that there had been a large improvement in gender equality in the region in recent years, which he attributed to a series of workshops in 2005 provided by the union on gender equality and women's empowerment. The union's male Export Manager outlined similar empowerment projects, asserting that KDCU is trying to attract more women as members and leaders. KDCU had recently recruited 11 Field Officers, five of whom were women, and the union's male General Manager stated:

*So there's an improvement. When you go to members there's a cultural issue. The man is the spokesman of the family. So he owns everything, including coffee. The wife and children are represented through a man's membership. Now we do sensitization to get men to give women coffee and now women are more involved. It's still lower than we'd like, but better than in the past.*

The female Export and Fairtrade Liaison Officer at KNCU conducts seminars every year at the primary society level and claims that she includes topics on gender equality and the importance of having female members. She explained that in the past men did not like to have female leaders, and that it is therefore important to train both men and women. She stated: "We need to encourage women so that they can have the courage. We need training for women to become members. Right now many of them don't have the courage to become members" (Female

Fairtrade Liaison and Export Marketing Officer, KNCU). In recent years there had also been KDCU union-led gender equality training aimed at encouraging men to give their wives some of their land or plants for coffee growing. If successful, this could allow women to get their own identification numbers and become members of the co-operative. The male Fairtrade and Organic Coordinator at KDCU explained: "It is not possible to give land to women, according to tradition, so we are campaigning; just give your wife two to three bags [of coffee] so she can become a member and have a right to vote."

A clear example of the impact of capacity building, particularly gender equality training, that I found was at Mamsera Rural Primary Co-operative Society—a primary society that left KNCU in 2003 and is completely independent today. Mamsera's Secretary-Manager is a woman who is credited with the co-operative's success. As a KNCU male Acting Manager stated, "They've been successful because they've trusted the woman in charge; she has autonomy to make decisions." At this independent primary society, both male and female producers claimed that male dominance is changing because people are being trained and learning that women have equal rights. Individuals who took part in a Mamsera focus group also claimed that more women participate in meetings and as members, attributing this to training on equal rights that is leading to a reduction in male dominance. There is clearly optimism among both key informants and members that capacity building may serve to attract new female members, as well as to provide current female members with the skills they require to participate effectively<sup>vii</sup>.

Of course, sustainable change requires going beyond capacity building to reduce barriers (such as land ownership and cultural norms) and address the root causes of the problem. How will women who do not have a Standard 7 education

run for board elections if the rules do not change? And how will women who do not own coffee plants become co-operative members? Along with gender equality training for the various actors involved at these co-operatives (managers, leaders and producers), actors within the government and the union have a role to play in changing these laws and policies.

## Discussion and Recommendations

From this paper's findings, it is clear that female participation remains a challenge and that women experience high barriers to participation in these co-operatives. Generally speaking, while there were some signs of change, many of the women I interviewed did not feel that they had access to opportunities to become members or leaders in their co-operatives. This was due to the presence of many deeply entrenched societal factors, primarily related to land ownership and cultural norms. While lowering these barriers will take time, I find that gender equality training for both women and men can help to raise awareness of these challenges and is already creating more opportunities for women to participate at all three unions.

Two years following the completion of my research, Fairtrade International published a five-year gender strategy (Fairtrade International, 2016). It emphasizes the importance of capacity building, particularly strengthening the capacity of producer organizations to develop and implement gender policies and programmes, building awareness through advocacy, and increasing the awareness and skills of its own staff involved in the fair trade system. The strategy includes a Gender at Work framework (Rao & Kelleher, 2005) that outlines changes sought at the individual, collective, formal and informal level. I

integrate this framework here as Figure 1 highlights how training and education cannot be considered in isolation; real change in relation to cultural norms, policies, markets, and cultural practices, among other factors, is required. For example, the Tanzanian government would need to amend the requirement of a Standard 7 education for board members, and the union would need to allow women who do not technically own coffee plants to become members, in order for these individuals to have access to leadership opportunities. That being said, the gender equality training participants referred to in this research could serve to address some of the challenges outlined in all four quadrants, such as:

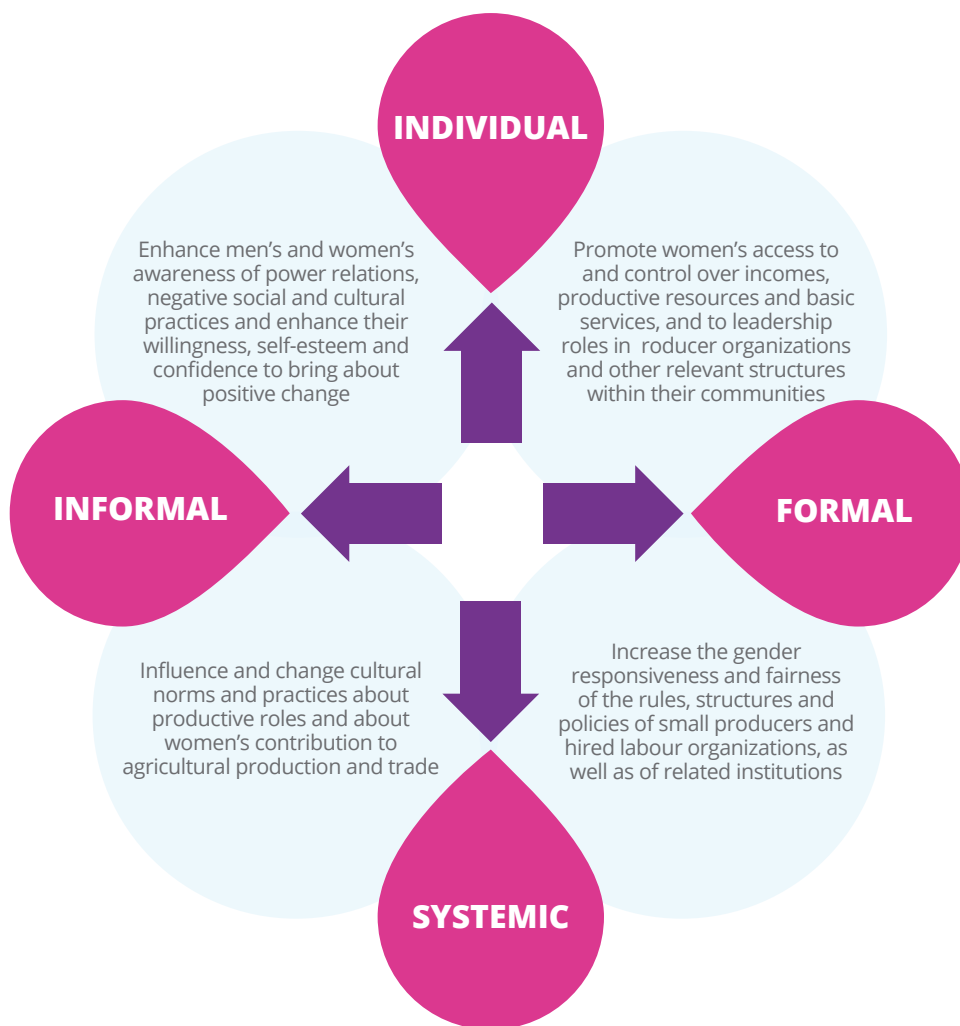
- Build capacity of producers:
  - Enhance men's and women's awareness of power relations, negative social and cultural practices and enhance their willingness, self-esteem and confidence to bring about positive change (individual, informal)
  - Promote access to leadership opportunities for women in producer organizations (individual, formal)
  - Create dialogue around cultural norms and practices pertaining to women's role in agriculture (informal, systemic)
- Build capacity of union staff
  - Raise awareness of the need to increase the gender responsiveness and fairness of the rules and policies of primary co-operatives (formal, systemic).

It is essential also to note the importance of going beyond 'adding women'. While quotas aimed at getting more women into leadership roles may be one part of the solution, much more is required for real change to be achieved at these organizations. Fair trade, in particular, which targets small-scale producers as a marginalized group, must recognize that there are intersecting categories for

whom differing degrees of support may be required, related to, for example, gender. It is essential to understand heterogeneity and diversity among producers in order to provide strong support to individuals and to address specific needs.

This paper concludes that capacity building via training and education, particularly gender equality training, may serve to give female participants a voice within decision-making. Education and training are essential to the development of women as members and leaders within co-operatives, and both women and men have much to gain from gender equality training. Diverse actors from the unions, the government, the fair trade system, and other external organizations have an essential role to play in providing members with the training that is required in order to ensure women can achieve an equal voice within their co-operatives. However, capacity building is not a silver bullet. There must also be efforts towards reducing barriers, such as those around educational requirements in leadership applications, and shifting cultural norms related to which member of a household typically holds a co-operative membership card, if a multitude of voices is truly to be heard within the co-operative.

Shannon Sutton is a gender equality and knowledge translation specialist and researcher currently living in Morocco. Her work experience includes seven years with Canada's International Development Research Centre as well as roles with Fairtrade Canada, worker co-operative La Siembra Co-operative/Cocoa Camino, and NGOs in Mozambique and the UK. She has conducted fieldwork with smallholder agricultural co-operatives in Latin America and East Africa, and holds a PhD from Queen Mary, University of London, a Master's degree in International Development from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University, and a Bachelor's degree in Management from McGill University.



**Figure 1. Gender at Work framework adapted by Fairtrade International**  
 Source: Fairtrade International, 2016; Rao and Kelleher, 2005. Reprinted with permission.

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## **APPENDIX A: Partial Union Manager/Leader/Focus Group Interview Guide**

### **1. General**

Can you tell me about your organization?

What is your role?

### **2. Co-operatives**

What does it mean to be a co-operative?

How are delegates elected?

How many female producers are there?

Who attends meetings?

How often are meetings held?

Do you have secondary data on meetings, quorum, and women?

Are people leaving the co-operative?

### **3. General Fair trade**

What do you know about fair trade?

How important is the fair trade price?

What is the impact of fair trade on producers?

Are there other projects here you can tell us about?

### **4. Governance**

How is the primary society structured and governed?

How are managers and board members chosen?

Are there women in board and management roles? How many?

## 5. Capacity Building

Who gets trained?

What type of training is there?

Are there groups here (like the village cooperative bank)?

Do you think capacity building is important?

## APPENDIX B: Producer Interview Questionnaire (partial)

Primary Society: \_\_\_\_\_

Co-op: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Gender (M/F/Prefer not to say): \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Research Code: \_\_\_\_\_

### I. General Information

1. How old are you?
2. What is your marital status?
3. How many children do you have?
4. How much formal education did you receive? Why did you leave school?

### II. Coffee Farming

5. Do you own a coffee farm? If NO, who owns the farm that you work on (name and relation)?
6. How large is your farm?
7. How many coffee trees do you have? Of these, how many are old and how many are new?
8. What is the level of coffee production in kilos (kg) per season?
9. Do you hire people to work for you?
10. Do you pulp the coffee yourself? If NO, where does it go for pulping?
11. Who do you sell your coffee to? (Private buyers)
12. What price did you receive for your coffee last season?
13. What other crops do you grow?
14. Do you ever work elsewhere (for the government, private company, etc.) If YES, please elaborate:

### III. Co-op Membership

15. In which year did you join the co-operative?
16. Why did you join the co-operative?
17. Are you/have you ever been in a leadership position at the co-operative? If YES please describe.
18. How do you participate in your primary society? (Circle all that apply)
  - a) As a board member
  - b) Vote for a board member
  - c) Frequently attend meetings
  - d) Occasionally attend meetings
  - e) No participation
19. How often are primary society meetings held?
20. How many people attend these meetings?
21. Do you speak at meetings? Why or why not?
22. How do you receive information from your primary society?
23. Who makes decisions at meetings of your primary society?
24. Do you know who your delegate/representative is?
25. Do you know how primary society board members are chosen? If YES please describe.
26. Do you have confidence in your primary society board members?
27. Do you have confidence in the management of the union?
28. Do you have confidence in the Management board of the union?
29. Are there many female producers in the co-operative? Why or why not?
30. Are there many women in leadership positions at the co-operative? Why or why not?
31. Are there many young people at the co-operative? Why or why not?
32. Do you receive any training or technical assistance? If YES, please elaborate. What would you like to learn that you haven't yet learned?
33. Are there other ways in which you learn (from a neighbor, friend, etc)? If YES, please elaborate:
34. Do you have access to loans? If YES, please elaborate:
35. Are you a member of another group? (Village Community Bank etc.) If YES, please elaborate:
36. Do you vote in local, regional, and national elections? (Circle all that apply)

- a) Yes, Local Elections
- b) Yes, Constituent Elections
- c) Yes, National Elections
- d) No
- e) Not eligible
- f) Unsure

## **V. Fair Trade**

- 37. Do you know what fair trade is? If NO, end interview. If YES, can you tell me a bit about fair trade?
- 38. Has your standard of living increased due to fair trade? If YES, please elaborate:
- 39. Do you know what the fair trade premiums are? If NO, end interview. If YES, please describe:
- 40. How are the fair trade premiums used within the co-operative? (Do you know of any social projects within your co-operative?)
- 41. Who decides how the fair trade premiums will be spent?
- 42. Is there anything you would like to add about anything we've discussed?  
Challenges?



## Notes

- i This paper is based on doctoral research for a PhD dissertation entitled: Sutton. S. (2014) *Voice, Choice and Governance: The Case of Tanzania's Fairtrade Co-operatives*, Queen Mary University of London. It is available at the following link and provides further detail on collaborative governance and the complex nature of participation: <https://qmro.qmul.ac.uk/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/7780/SHANNONVoiceChoiceGovernance2014.pdf?sequence=1>
- ii For further background on the Tanzanian context, including African co-operatives, Tanzania's co-operative history including forced villagization and liberalization and the contemporary landscape and co-operative policies please see Sutton (2014).
- iii During interviews with academics and co-operative managers in Tanzania, I heard about two breakaway groups that separated from KNCU: the G32 and Mamsera. These groups are outlined in detail in Sutton (2014) as the findings were pertinent to the dissertation's focus on collaborative governance and countervailing power. The gender-related results are limited to the reference to Mamsera in this paper.
- iv Through direct non-participant observation (meaning that I was not myself a participant) I was able to gather data in a natural setting and complement my knowledge of individuals with observations about their day-to-day activities. I was occasionally able to ascertain power dynamics related to participation, such as how many women are present, where they sit and how often they speak. Further detail is provided in Sutton (2014).
- v This is outlined in further detail in Sutton (2014).
- vi I asked all interviewees about the training that is offered, also asking the experts who gets trained and asking producers what else they would like to learn. These questions can be located in Appendices A and B.
- vii Further information on capacity building and governance at Mamsera can be found in Sutton (2014).

# Health Status and Job Satisfaction of Worker Co-operative Members in the Basque Country in a Time of Economic Uncertainty

Laia Ollé-Espluga and Xavier Bartoll

## Abstract

*The current article compares the health status and job satisfaction of worker co-operative members with that of other types of workers in the Basque Country (Spain) using data from the 2013 Health Survey of the Basque Country. The study population comprised co-operative members, managers, and employees with permanent or temporary contracts (n=4,304). Using robust Poisson regression and ordered logistic regression analyses stratified by sex, we examined the association between the type of employment relation and four dependent variables: stress, mental health, absenteeism, and job satisfaction. Female co-operative members in our sample tend to show worse health status results than other employment relation categories, especially in comparison to fixed-term employees. No differences are observed regarding job satisfaction among women but among men, job dissatisfaction is higher for temporary employees than for co-operative members (adjusted PR 2.59; 1.12-6.01). The data collection of the survey coincided with a profound crisis in the Basque co-operative sector. Results might reveal the impact of this period of economic uncertainty among co-operative members, and in addition observe differential results according to gender.*

## Introduction

Co-operatives are business organisations owned and controlled by workers/ members, which endorse the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equity and solidarity, and equality (International Co-operative Alliance, 2019). Some of these principles have proven to be beneficial for workers and are closely linked to the Sustainable Development Goal of promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all (United Nations, 2019). For instance, co-operative firms are more committed to job security than non-co-operative firms during economic downturns (Calderón & Calderón, 2012; Pencavel, 2012; Roelants, Hyungsik, & Terrasi, 2014), and there is lower wage inequality in worker co-operatives (Magne, 2017). The potential of co-operatives as a way of impeding unemployment and ensuring a key means of income has also been pointed out in the case of the recuperated

firms in Argentina (Ranis, 2010). At the same time, working and employment conditions constitute a powerful social determinant of health (Benach et al., 2007), so, by promoting employment and decent work, co-operatives might be also contributing to another Sustainable Development Goal, namely to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

### **Worker co-operatives and well-being**

Despite their lengthy existence, in the area of public health there is still only a surprisingly limited number of studies analysing work-related health in worker co-operatives. Existing research on the health impact of co-operatives is mostly based on case studies and does not perform separate analyses based on gender. It can be categorised into studies dealing with occupational health and safety matters, studies on health status outcomes, and those focused on the psychosocial environment in co-operatives.

As for studies focusing on occupational health and safety, there is scarce literature. Grunberg and colleagues (1984; 1996) conducted some studies in the wood industry in the United States in which they concluded that co-operatives do not show better results in safety performance in terms of higher reported injury rates and more days missed due to injuries. The authors point out that the higher number of missed days are due to weaker control systems, along with the lack of safety bonuses or incentive schemes to decrease the number of days without a lost-time accident (Grunberg et al., 1996). Later on, however, their results were debated on the grounds of making generalisations out of too few co-operatives (n=3) from one particular economic sector. A further criticism is that the authors immediately associated employee ownership with participation when it would have been more salient to

compare employee-owned companies with conventional companies also on the basis of their commitment to worker participation (Kardas, 1997).

To the best of our knowledge, there is only one study addressing the general health effects of worker co-operatives (Erdal, 2014). Based on individual and population data, Erdal's study compared different outcomes, including health, among three populations with different levels of co-operative density in northern Italy. The self-perceived physical health of people in the community with greater co-operative density was slightly better but no differences were found regarding mental health. Interestingly, the study shows that the population of the community with greater density of cooperative employment lived longer and points to diminished cardiovascular mortality as the factor with greater differential results across communities. The author also cites the existence of initial studies on co-operative density and mortality rates in the Basque Country with preliminary results along the same lines, but nothing has been published since then.

With respect to work-related psychosocial conditions, one seminal study on the Mondragón co-operative (Rothschild & Whitt, 1991) showed that co-operative workplaces reduce alienation and constitute more meaningful places of work, prompting higher levels of job satisfaction among their worker-members. However, if their expectations (in terms of ideals but also job security, pay or working conditions) are unmet, job satisfaction may be diminished, leading to greater stress. Other factors that have been related to job satisfaction among co-operative members are remuneration, management style, and promotion opportunities (salaried staff in co-operatives, for their part, value job security most highly) (Gargallo, 2008).

For Höckertin and Härenstram (2006), the characteristics of co-operatives

make it plausible to imagine that these organisations facilitate more horizontal social relations and provide workers with a greater control over their work. The former hypothesis has been confirmed in studies about co-operatives in Italy and Sweden by detecting a better psychosocial climate in worker co-operatives in terms of positive social relations in the workplace (Höckertin & Härenstam, 2006), particularly regarding relations with managers (Carpita & Golia, 2012; Höckertin, 2008). In the study about Italian social co-operatives (Carpita & Golia, 2012), workers also perceived procedural fairness. As for the latter hypothesis, workers in co-operatives in Sweden did not perceive higher levels of control than in other types of firms (Höckertin, 2008), which can also lead to dissatisfaction (Nilsson, Kihlén, & Norell, 2009).

### **Basque co-operatives in the time of uncertainty**

One of the main elements characterising employment in the co-operative sector is its stability, since in case of economic downturn, co-operatives use dismissal as a last resort. Still, co-operative members may be suffering job insecurity, understanding it not only as the threat of becoming unemployed but also as the possibility of worsening working conditions such as wages, work schedules or tasks (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Salas-Nicás, Moncada, Llorens, & Navarro, 2018).

In the Basque Country, an autonomous community of northern Spain, the financial crisis of 2008 also ended up severely affecting its co-operative economy, a sector that plays an important role in the region. The region is home to the renowned Mondragón Cooperative Corporation, a federation of worker co-operatives, whose economic weight and influence has made it a leading international name (Alustiza, 2015). In 2013, it was considered to be the largest

co-operative and mutual organisation by turnover in the world in the industry and utility sector (ICA & EURICSE, 2015, p. 28). Accordingly, the employment generated in co-operatives in the region is mainly concentrated in the service and industrial sectors (in 2013 accounting for 53.8% and 43.4%, respectively) (Roelants et al., 2014). In 2013, the ratio of employment generated in cooperatives out of the total employment of the Basque Country amounted to 6.2%, of which around 70% were worker-members (Gobierno Vasco & Departamento de Empleo y Políticas Sociales, 2016; Roelants et al., 2014). More than half of this employment—3.7%—was provided by the Mondragón group (Roelants et al., 2014).

In the early years of the crisis the co-operative employment ratio remained stable despite the unfavourable economic context due to the implementation of strategies to avoid job destruction among worker co-operatives members. Mechanisms such as the use of a flexible working calendar, redistribution of surpluses, relocations among co-operatives, early retirement or wage cuts have been described in relation to the Mondragón group (Errasti, Bretos, & Nunez, 2017, p. 187; Landeta, Basterretxea, & Albizu, 2016). At that time two significant co-operatives of Mondragón were struggling. First, Fagor, Mondragón's oldest and largest co-operative as well as its industrial cooperative flagship, and, second, Eroski, its biggest co-operative in the retail and distribution sector and one of the three largest chains of food distribution in Spain ((INDISA, 2011) cited in (Mercadé-Melé, Molinillo, & Fernández, 2014)). However, it was not only the Mondragón group having a tough time. During the period 2010-2012 half of the Basque social economy firms applied some kind of measure related either to personnel adjustments, hourly dedication or wage adjustments (Gobierno Vasco & Departamento de Empleo y Políticas Sociales, 2014). Also during that period

salaried employment was destroyed in the Basque co-operative sector (Gobierno Vasco & Departamento de Empleo y Políticas Sociales, 2016, p. 63).

For co-operatives the hardest period was between 2012 and 2014. In May 2013 Fagor needed an extraordinary cash injection, half of which required a 1% contribution from all the co-operative members of the Mondragón group (Alustiza, 2015; Errasti et al., 2017; Ortega & Uriarte, 2015). In November 2013 it declared bankruptcy. Of the 2,170 job losses for co-operative members in the period 2012-2014, Fagor's closure accounted for the largest share. Yet, other closures and/or processes of workforce reduction also took place in the industrial sector of the Basque social economy during that period (Gobierno Vasco & Departamento de Empleo y Políticas Sociales, 2016, p. 8).

Given the relevance of the co-operative economy in the Basque Country as well as the scarcity of research providing a comparative analysis of the wellbeing of worker co-operatives members, the aim of this paper is to examine the health status and job satisfaction of co-operative members in the Basque Country in comparison to other types of workers.

## Methods

### Study population

This study draws on the VI Health Survey of the Basque Country 2013 (Osasun Saila / Departamento de Salud & Gobierno Vasco, 2013a), a representative sample of the Basque population based on a random sample of private households. The survey was conducted through multi-stage sampling and its response rate was 86% (Osasun Saila / Departamento de Salud & Gobierno Vasco, 2013b). Data collection was from December 2012 to May 2013. Our sample was restricted to salaried workers with permanent or temporary contracts,

cooperative members and managers aged between 16 and 65 (n=4,304).

### Study variables

Outcome variables were:

- Stress, analysed using the question "Overall and taking into account the conditions in which you do your work, how would you rate the stress level of your work, on a scale from 1 (not stressful) to 7 (very stressful)". This was then transformed into a variable with three categories: not at all or a little stressful (1-3); stressful (4-5); very stressful (6-7).
- Mental health, assessed through the five-item Mental Health Inventory (MHI-5) (Osasun Saila / Departamento de Salud & Gobierno Vasco, 2013b). It asks whether, in the last four weeks, the surveyed population were nervous, happy, calm and peaceful, down in the dumps, or downhearted and blue. Response categories ranged from "all of the time" (1 point) to "none of the time" (6 points). Responses were added and transformed to a 0-100-point scale, where the higher the score, the better the mental health. The scale was recoded into a variable with three categories: poor mental health (0 - 52); good mental health (53-72) and excellent mental health (73-100). The cut-off point between poor and good mental health was 52 as in (Bültmann et al., 2006); while the median was used to distinguish between good and excellent mental health.
- Job satisfaction, measured by the question "How satisfied are you with your work?" (very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied). Responses were grouped into satisfaction (very satisfied or satisfied), and dissatisfaction (dissatisfied or very dissatisfied).



- Absenteeism, based on the question “Have you had to suspend or moderate your usual activities for health reasons?” (yes, no).

The main explanatory variable was the employment relation (co-operative members, managers, permanent employees, temporary employees). Other explanatory variables analysed in the study were:

- a. socio-demographic characteristics: sex; age (16-30; 31-49; 50-65); educational attainment (compulsory education or less; non-compulsory secondary education; tertiary education); occupational codes (following the Spanish National Classification of Occupations 2011); and occupational social class (most advantaged (classes I and II); intermediate (III); and most disadvantaged (IV and V)). This categorisation is based on the Goldthorpe-oriented codification proposed by the Spanish Society of Epidemiology (Domingo-Salvany et al., 2013).
- b. household characteristics: cohabitation (yes; no); and family burden (living with children under 14 years: yes; no);
- c. economic sector (agriculture; industry; construction; services); and
- d. stress, used as adjustment variable for the regression models with the mental health, absenteeism and job satisfaction outcomes.

### Data analysis

We conducted a weighted descriptive analysis to describe the sample by employment relation types and a more in-depth descriptive analysis of the labour characteristics of the co-operative members in the sample on the basis of their occupational codes. We then performed a multivariate analysis. Weighted

robust Poisson regression was used to assess the association between type of employment relation and job satisfaction and absenteeism due to the very high prevalence of these outcomes (Petersen & Deddens, 2008). We calculated raw and adjusted prevalence ratios (PR) with 95% confidence intervals (CI). Weighted ordered logistic regression models were run to examine the relationship between employment relation type and stress and mental health. The proportional odds assumption was checked. Regression coefficients are reported as odds ratios (OR) and 95% CIs were estimated. All analyses were stratified by sex and performed using Stata v.14 software.

## Results

Sociodemographic and organisational characteristics of the study sample stratified by sex are displayed in Table 1. Co-operative members in the Basque Country account for a small proportion of the surveyed workforce: 1.7% of women and 3.2% of men.

Co-operative members are mostly middle-aged and employed in the industrial (for men) and services (in the case of women) sectors (see Table 1). A detailed analysis of the most frequent occupation codes of the sample shows that there is a greater occupational dispersion among men than among women. Almost half of the female co-operative members are employed in three types of job: “shop salespersons”, “cashiers and ticket clerks”, and “blacksmiths, toolmakers and related trades workers”, each one accounting for 15.2%. Among men, the most frequent occupation code is “blacksmiths, toolmakers and related trades workers” (22.0%) followed at a great distance by “metal carpenters” (4.8%), “mobile farm and forestry plant operators” (4.8%), and “draughtspersons” (4.8%) (results not shown in the table). In terms of occupational social class, more than 60%

of co-operative members—both men and women—belong to the categories IV or V. However, men in co-operatives hold jobs allocated among the most advantaged occupational categories to a greater extent than women (categories I or II) (Table 1). In our descriptive analysis of health and job satisfaction outcomes, male co-operative members show lower levels of stress than managers and greater job satisfaction than permanent and fixed-term employees. They present the lowest absenteeism rates as well as the highest shares of excellent mental health. Female co-operative members, on the other hand, display less favourable results: the lowest share of excellent mental health of the analysed categories of employment relation, along with the highest percentage of job dissatisfaction and absenteeism. With regard to stress, they report experiencing stress to a lower extent than female managers but slightly more than salaried employees (Table 1). The results of the multivariate analyses confirm worse results for women in

co-operatives in every health outcome analysed. The odds of having excellent mental health rather than good or poor mental health is 68% lower among female co-operative members compared to managers: adjusted OR 0.32 (95% CI: 0.13-0.78); and 53% lower compared to fixed-term employees: adjusted OR 0.47 (95% CI: 0.24-0.93). Compared to co-operative members, salaried staff show a lower odds of experiencing very high levels of stress relative to medium or low levels of stress: adjusted OR 0.47 (95% CI: 0.27-0.83) for permanent employees; adjusted OR 0.43 (95% CI: 0.24-0.77) for fixed-term employees. Fixed-term employees also show a lower prevalence ratio of absenteeism than female co-operative members: PR 0.39 (95% CI: 0.16-0.98). No differences are observed regarding job satisfaction among women but the prevalence ratio of job dissatisfaction among male temporary salaried employees was about 2.5 times that of male cooperative members: PR 2.59 (95% CI: 1.12-6.01) (Tables 2 and 3).

**Table 1. Distribution of employment relation types stratified by gender and according to socio-demographical features, household characteristics, working-related variables and health and job satisfaction outcomes.**

	MEN (n=2145)					WOMEN (n=2159)				
	Cooperative members	Permanent employees	Fixed-term employees	Managers	Managers	Cooperative members	Permanent employees	Fixed-term employees	Managers	Managers
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
<b>Age</b>										
16-30	3 (4.4)	96 (6.2)	165 (41.6)	1 (0.8)	109 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	154 (29.7)	4 (7.0)		
31-49	24 (35.3)	636 (41.0)	170 (42.8)	55 (43.0)	632 (40.9)	20 (54.1)	236 (45.5)	29 (50.9)		
50-65	41 (60.3)	820 (52.8)	62 (15.6)	72 (56.3)	805 (52.1)	17 (46.0)	129 (24.9)	24 (42.1)		
<b>Educational attainment</b>										
Tertiary education	34 (50.0)	724 (46.7)	147 (37.0)	76 (59.4)	706 (45.7)	16 (43.2)	233 (44.9)	25 (43.9)		
Non-compulsory secondary education	16 (23.5)	289 (18.6)	104 (26.2)	23 (18.0)	340 (22.0)	8 (21.6)	132 (25.4)	14 (24.6)		
Compulsory education or less	18 (26.5)	539 (34.7)	146 (36.8)	29 (22.7)	500 (32.3)	13 (35.1)	154 (29.7)	18 (31.6)		
<b>Occupational social class</b>										
I or II	15 (22.1)	298 (19.2)	49 (12.4)	77 (60.2)	347 (22.5)	6 (16.2)	95 (18.3)	22 (38.6)		
III	9 (13.2)	265 (17.1)	45 (11.4)	13 (10.2)	413 (26.7)	8 (21.6)	84 (16.2)	17 (29.8)		
IV or V	44 (64.7)	986 (63.7)	302 (76.2)	28 (29.7)	785 (50.8)	23 (62.2)	339 (65.4)	18 (31.6)		

<b>Economic branch<sup>a</sup></b>									
Services	13 (19.1)	700 (45.2)	186 (47.0)	67 (52.3)	24 (64.9)	1243 (80.5)	453 (87.5)	50 (87.7)	
Industry	49 (72.1)	675 (43.6)	122 (30.8)	36 (28.1)	13 (35.1)	275 (17.8)	57 (11.0)	4 (7.0)	
Construction	3 (4.4)	149 (9.6)	75 (18.9)	20 (15.6)	0 (0.0)	22 (1.4)	6 (1.2)	2 (3.5)	
Agriculture	3 (4.4)	26 (1.7)	13 (3.3)	5 (3.9)	0 (0.0)	4 (0.3)	2 (0.4)	1 (1.8)	
<b>Cohabitation</b>									
Yes	55 (80.9)	1137 (73.3)	116 (29.2)	105 (82.0)	29 (78.4)	1061 (68.6)	260 (50.1)	39 (68.4)	
No	13 (19.1)	415 (26.7)	281 (70.8)	23 (18.0)	8 (21.6)	485 (31.4)	259 (49.9)	18 (31.6)	
<b>Family burden</b>									
Yes	17 (25.0)	386 (24.9)	53 (13.4)	35 (27.3)	14 (37.8)	377 (24.4)	129 (24.9)	16 (28.1)	
No	51 (75.0)	1166 (75.1)	344 (86.7)	93 (72.7)	23 (62.2)	1169 (75.6)	390 (75.1)	41 (71.9)	
<b>Stress<sup>b</sup></b>									
Very stressful	13 (19.4)	275 (18.0)	54 (14.7)	39 (31.0)	7 (20.0)	248 (17.6)	61 (14.1)	14 (25.9)	
Stressful	27 (40.3)	645 (42.1)	139 (38.0)	53 (42.1)	19 (54.3)	602 (42.6)	191 (44.0)	19 (35.2)	
Not at all or a little stressful	27 (40.3)	610 (39.9)	173 (47.3)	34 (26.9)	9 (25.7)	562 (39.8)	182 (41.9)	21 (38.9)	
<b>Mental health<sup>c</sup></b>									
Excellent	33 (48.5)	881 (56.8)	203 (51.1)	71 (55.5)	21 (56.8)	680 (44.0)	231 (44.5)	21 (36.8)	
Good	24 (35.3)	456 (29.4)	123 (31.0)	40 (31.2)	12 (32.4)	525 (34.0)	162 (31.2)	19 (33.4)	
Poor	11 (16.2)	215 (13.8)	71 (17.9)	17 (13.3)	4 (10.8)	341 (22.0)	126 (24.3)	17 (29.8)	

**Job satisfaction<sup>d</sup>**

Satisfied	61 (91.0)	1368 (89.4)	294 (80.3)	121 (96.0)	30 (85.7)	1279 (90.6)	389 (89.6)	50 (92.6)
Dissatisfied	6 (9.0)	162 (10.6)	72 (19.7)	5 (4.0)	5 (14.3)	133 (9.4)	45 (10.4)	4 (7.4)

**Absenteeism**

No	65 (95.6)	1445 (93.1)	376 (94.7)	117 (91.4)	31 (83.8)	1404 (90.8)	492 (94.8)	53 (93.0)
Yes	3 (4.4)	107 (6.9)	21 (5.3)	11 (7.8)	6 (16.2)	142 (9.2)	27 (5.2)	4 (7.0)

<sup>a</sup> 6 missing values (3 among men, and 3 among women)

<sup>b</sup> 454 missing values (144 among men, and 310 among women)

<sup>c</sup> 467 missing values (148 among men, and 319 among women)

<sup>d</sup> 280 missing values (54 among men, and 224 among women)



**Table 2. Association between employment relation and absenteeism and job satisfaction outcomes stratified by gender. Raw and adjusted prevalence ratios (PR) and 95% confidence intervals.**

	MEN		WOMEN	
	Raw PR	Adjusted PR	Raw PR	Adjusted PR
<b>ABSENTEEISM<sup>a</sup></b>				
Employment relation				
<i>Cooperative members</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Permanent employees</i>	1.06 (0.35-3.24)	1.10 (0.36-3.34)	0.53 (0.24-1.17)	0.60 (0.27-1.32)
<i>Fixed-term employees</i>	0.78 (0.24-2.58)	0.87 (0.26-2.94)	<b>0.32 (0.13-0.80)</b>	<b>0.39 (0.16-0.98)</b>
<i>Managers</i>	1.01 (0.28-3.60)	1.02 (0.27-3.85)	0.26 (0.06-1.24)	0.30 (0.06-1.44)
<b>JOB DISSATISFACTION<sup>a</sup></b>				
Employment relation				
<i>Cooperative members</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Permanent employees</i>	1.24 (0.54-2.85)	1.26 (0.56-2.84)	0.62 (0.26-1.45)	0.78 (0.38-1.58)
<i>Fixed-term employees</i>	<b>2.50 (1.08-5.79)</b>	<b>2.59 (1.12-6.01)</b>	0.67 (0.28-1.63)	0.82 (0.38-1.74)
<i>Managers</i>	0.43 (0.13-1.45)	0.52 (0.16-1.71)	0.53 (0.15-1.90)	0.60 (0.20-1.85)

<sup>a</sup> Model also adjusted by age, educational attainment, social class, economic sector, cohabitation status, family burden, and stress.

Prevalence ratios are shown for negative categories in each outcome analysed (corresponding to having been absent from work, and job dissatisfaction).

Bold text indicates a statistically significant result less than or equal to the significance level cut-off of 0.05.

\* How to interpret the results: If the value of the regression estimate is above 1, the outcome under study is occurring to a greater extent among (some categories of) non-co-operative members than among co-operative members. If it is lower than 1, co-operative members are

experiencing the outcome analysed to a greater extent. These interpretations hold true provided that the 95% confidence interval does not overlap 1. If this happens it means that there are no differences between the groups compared.

**Table 3. Association between employment relation and stress at work and mental health outcomes stratified by gender. Raw and adjusted odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals.**

	MEN		WOMEN	
	Raw OR	Adjusted OR	Raw OR	Adjusted OR
<b>STRESS<sup>a</sup></b>				
Employment relation				
<i>Cooperative members</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Permanent employees</i>	0.93 (0.57-1.53)	1.00 (0.60-1.67)	<b>0.52 (0.30-0.90)</b>	<b>0.47 (0.27-0.83)</b>
<i>Fixed-term employees</i>	0.75 (0.44-1.28)	0.96 (0.55-1.68)	<b>0.45 (0.26-0.79)</b>	<b>0.43 (0.24-0.77)</b>
<i>Managers</i>	<b>1.98 (1.06-3.68)</b>	1.55 (0.82-2.93)	0.65 (0.27-1.56)	0.54 (0.22-1.32)
<b>MENTAL HEALTH<sup>b</sup></b>				
Employment relation				
<i>Cooperative members</i>	1	1	1	1
<i>Permanent employees</i>	1.35 (0.83-2.18)	1.35 (0.83-2.20)	0.67 (0.34-1.32)	0.54 (0.28-1.04)
<i>Fixed-term employees</i>	1.09 (0.65-1.84)	1.07 (0.62-1.85)	0.61 (0.17-1.03)	<b>0.47 (0.24-0.93)</b>
<i>Managers</i>	1.33 (0.73-2.42)	1.26 (0.69-2.31)	0.42 (0.17-1.03)	<b>0.32 (0.13-0.78)</b>

<sup>a</sup> Model also adjusted by age, educational attainment, social class, economic sector, cohabitation status, and family burden.

<sup>b</sup> Model also adjusted by age, educational attainment, social class, economic sector, cohabitation status, family burden, and stress.

Odds ratios are shown for incremental categories in each outcome analysed (corresponding to considering work as “very stressful” versus the categories “stressful” and “not at all or a little”, and “excellent mental health” versus “good” and “poor”).

Bold text indicates a statistically significant result less than or equal to the significance level cut-off of 0.05.

\* How to interpret the results: If the value of the regression estimate is above 1, the outcome under study is occurring to a greater extent among (some categories of) non-co-operative members than among co-operative members. If it is lower than 1, co-operative members are experiencing the outcome analysed to a greater extent. These interpretations hold true provided that the 95% confidence interval does not overlap 1. If this happens it means that there are no differences between the groups compared.

## Discussion

In this article, we studied the health and job satisfaction outcomes of co-operative members in comparison to other types of employment relations in the Basque Country. We anticipated that being a co-operative member could lead to having more favourable health and job satisfaction outcomes, but we do not observe a completely straightforward relationship. Only male co-operative members display better results in terms of job satisfaction while we observe poorer health outcomes among the female co-operative members participating in the survey. Further studies are needed, but we speculate that our results are affected at least in part by the context of economic instability and subsequent job insecurity that the Basque country, and particularly the co-operative sector, were facing.

Job insecurity is a phenomenon of anticipatory nature entailing “an everyday experience involving prolonged uncertainty about the future” (Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002, p. 243). Of the domains constituting job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Salas-Nicás et al., 2018), worker co-operative members might have experienced to a greater extent than salaried staff working conditions insecurity, namely the possibility of deterioration of the working conditions. The reason is the different organisational responses to economic crisis: capitalist firms tend to lay off employees rather than other strategies (Calderón & Calderón, 2012; Pencavel, 2012), whereas half of the companies of the Basque social economy did apply some kind of measure to deal with the

economic crisis during the study period (Gobierno Vasco & Departamento de Empleo y Políticas Sociales, 2014). In line with our results, this type of job insecurity has been associated with increased poor mental health (Salas-Nicás et al., 2018). Erdal’s (2014) results concerning the mental health of citizens of populations with different levels of density of co-operatives did not find differences but his study was not conducted in a time of deep economic crisis.

Arguably, among the salaried employees of the sample, the threat of job insecurity might have been more severe (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) by involving job loss insecurity (the threat of losing present job) and labour market insecurity (ease or not of finding another job in case of becoming unemployed). In our findings fixed-term male employees are less satisfied than co-operative members, which is consistent with the established association between job loss insecurity and job dissatisfaction (De Witte & Näswall, 2003; Sverke et al., 2002). In any case, worker co-operative members might also have had to face the “survivors’ effect” as during the study period salaried staff employed in cooperatives were dismissed (Gobierno Vasco & Departamento de Empleo y Políticas Sociales, 2016). The “survivors’ effect” comes with downsizing processes and it refers to the increased workload and stress the remaining workforce has to deal with as a result of staff reduction. Among other effects, it has been related to reduced job satisfaction and organisational commitment or increased

absenteeism (Kulkarni, 2008; Modrek & Cullen, 2013). Recent studies on Eroski and Fagor reveal higher absenteeism rates among co-operative members than among non-members (Basterretxea, Heras-Saizarbitoria, & Lertxundi, 2019; Basterretxea & Storey, 2018). As for Fagor, this was attributed by Human Resources managers to a deterioration in commitment linked to a greater sense of job security (Basterretxea et al., 2019), a kind of argument also mentioned in (Grunberg et al., 1996). In both co-operatives it was also –at least partly–related to discontent with austerity measures (e.g. wage cuts, relocations), which in the case of Eroski led to an increase in workload and stress. However, according to Eroski’s job satisfaction surveys, dissatisfaction among co-operative members in the firm was not new. In the view of managers, this was due to higher expectations not fulfilled as well as the policy decoupling pay and performance (Basterretxea & Storey, 2018).

The aforementioned reasoning could justify why co-operative members would have been more affected by job insecurity than other types of workers but why then do we only find negative results for female co-operative members? In our results’ interpretation we consider two pathways through which gender might be affecting the relationship between work and health: the fact that men and women are exposed to different working conditions as a result of gender segregation (in the labour market but also within jobs); and the fact that the way men and women experience their work-related exposures can lead to distinct health impacts (Casini, Godin, Clays, & Kittel, 2013; Quinn & Smith, 2018).

Concerning the differentiated exposure to health-affecting working conditions due to gender segregation, it is known that women in Basque co-operatives are more concentrated than men in

lower-skilled and lower-paid jobs and they scarcely participate in managerial and representative positions (Kasmir, 1996; Ribas, 2006). In our data, we also observe fewer women among the most advantaged categories of occupational social class. This could explain higher levels of stress among women as their occupational status provides them with lower control and less efficient coping strategies (Mayor, 2015, p. 3). Additionally, this might explain why in our study men in co-operatives—and not women—present higher levels of job satisfaction as women tend to be far from those features related to job satisfaction among co-operative members such as control (Nilsson et al., 2009), as well as remuneration and promotion opportunities (Gargallo, 2008).

In addition to women having lower occupational status, in our results, two of their most frequent job types were either “shop salespersons” or “cashiers and ticket clerks” and at least half of those with the worst health outcomes were assigned to these occupational codes. The survey used in this study seems to reflect the type of work most frequently carried out by women in co-operatives in the Basque Country namely “shop assistants and retailers” corresponding to the main occupation offered by one eminent distribution co-operative (not explicitly mentioned in Ribas’ study but most likely Eroski given its dominant market position) (Ribas, 2006, p. 161). The data we analysed is anonymized so it is impossible for us to discern where the respondents worked; thus, we can only conjecture an “Eroski effect” that would fit with the findings of increased stress and absenteeism in this co-operative (Basterretxea & Storey, 2018, p. 12). Regardless of the Eroski conjecture, interpersonal conflicts have been found to be the main job stressor of salespersons but when performing comparative analysis according to gender, interpersonal conflict, work

overload, and time wasters were perceived to a greater extent as stressful for women than for men (Narayanan, Menon, & Spector, 1999).

In this regard, stress, which has been found to interfere with depression and absenteeism (Casini et al., 2013; Mayor, 2015), is a good example to illustrate the differential health impacts of work-related exposures according to sex/gender. Men and women perceive job stressors differently, with women tending to judge demand stressors as more disturbing than men, and they also face different coping strategies (Mayor, 2015). It could be that in our sample women worked at workplaces with scarce social support as (high levels) of social support at work have been found to be beneficial for women to cope with work stress (Padkapayeva et al., 2018; Rivera-Torres, Araque-Padilla, & Montero-Simó, 2013). This hypothesis would not be consistent with earlier research (Carpita & Golia, 2012; Höckertin, 2008; Höckertin & Härenstam, 2006) although these studies did not present results stratified by gender so they could conceal differences—and they were conducted in more favourable economic times. Work-life interference cannot be ruled out as a reason for higher levels of stress among women, but studies tend to find better work-life balance in cooperatives and the social economy sector (Esteban, Gargallo, & Pérez, 2016; Richez-Battesti, Petrella, & Melnik, 2011).

### Strengths and limitations

The lack of population-based survey data about co-operatives makes it difficult to analyse and compare the effects of this organisation type (International Labour Organization, 2018). To the best of our knowledge, ours is the first study based on this type of data to compare the health status and job satisfaction outcomes of worker co-operative members with those of other types of workers. We drew from data of the Health Survey of the Basque Country (2013) because of the salient experience of the cooperative economy in this region and the high quality of the data. The turbulent time at which the data collection took place adds more interest to the study.

However, this is a cross-sectional study and, in addition to the limitations of this design type such as the impossibility of establishing causal relationships between variables or discarding inverse causality, this study has a small sample of co-operative members. Also, as this is a secondary analysis of a health survey, it lacks information on work-related variables (e.g., psychosocial exposures) as well as other factors which could potentially help better understand our results (e.g., the co-operative of which respondents were members). Moreover, we had to discard the working-hours variable because there were too many missing values.



## Conclusions and recommendations for future research

In this study, we observed worse results in health-related variables among women in co-operatives than among men. As the results of the study relate to a moment of economic turmoil for co-operatives in the Basque Country, further research is needed to find out whether these differential results are attributable, for instance, to short-term health effects of organisational strategies for maintaining employment in co-operatives resulting in increased work stress. Or further research might explore alternative explanations such as differential work exposures resulting from occupational gender segregation. There is also the need for qualitative studies which give prominence to co-operative members' voices and lived expertise to better understand their experience about health outcomes and health-affecting working conditions as well as for trend analyses.

Laia Ollé-Espluga has a master's degree in Public Health and holds a PhD in Applied Economy. Her research interests include health inequalities, work and employment, social economy and worker participation. She is a research collaborator at GREDS-EMCONET, Universitat Pompeu Fabra. At the Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz she has been the leader of the Project "Economy for the Common Good: Job Quality and Health" funded by the Austrian Science Fund (M 2158-G27).

Xavier Bartoll holds a master's in Public Health and a PhD in Applied Economy. His research has focused on the effects of the economic crisis on health outcomes. He also researches the effects of quality of work on health as well as inequalities on health. He Works at the Public Health Agency of Barcelona.

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# Co-operatives, Agricultural Livelihoods, Gender, and Differentiation in Rural Uganda<sup>1</sup>

JoAnn Jaffe, Lou Hammond Ketilson, Johnny Mugisha, Bernard B. Obaa, Diana Namwanje, and Mercy Nimusiima

## Abstract

*The Ugandan co-operative movement has made it a priority to improve the livelihoods of female and poor farmers. Based on field data from two sites in Uganda, this paper investigates how engagement with co-operatives affects male- and female-headed households with different levels of wealth. This is facilitated by comparing selected aspects of livelihoods of non-member households, single co-operative, and integrated co-operative member households. The research suggests that, for some agricultural households, co-operatives may provide opportunities for alternative pathways and trajectories, but that the effects may be more complicated, paradoxical, or counter-intuitive for others<sup>2</sup>. Engagement with the integrated co-operative model provided opportunities for some farmers, but it also increased some risk, vulnerability, and status competition. Outcomes on some measures commonly thought to be indicators of increased well-being appear to be worsening for some. Poor and female co-operative-member households appear to be less able to realize potential benefits of membership in co-operatives that are part of the integrated model. Academics, rural development specialists, and co-operative developers need to pay attention to these outcomes and plan their research and programming accordingly.*

## Introduction

Agriculture is the backbone of many economies in the developing world, accounting for between 30 and 60 percent of the gross domestic product of many countries. Yet most farmers in developing nations are poor and face serious challenges, such as an inadequate resource base, labour bottlenecks, lack of access to capital, high cost of inputs, low prices for agricultural commodities especially during harvest seasons, limited infrastructure for storage and transport, little social protection, and risks and uncertainties due to climate change. Lack of social services in remote rural areas, difficult and disadvantageous access to markets, and lack of power to influence decisions related to service delivery at the local, regional, and national levels (IFAD, 2001) constitute major barriers to poverty alleviation

and “the sustained improvement of the (rural) population’s standards of living or welfare” (Anriquez & Stamoulis, 2007,

Many small farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa face just such conditions. Their lives and livelihoods are precarious, vulnerable, unpredictable, and characterized by multiple forms of deprivation (Chambers, 2010). Describing their poverty only in terms of income does not capture the insecurity, uncertainty, marginality, and powerlessness that are its result. These conditions arise out of unequal social relations, which lead to inequitable access to resources, and inequalities in terms of responsibilities, claims on their time, and their ability to exert claims over others. Life tends to be particularly difficult for female-headed households due to institutionalized arrangements around gender (Jutting, 2011), and unequal entitlements and access to productive resources (Jiggins, 1989; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2011). At the same time, it is also through social relationships—for example, through participation in networks of family and friends—that many poor people survive. Notwithstanding such networks of mutual aid and support, however, many (poor and female) farmers are caught in a ‘simple reproduction squeeze’ (Bernstein, 2010) in which their coping strategies undermine their longer-term capacity to maintain themselves (Ayele, 2008).

Researchers have identified the potential of co-operatives to address many of the problems faced by rural dwellers—particularly smallholder farmers. Birchall (2003) examined the historical record of co-operatives around the world and concluded that co-ops can play an

important role in reducing poverty in developing countries. Furthermore, there is broad agreement on the generally positive role played by co-operatives in economic development (Birchall, 2003; Birchall et al, 2008; Wanyama, Develtere, & Pollet, 2008). Co-operatives can offer poorer farmers many advantages—from the ability to realize higher prices in markets that would otherwise be inaccessible, to the capacity to attain economies of scale and market power through product pooling (Poole, Chitundu, & Msoni, 2013). They also have the potential to facilitate social inclusion and to raise the productivity of female and small producers through connection with extension and credit services from which they would otherwise be excluded (Meier zu Selhausen, 2016; Mugisha, Ajar, & Elepu, 2012; Münkner, 2012).

Co-operatives, thus, may be able to ameliorate conditions of poverty by generating income, improving the institutional and organizational contexts of households pursuing rural livelihoods, and bringing together members from a range of socio-economic locations. They can have a positive impact on household livelihoods, for example, by improving their chances for accumulation and reproduction through increasing their ability to diversify crops, invest in businesses, and pay school fees. In addition, co-operatives concern themselves with community needs, providing services and supports that can decrease member socio-economic vulnerability (Delvetere et al, 2008). This means that co-ops have the potential to inhibit the (re)production of the conditions that perpetuate poverty. These include what have come to be called,

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2 This research was funded by the IDRC grant, “Examining Success Factors for Sustainable Rural Development through the Integrated Co-operative Model.” Portions of this paper rely heavily on the IDRC report for this grant.

'poverty traps,' such as the traps of family child labour, illiteracy, lack of working capital, debt bondage, vulnerability and risk, undernutrition, exclusion and powerlessness, and collective action with no collective benefit (Birchall & Simmons, 2009; Münkner, 2012). The prevalence of such conditions points to the need for multipronged approaches to development that align well with the co-operative principles and values of benefitting members by addressing self-identified needs. Taking on social, cultural, and political roles that reduce social exclusion, co-operatives can add a more inclusive option to the array of rural social institutions of co-operation and community.

Co-operatives increasingly address gender-based vulnerabilities through approaches such as mandating female membership and leadership quotas or creating training programs specifically for women. They may also offer opportunities for female householders to access markets or credit through more neutral social connections than are offered by family ties or the local community. Unfortunately, due to broader institutional arrangements around gender and, due to social relations at the household and community level that prevent equitable recognition or treatment, co-ops still face many challenges in realizing desired outcomes.

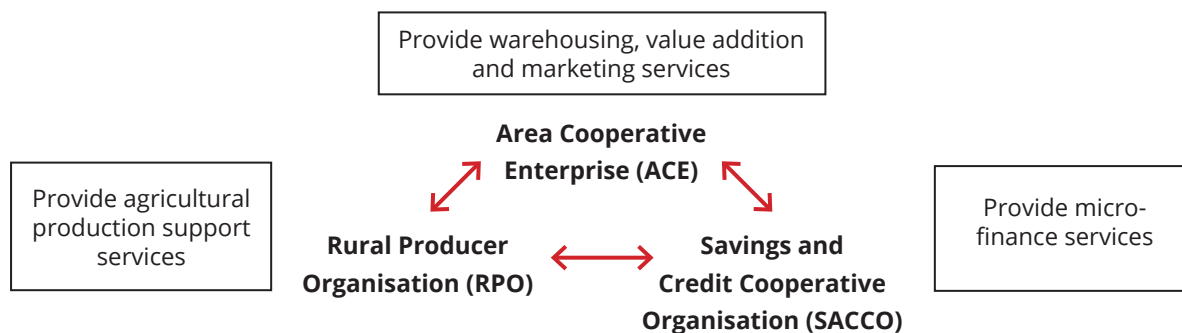
### **The Integrated Co-operative Model in the Ugandan Context**

In East Africa, the record of co-operatives in rural development has been contentious, but observers largely ascribe their mixed and less than stellar record to past government control and over-bureaucratization (Mrema, 2008; Mukarugwiza, 2010; Nyamwasa, 2008; Ruvuga, Masandika, & Heemsker, 2007).

Chambo, Mwangi, and Oloo, (2007) found that co-operatives have helped to reduce poverty as well as to, directly and indirectly, increase employment, particularly when they provide support for production, marketing, and financial services as part of an integrated system, such as is commonly found in Uganda.

In Uganda, co-ops were organized in a vertical, top-down structure for decades, but when the country's economic liberalization began in 1987 (Bazaara, 2001), co-ops, having been heavily state-supported, began to crumble. The co-operative sector in Uganda went through a dramatic process of restructuring and readjusting to the conditions of a liberalized economy (Afranaa-Kwapong, 2012). In the early 2000s, the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) helped to introduce co-operative financial institutions, an innovation that addressed a need felt by members of existing rural co-ops. Since 2004, the Uganda Co-operative Alliance (UCA) has been working with CCA to develop and support an integrated co-operative model for sustainable rural development. UCA also worked with the Swedish Co-operative Centre to support the further generalization of the model in western parts of Uganda. These partners supported UCA, and the co-ops for which it serves as national apex organization, in building their own tools and solutions for sustainable livelihoods—especially through owning and operating networked co-operative enterprises. The "Integrated Co-operative Model" that emerged integrates three functions: agricultural production, marketing, and access to financial services. These three arenas of co-operation are essential facets of this more holistic and networked approach to rural development<sup>i</sup>. The model can be illustrated as follows:

In this model for sustainable rural development, production, marketing support, and financial services are integrated, yet separate. Rural Producer



NB. The inter-linkage implies all serve the members of the same community

Source: Muhereza & Kyomuhendo, 2010. Reprinted with permission of the Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada.

Organizations (RPOs) are made up of individual smallholder farmers, who combine forces to increase their agricultural production and productivity, and to bulk, aggregate, or pool their production for sale. Area Co-operative Enterprises (ACEs) are second-tier co-ops focused on marketing, typically made up of six to ten member production co-ops working together to take advantage of economies of scale. Each ACE is required to handle at least three types of crops for diversification and risk minimization. These co-ops provide market information, source agricultural inputs in bulk, assist with strengthening of market linkages, and help to negotiate bulk sales at good prices. They also help to supply training and various other services to their member RPOs. SACCOs, the third element of the model, are co-operative financial institutions that act as engines for the development and growth of the two other types of co-operatives involved. SACCOs are the life blood of the other co-operative enterprises, as they provide the financing to households, RPOs, and ACEs that is needed to enhance agricultural production and productivity and run sustainable farm businesses. Individual households may belong to co-operatives of any or all three types at their discretion. Further, individual non-member households

may sell through the co-ops or borrow money through the SACCOs but they do not get access to the full array of services available to members, nor are they able to influence the direction of the co-op.

In their study of the integrated co-operative model of Uganda, Muhereza and Kyomuhendo (2010) argue that farmers gain improved access to markets and extension services through their production and marketing co-ops, and better access to credit through their membership in financial co-ops. They claim that implementation of the integrated model has resulted in higher household incomes, as well as increased food security for both male- and female-headed households. Mugisha et al. (2012) indicate that access to credit is an important determinant of whether farmers adopt new agricultural technology or are willing to attend training in new techniques, so the integrated model is key to agricultural development. Other case studies of the co-operative movement in Uganda show that co-operatives can both reach the poor and raise member incomes (Birchall & Simmons, 2009; Mrema, 2008).

These findings that co-operatives increase income and food security for the poor in Uganda, however, are largely based on

reports from co-operatives themselves or on key informant interviews and focus groups, rather than on household surveys delving into member and non-member experiences. Notable exceptions are Ampaire, Machethe, and Birachi (2013) and Latynskiy and Berger (2016) who found that co-operatives have mixed records in poverty reduction. Further, the record of co-operative performance where female producers are concerned is lacklustre or uneven at best (Ampaire, et al., 2013; Meier zu Selhausen, 2016). Access to credit through the co-operative sector is frequently dependent upon farmer savings, collateral, or other resource-demanding preconditions. This limits access for asset-poor members, including many female farmers (Ampaire et al., 2013). Both because of issues in their immediate households and problems with inclusion at the level of the co-operative, female producers appear to be at a disadvantage when it comes to realizing the full range of potential benefits from co-operative membership (Ampaire, et al., 2013). That women are hampered by gendered expectations, and that they are more likely to be poor and working smaller land holdings are some of the explanations proffered for this disparity.

Building on these findings and based on field research in two sites in Uganda, this study takes a more fine-grained look at issues of gender and household wealth in relation to co-operative participation and benefits. The paper explores how livelihood outcomes for farmers in different wealth categories, and for households headed by either males or females, may be affected by engagement with the integrated co-operative model in comparison with single co-operatives or with no co-operative at all. A particular focus is how, for different categories of farmers including female-headed households, membership in co-operatives may be associated with capabilities and entitlements that are useful for avoiding poverty traps and constructing resilient livelihoods.

## The Livelihood Concept

People's capacity to make a living exists at the nexus of a set of interrelated constraints and possibilities that affect how they assemble their livelihoods (Ploeg, 2013): "Livelihoods emerge out of past actions and decisions made within specific historical and agro-ecological conditions, and are constantly shaped by institutions and social arrangements" (De Haan & Zoomers, 2005, p. 43). Livelihood possibilities and outcomes are largely structural in that they are shaped by the pathways, trajectories, tactics, strategies, constraints, and ways of understanding inscribed by the wider context in which rural people find themselves (Jaffe, 1997; Van Dijk, 2011). These structures can be seen to operate at three interacting levels of social reality: the individual *habitus*, that is, the dispositions, tastes, personal understandings, and habits of a person, which are shaped by class, gender, ethnicity, and so on (Bourdieu, 1977); the interactional, being the face-to-face world of family, group, and community; and, the societal, the relations or structure of positions, identities, roles, practices, and discourses. Conditions of constraint, opportunity, vulnerability, and exposure vary for farmers in different relational positions, given the properties, powers, and susceptibilities of these households and livelihoods.

The focus, therefore, is on social relations, in that "capabilities, motivations, and trajectories are contextually shaped relational phenomena" (Van Dijk, 2011, p.103). People's agency as expressed through their habitus is strongly shaped by structure, as are their livelihood strategies. At every level of society, inequalities shape agency and the ability to realize the goals of action. In this way, structures do not just make some strategies and outcomes more likely but, through habitus, they also differentiate actors' preferences and make some more likely to adopt particular strategies. That habitus is gendered



makes it more likely, for example, that any increases in poor women's income will be spent on family members rather than on personal consumption or status competition, as is more often the case for men. Stratification, however, tends to make the habitus of some categories of actors seem more 'normal' and acceptable. It "privileges some actors' identities, strategies, places, and spatial-temporal horizons over others" (Jessop, 2001, p.1231) so that these people's worldviews and ways of being are more likely to fit comfortably with the dominant culture and be successful.

At their most basic, livelihoods depend upon capabilities and entitlements, and being able to successfully overcome vulnerabilities. People must be able to get access to essential components of livelihood, such as land, labour, knowledge, seeds and other inputs, animals, tools, and markets, and they do so via relationships that give people rights to those components. Livelihoods, thus, depend upon the successful accomplishment of social relations within the web of family, community, economy, and state. In the context of a gendered division of labour that is as often unequal, hierarchical, conflictual, as it is co-operative and interdependent, intra-household relations reflect the contradictory tensions arising from a stratified 'economy of affection' (Hyden, 1980). While it is now recognized that households are rarely unitary and women may need to bargain and negotiate their access to resources in gendered ways, households can also be characterized as embracing 'projects' or over-arching logics or objectives while, at the same time, reacting to the everyday contingencies of lived events (Jaffe & Kaler, 2016; O'Laughlin, 2007). As rural livelihoods are in some sense community-based, they are also shaped by relations with family and neighbours. These relations may be contradictory in that farmers depend on each other for formal and informal help, but may

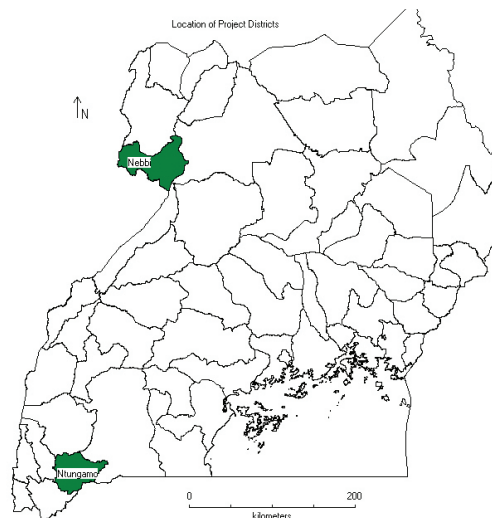
also be in competition for land, labour, other inputs, or markets, and in conflict over local issues of power and control. Households may find they are advantaged or disadvantaged in their productive capacity due to their membership in advantaged or disadvantaged categories.

At the societal level, relations of livelihood are conditioned, shaped, and limited by rights, practices, policies, and discourses, and are influenced by the broader institutional arrangements of gender, class, private property, ethnicity, and so on, that structure the relations of power within society (Jaffe & Gertler, 2008; Jutting, 2011; Pretty, Toulmin, & Williams, 2011). Women and smaller landowners, for example, may not be viewed as real farmers or as the future of farming, and thus be left outside the circle of official assistance. Women are also generally less likely to inherit land than men and, when they do, they often find it more difficult to farm successfully on their own account because of difficulties in accessing necessities such as capital, labour, and information due to gender dynamics.

## Research Area and Methods

This study focused on households in Ntungamo District<sup>i</sup>, located in southwestern Uganda, and Nebbi District<sup>ii</sup>, located in northwestern Uganda. Both areas host numerous Savings and Credit Co-operative Associations (SACCOs), Rural Producer Organizations (RPOs), and Area Co-operative Enterprises (ACEs). The RPOs and ACEs handle a variety of crops/commodities, including dairy in Nebbi District. The SACCOs offer various products and services aimed at both production and consumption needs.

In each of these regions, researchers administered household surveys in 2014 and 2015 to obtain data with which to measure any differences among Integrated



Co-operative Member (ICM) households, Single Co-operative Member (SCM) households, and Non Co-operative Member (NCM) households. The household survey asked both closed questions designed to gather quantitative data, and open-ended questions that made it possible for study participants to explain and elaborate on their responses. A broad range of data was collected, from household characteristics and demographics, to variables focusing on agriculture production and other aspects of livelihood. The household data was analyzed using SPSS. In both regions, household members belonging to all three categories were selected and interviewed. The target was to interview a total of 600 households divided equally among the three categories of co-operative membership in the Ntungamo and Nebbi Districts. The actual numbers interviewed were 281 ICM households, 119 SCM households, and 200 NCM households. The household interviews were face-to-face interviews with household heads or their spouses. A selection of households was re-encountered in validation workshops, which were held to follow-up on issues arising from initial analysis of survey data. The data presented in contingency tables and analyzed using Chi-square statistics, are from the household surveys. Additional explanations are incorporated from information gathered at the workshops.

Given that these data present a snapshot of livelihoods and communities at one point in time, it may be difficult to trace causal relationships. One may argue, however, that the largely critical realist orientation that this work is embedded in leads to the view that social reality can best be understood as a network of causal relations, mechanisms, and path dependencies that present conditions, opportunities, liabilities, outcomes, and dynamics for different positions in social relations, such as rich versus non-rich, women versus men, and, one might assume, for co-op members versus non-members. Consistent with this, we would view these initial findings as pointing to issues for further exploration within a complicated web of causality. The findings are highly suggestive but it remains difficult to confirm linear causal relationships using data collected at one moment in time.

## Characteristics of Farming Households

Both the Nebbi and Ntungamo districts are areas of relatively small mixed farms that, in general, are only partially market-oriented. Farmers in both areas grow a varied assortment of produce throughout the year, including coffee, cassava, sweet

potatoes, maize, millet, sorghum, Irish potatoes, pineapples, and green vegetables. Farmers in Nebbi grow a wider variety of crops, but their animal production is mainly limited to goats and pigs. Ntungamo farmers produce a more limited range of crops but integrate diverse livestock, including cattle, goats, sheep, chickens, bees, and some pigs, into their farming systems. Both areas offer other livelihood possibilities such as stone quarrying and charcoal-making in Nebbi, and brick-making and lumbering in Ntungamo.

In both districts, ICM, SCM, and NCM survey households are quite similar in terms of demographics. Most households are male-headed, monogamously married, and make their primary income through farming. The household head has seven years or less of schooling, with children who have spent or are spending their elementary school years in the public-school system. Most households orient their production towards their own subsistence, be that through direct consumption or via sale of their own

produce and subsequent purchase of other goods. They typically sell some of their crops, but not the majority, and also report experiencing severe constraints in their crop production.

Some differences of note are that ICM households tend to live in homes with more rooms than SCM or NCM households and they are less likely to send their boys to high school, apparently keeping them home to labour. As seen in Table 1, which illustrates the child dependency ratio and total dependency ratio, households with membership in co-operatives have on average approximately twice the number of dependents to look after—especially more children. One implication of higher dependency ratios is that the adults in these households need a larger resource base, or to increase output or returns in other ways, in order to maintain consumption standards (Ploeg, 2013).

**Table 1. Dependency ratio among households in different co-operative**

Dependency ratio	ICM (n=281)	SCM(n=119)	NCM (n=200)
Child dependency ratio	1.79*	1.76*	0.91*
Total dependency ratio	1.95*	1.90*	0.94*

\* = PValue < 0.01

## Wealth, Diversification, and Income

Having access to land and being able to use it effectively are central dimensions of agriculturally-based livelihoods. These, in turn, often depend upon social arrangements that can be difficult to negotiate in the context of inequalities and a gendered division of labour, and where

relations within and between households are hierarchical and conflictual as well as co-operative (Sen 1990). Even if women have access to land, for example, they may have difficulty accessing the labour required to work it due to the unequal exchange value of their labour and their

poor bargaining power, which means they can be too poor to work the land they have or may be unable to access the labour and other things they need to benefit from it (Jaffe, 1997).

As seen in Table 2, there were statistically significant differences among ICM, SCM, and NCM households in terms of the average total land owned and acres currently in use. ICM households generally own and are using larger amounts of land. This was especially true among households led by males. Only about half of the NCM households own land for production. Over two-fifths of NCM households—and fully two-thirds of female-headed NCM households—only rent land (compared with a fifth of ICM and a little more than one-quarter of SCM households). Livestock (especially, cattle, sheep, and goats) are the other critical physical asset and key indicator of wealth. Livestock impart resilience to livelihoods by being a store of value and a source of ready cash in case of emergency, and by providing traction, food, and fertilizer. Differences in terms of the livestock index, which is a combined count of livestock based upon Tropical Livestock Units (TLUs), were also statistically significant among households belonging to integrated co-operatives, single co-operatives, and not belonging to any co-operatives. ICM households had the highest livestock index. This was mostly a result of higher livestock inventories in male-headed households. Although, on average, female NCM households were much less likely to own land and also own fewer livestock than other female-headed households, their household income was larger.

Diversification is an important strategy that allows households to withstand shocks and gives some protection from the vagaries of markets, weather, crop yields, and social relations. The Livelihood Diversity Index used here is a measure

that computes the total number of income sources and the income proportion from each, including crops and livestock (self-provisioning and sales), employment (formal and informal, self-employment or working for others), and other sources of support<sup>iv</sup>. Although sampled households in different co-operative relations generally did not show much difference in terms of diversification levels, there was a significant difference between female-headed and male-headed SCM and NCM households (Table 2). Male-headed SCM and NCM households had much more diversified livelihoods than female-headed households in the same categories, while female-headed ICM households managed to assemble as many sources of income and livelihood as their male-headed counterparts, in general. However, average male-headed ICM household income (farm plus non-farm income minus expenses) was almost four times that of female-headed ICM households. Furthermore, belonging to an integrated set of co-operatives was associated with significantly higher livelihood diversity for female-headed households as compared to female-headed SCM or NCM households.

Female-headed ICM and SCM households had significantly fewer assets than corresponding male-headed households. This included productive assets, such as hoes, *pangas* (a type of machete), spades, slashers, sickles and ox ploughs, as well as items classified as consumption assets, such as radios, clocks, bicycles, mobile phones, motorcycles, sofas, and lanterns. In contrast, male-headed and female-headed NCM households did not show significant differences in assets, although this may have been related to the fact that both groups were quite asset-poor in general. Lack of assets is a result of the inability to generate sufficient cash, but also contributes to future poverty, lack of status, and incapacity to participate in labour exchange.

**Table 2. Mean wealth indicators among households in different co-operative**

Wealth indicators	ICM (n=281)		SCM (n=119)		NCM (n=200)	
Average total acres owned	7.02*		6.10*		2.90*	
Average acres in use	4.17*		3.51*		2.54*	
Rents land only (%)	20.64*		26.89*		42.55*	
Livestock Index	2.00**		1.77**		1.06**	
Average livelihood diversity index	0.26		0.23		0.26	
Average asset index	0.59		0.57		0.51	
Average asset index	0.59		0.57		0.51	

	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Average total acres owned	7.85***	3.24***	6.61	3.84	3.02	2.10
Average acres in use	4.55**	2.45**	3.65	2.89	2.60	2.19
Rents land only (%)	19.57	25.49	23.71	40.91	39.16**	68.18**
Livestock index	2.27**	0.78**	2.00	0.68	1.16***	0.40***
Average livelihood diversity index	0.25	0.27	0.26**	0.12**	0.28**	0.13**
Average asset index	0.73**	0.45**	0.74**	0.39**	0.54	0.47
Average household income	1.69**	0.45**	1.20	0.59	1.00	0.93

**NOTE:** \* = PValue < 0.01; \*\* = PValue < 0.05; \*\*\* = PValue < 0.09

Household income is farm income plus own business minus expenses in million UGX.

Asset index does not include land or livestock.

## Labour Relations

Being able to hire labour to work one's land and, conversely, hiring one's self out to work on land owned by others are key indicators of well-being and class differences among agricultural households. As seen in Table 3, ICM, male-headed SCM, and female-headed NCM households are more likely to hire others to work in their fields, male and female co-op members are much less likely to work on others' fields, while male-headed

and female-headed NCM households are much more likely to hire themselves out to work on someone else's land. Although a rare occurrence overall, male-headed ICM and female-headed NCM households are slightly more likely to own an ox-plough, which, in substituting capital for labour, makes cultivating larger land bases easier and quicker. These findings likely indicate a bifurcation of the female NCM population, with some households



being much better off than the rest. Some ICM (especially) and SCM households—whether male- or, to a lesser extent, female-headed—participate in labour exchanges. Labour exchange can be a valuable way to access timely help without the need for cash payment (although it can be costly in terms of food or other

resources), but the person accessing the exchange must have an equivalency of labour to exchange, which tends to make it a male-gendered strategy in a way that cash payment is not. Participating in labour exchange groups can also be a source of social capital that can be drawn on in times of need.

**Table 3. Labour Relationsrelationsrelations**

Labour Relations	ICM% (n=281)		SCM% (n=119)		NCM%(n=200)	
Hired labour	52.92*		22.01*		25.07*	
Hhd men working on other's land	21.55*		11.21*		67.24*	
Labour exchange	20.28		19.33		13.78	
Own ox plough	0.05		0.01		0.01	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Hired labour	69.13	60.78	73.20*	36.36*	41.52**	65.52**
Hhd men working on other's land	10.87*	0.00*	12.37	4.55	40.94	27.59
Labour exchange	20.87	17.65	19.59	18.18	14.37	10.34
Own ox plough	0.06	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00*	0.07*

NOTE: \* = PValue < 0.01; \*\* = PValue < 0.05; \*\*\* = PValue < 0.09

## Hunger and Food Security

It is often assumed that livelihood advantages, such as improved access to resources or higher incomes, will automatically translate into enhanced food security. As is shown in Table 4, this research suggests that this may not necessarily always be the case. Although this analysis shows that level of wealth appears to have no significant impact on food security status for NCM households during times of plenty—meaning that assets and income have little impact on the ability of NCM households to feed themselves when times are good, co-op

membership does, with SCM households more likely than other households to eat three meals when food is generally plentiful. During times of scarcity, also known as the hungry season, NCM need much more income on average to eat three meals, in other words, the income threshold for the average NCM household eating three meals a day was significantly higher than for co-op member households. During the hungry season, co-op membership appears to confer a dietary advantage for those with assets and income—except that households

with higher income and assets and also integrated co-op membership are more likely to forgo a third meal, in preference, according to our interviews, for spending on private, secondary education for their children. Further, the hungry season is described as longer by integrated and single co-op members; they estimate that their households spend more than twice

as many months on average without enough food as compared with non-member households. Female-headed ICM households also appear to have trouble eating three meals during times of plenty, reflecting their lower incomes in relation to other ICM households, and indicating that some of their income is being diverted elsewhere.

**Table 4: Food security status by asset index and cooperative membership percentage**

	ICM (n=281)		SCM (n=119)		NCM (n=200)				
	Asset index	P	Asset index	P	Asset index	P			
<b>Number of meals consumed during plenty season</b>		0.1		0		0.2			
One meal	-0.72		0.00		-0.49				
Two meals	-0.03		-0.20		-0.42				
Three meals	0.4		0.48		-0.19				
<b>Number of meals consumed during scarcity season</b>		0		0		0			
One meal	-0.08		-0.29		-0.48				
Two meals	0.28		0.29		-0.08				
Three meals	0.86		1.25		0.05				
	ICM by % (n=281)			SCM by % (n=119)			NCM by % (n=200)		
<b>Number of meals consumed during plenty season</b>									
One meal	0.71			0			5		0
Two meals	53.02			47			54		
At least three meals	46.26			53			41		
<b>Number of meals consumed during scarcity season</b>									
One meal	47.33			44			64		0
Two meals	47.33			43			30		
At least three meals	10.68			27			23		
	M	F	P	M	F	P	M	F	P
<b>Number of meals consumed during plenty season</b>									
One meal	0.43	2	0.1	0	0	0.4	5.3	3.45	0.9
Two meals	50.87	63		45	54.55		54	55.17	
At least three meals	48.7	35		55	45.45		41	41.38	
<b>Number of meals consumed during scarcity season</b>									
One meal	45.65	55	0.2	42	50	0.4	63	68.97	0.8
Two meals	42.17	41		42	45.45		30	24.14	
At least three meals	12.17	3.9		15	4.55		7	6.9	

## Patterns of Credit and Debt

Agriculturally-based rural households need cash to farm or to engage in other productive activities as well as to satisfy household consumption needs. Researchers have noted that shortages of cash and credit can shape decision-making about the farming system in ways that lead to poverty traps and undermine the productive basis of livelihood<sup>v</sup> (Jaffe, 1997; Mugisha et al., 2012). One role of livestock in these households is to provide a ready source of cash for emergencies. Selling livestock in this way may precipitate a cycle of destructive coping strategies where the household's productive base is put in jeopardy in order to meet current demands (Ayele, 2008). Borrowing cash or in-kind from local lenders at high rates of interest can trigger the same sort of crisis. The ready availability of credit at reasonable rates is critical for the resilience and development of rural livelihoods.

Households in these regions have access to several sources of financial services. They can belong to SACCO (described above) or Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA), or they can borrow from family, friends, commercial banks, or money lenders. A VSLA is a self-selected group of people, usually unregistered, who pool their money into a savings fund. Some consider the VSLA an improvement over the traditional savings club or rotating fund though, like these, it requires no external funding and operates within the informal sector. Its operation and strength depend on the savings contributions made by its members and on the repayment track record of member-borrowers. Members of the VSLA can borrow from the savings pool and the money is paid back with interest, causing the money to grow. Regular savings contributions to the association are made with an end date in mind for distribution of all or part of the total (including interest earnings) to the individual members, usually on the basis of a formula that links payout to the

amount saved by each member. As seen in Table 5, the prevalence of saving in a VSLA was significantly ( $P \leq 0.01$ ) different between ICM, NCM, and NCM households. ICM households were the most frequent savers in VSLAs. As SACCO members, they were expected to be saving less in VSLAs. While this could be an indication that these households participate more in structured social activities, it may also be another cash-generating or diversification strategy for them.

Borrowing money and acquiring income from remittances was also statistically and significantly ( $P \leq 0.01$ ) different among the households belonging to integrated and single co-operatives. Households in integrated co-operatives and single co-operatives borrowed money from both formal and informal sources. The majority of households that acquired income from remittances were male- and female-headed ICM households (about 9% in each). Remittances were received by a little over 1% of NCM households.

Co-op households generally borrowed more money and from a greater variety of sources. When they did borrow, non-members borrowed mainly from friends and relatives, perhaps because they offer loans at low or no cost, or perhaps because these borrowers had a harder time qualifying for formal loans. Borrowing and lending among friends and relatives has been quite common (Kashuliza et al., 1998) but is reported to be on the decline because of increasing dishonesty and declining levels of trust. Furthermore, some may feel that borrowing from family is less desirable because it leads to a loss of autonomy and/or privacy, family having a 'say' over decisions, and so on.

Gender-related patterns of borrowing were very similar across the membership categories, with the exception that female-headed SCM households were less likely to borrow money from a VSLA

and more likely to borrow from family and friends than their male counterparts. Whether women are reluctant to borrow or are less likely to get loans from VSLAs for whatever reason is unknown. Some people are much more likely to save than borrow from a VSLA and vice versa, e.g. male-headed ICM households and female-led SCM households were about twice as likely to save in a VSLA than to borrow from one. NCM households overall were more likely to borrow than to save. VSLAs usually give shorter-term loans than SACCOs or commercial banks, and some charge much higher interest rates. Therefore, farmers do not use such loans for long-term investment in production but, rather, for routine or unexpected household or farm expenditures. This is a complex phenomenon that represents

a transfer of wealth from borrowers to lenders but also reflects the availability of credit on relatively easy terms. Saving and borrowing money with VSLAs is easier compared to SACCOs and banks because of accessibility and simpler procedures for taking out loans. As well, these same qualities mean that the availability of VSLA credit provides some freedom from money lenders; borrowing from money lenders is usually a last resort due to high interest rates and the risk incurred by taking on such obligations. In fact, there were households in this study whose land base was smaller than it was 5 years earlier due to forfeiture to a money lender. The fact that SACCOs are not used as much as VSLAs, however, is an indication of that the financial services aspect of the ICM model is falling short of its potential.

**Table 5. Use of Financial Services**

	ICM%		SCM%		NCM%	
Save in VSLA	70.46*		52.10*		14.50*	
Borrowed money from VSLA	35.94*		40.34*		30.80*	
Borrowed money from SACCO	25.62*		19.33*		22.60*	
Borrowed from relatives and friends	11.74*		14.29*		25.00*	
Acquire income from remittances	9.21*		0.00*		1.00*	
Borrow money from money lender	3.20		1.68		0.50	

	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Save in VSLA	70.87	68.63	54.64	40.91	15.20	10.34
Borrowed money from VSLA	34.78	41.18	44.33**	22.73**	15.79	13.79
Borrowed money from SACCO	26.52	21.57	19.59	18.18	8.77	6.9
Borrowed from relatives and friends	12.17	9.80	12.37	22.73	26.32	17.24
Acquire income from remittances	9.30	8.70	0.00	0.00	1.17	0.00
Borrow money from money lender	3.91	0.00	2.06	0.00	0.58	0.00

NOTE: \* = PValue < 0.01; \*\* = PValue < 0.05; \*\*\* = PValue < 0.09

## Commercialization and Co-operative Impact

Governments, including the current Ugandan government, often promote commercialization, measured in terms of an increasing proportion of agricultural production sold via local, regional, or global markets. Fuller development of co-operatives is seen as crucial to rural development in that co-operatives are viewed as vehicles to promote increased and efficient production and trade of agricultural goods, and to eliminate poverty by connecting rural producers more reliably to commodity markets (MTIC, 2011). Co-operatives provide farmers better prices for their products because they can successfully store commodities and wait for better prices and higher volume buyers. Governments support co-operative development because they believe that facilitating smallholder organization, reducing the costs of intermarket commerce, and increasing access to improved technologies and productive assets will stimulate market participation and provide a pathway for poorer farmers to escape from poverty traps (Barrett, 2007).

The assumption is that farmers who are more highly commercialized will also enjoy improved welfare because they will earn higher incomes. This is expected to initiate a virtuous cycle in which higher incomes will lead to improved household consumption and, more generally, to enhanced local demand. Underlying these assumptions is the belief that all farmers will be able to commercialize their enterprises and that, furthermore, commercialization will bring only good things to rural households and communities. Not acknowledged here are those whose greater involvement in commercialization results from their poverty, or whose capabilities, entitlements, and vulnerabilities render

them worse-off as they attempt to further commercialize their operations (Carletto, Corral, & Guelfi, 2017; Poole et al., 2013).

All the co-operative organizations that make up the integrated model are committed to improving and increasing production, productivity, and commercialization of products from member households. In both study areas, RPOs and ACEs handle a variety of products, such as maize, beans, coffee, *matooke* (banana), cotton, sesame, honey, and milk. Households thus have a choice of several crops they can market through co-operatives. ICM and SCM households reported multiple marketing-related benefits resulting from co-operative membership, including lower marketing costs, secure storage, market access, and better prices and payment conditions. While ICM households were more likely to be pursuing commercial pathways, ICM households were not invariably more commercialized than other types of households in this study. Every household sells some of its production, and whether households belong to co-operatives or not, they all market a portion of their output outside the co-operative. Farmers may continue to sell to people with whom they have established trading relationships, or they may want quick sales that generate quick returns rather than waiting for higher returns that might be obtained through a co-operative. The women of a household may generate income from direct selling of produce. A household may also sell crops not handled by the co-op.

For households of all types, the level of commercialization did not appear to be closely related to many of the variables with which one might expect it to be correlated. Contrary to the presumptions of governments and the predictions of many experts (Ploeg, 2013), in this population, neither the total output of crops, nor amount of land owned, nor lack of problems with improved varieties, nor the sex or age of household head, nor size



of household, is significantly related to the proportion of crop marketed. Degree of commercialization is also not reliably associated with the number of days of labour exchanged, nor with the number of months that a household goes without sufficient food. Rather, whether farmers are large or small, old or young, hungry or well-fed, commercialization appears to be related to livelihood specialization, or lack of livelihood diversity—that is, where the proportion of income from crop sales is high, and the range of crops is relatively narrow, but without a corresponding increase in income from livestock sales or other sources of income. In this context, commercialization might be considered a risky household strategy or an indication of lack of resilience, particularly when linked to other indicators of vulnerability. The level of commercialization is also associated with the amount of school fees paid by households.

Further, despite the supposition that availability of credit should lead to stronger market orientation, borrowing from a VSLA was negatively related to the level of commercialization. This may be because VSLAs usually give short-term loans, often with higher interest rates, as mentioned previously. Perhaps counter-intuitively, commercialization was also negatively correlated with the level of education of the household head. This may partially be attributable to the fact that some farmers with relatively high levels of education have alternative sources of income such as salaried employment. They were also less likely to be members of co-operatives. Importantly, this may also indicate that commercialization is less about the underlying logic of the enterprise than it is an income-generating strategy oriented towards satisfying household consumption.

In addition to the factors cited above, age, the average daily rate of hired labour, seeing prices as being low, the amount saved with a VSLA, the amount borrowed from a SACCO, and household

size are all positively associated with commercialization in ICM households. This suggests that ICM households are engaged in production strategies with a somewhat different logic than other households, one that reflects a more conventionally understood market orientation. One can also see other income-optimizing strategies being pursued by ICM households: saving with a VSLA but borrowing from a SACCO, for example. Such strategies have implications beyond the enterprise. Increased demand for cash labour—likely due to increasing ICM commercialization—is causing wages to rise and, in the process, encouraging the adoption of labour-saving technologies and other cost-reduction strategies. Status competition and social class differentiation in these regions is also reported to be increasing, with sometimes unexpected results.

## Changes in Land Farmed and Farming

In general, ICM and SCM households are farming more land compared to five years ago (see Table 6), which they attributed to the various supports they received from their co-operatives, enabling them to buy more land. The support was mainly in the form of soft loans and provision of markets for their products. However, some households in these same categories were also much more likely to be farming less land compared to five years earlier. These households reported selling land, giving land to children, or losing land to money lenders.

When these results are disaggregated by gender, what may be happening becomes clearer. Both male and female co-op members were likely to farm more land than they did five years ago, but male-headed households who belong to co-ops were also more likely than female-headed households to farm less

land now than they did five years ago. At the same time, female-headed NCM households were much less likely to farm more land than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, in contrast to co-operative member households, most NCM households reported farming the same amount of land as they did five years earlier. Somewhat surprisingly, compared to NCM households, more ICM and SCM households reported experiencing both good and bad changes in their farming in the last five years. They described good changes stemming from increased production and productivity, which they ascribed to agronomic training they got from their co-operatives. The bad changes

included reports of increased pests and diseases, such as outbreaks of banana and coffee wilt that destroyed crops or led to lower yields and problems with soil fertility. They also complained that households that were affected did not get help from the co-operatives. Bad weather was another concern. Drought and floods destroyed fields and reduced yields. The NCM households who did see good changes mentioned rising incomes, being better able to take care of their families, and improved food security. Those who mentioned bad changes echoed ICM and SCM household complaints but also frequently mentioned problems of access to land and loss of income.

**Table 6. Changes in land farmed and farming**

	ICM % (n=281)		SCM % (n=119)		NCM % (n=200)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Farmed more land last 5 years						
	65.84*		68.91*		19.50*	
Farmed less land than last 5 years						
	33.45*		38.66*		15.00*	
Saw good changes in farming last 5 years						
	79.29*		78.15*		58.00*	
Saw bad changes in farming last 5 years						
	77.14*		70.59*		53.50*	
Farmed more land last 5 years	66.09	64.71	69.07	68.18	21.64**	6.90**
Farmed less land than last 5 years	37.39*	15.69*	41.24	27.27	15.79	10.34
Saw good changes in farming last 5 years	80.35	74.51	81.44***	63.64***	54.39*	79.31*
Saw bad changes in farming last 5 years	76.52	80.00	71.13	68.18	54.97	44.83

## Conclusions

While the picture presented here is admittedly complex, there are some findings that deserve to be underlined. This research indicates that poverty traps are not related only to the deficits of individual households and that escaping poverty traps for both households and communities is not just about making more money. It also emphasises that households in different structural positions have or face distinct conditions of livelihood and thus, in essence, live in different worlds of opportunities and constraints, risks and vulnerabilities, and engagements and strategies. This means that different households faced with similar opportunities will achieve variable results, and that many unintended consequences can ensue from developments that inadequately acknowledge or address these differences.

The original question was, how has the ICM model, and membership in participating co-ops, changed the conditions of livelihood for Ugandan farmers? Are impacts different with membership in a single co-operative, or in no co-operative at all? The outcomes, such as can be understood, are nuanced, complex, and interesting. The presence of the ICM model seems to make a difference in the sense that some new strategies and options for accumulation become available, and some farmers appear to be able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by these co-operatives. Some farmers appear to be adopting strategies that increase their 'take' from VSLAs and SACCOs, or are using additional money they gain from marketing through co-operatives to buy land.

As the possibilities for accumulation increase, however, there can be paradoxical or perverse outcomes. ICM-promoted farming strategies are associated with an increased need for cash and, thereby, also increased risk. Commercialization is similarly related to factors that increase vulnerability. While sometimes remunerative, greater participation in commercial trade networks may be a sign of economic stresses, or a source of new risks and vulnerabilities. Some ICM and SCM households have been able to acquire a bigger land base but others, in numbers larger than expected, have been getting smaller. Meanwhile, farmers without co-op membership mostly appeared to be holding their own. Some ICM households experienced food insecurity where their SCM counterparts did not. ICM households are selling more of their production and realizing higher incomes but, ironically, also eating less and experiencing longer periods of hunger. Status competition appears to be increasing, with some households spending more money on private schools, particularly for their teenage girls, which is reported to be an indicator to neighbours that one is doing well. This investment can be at a cost of spending money on food for the household. At the same time, because of increased demand for their labour in household farming operations, ICM boys are less likely to go to high school. ICM households are also more frequently spending money to expand their homes. Such unanticipated and even contradictory findings challenge researchers to look closely at interactions and knock-on effects. Likewise, there needs to be more attention to interacting social, agronomic, and economic dimensions if co-operatives are to have more positive impacts on poverty traps.

Women are participating as ICM and SCM, but their farms are not as large and they are not as wealthy as their male counterparts. Typically, they seem unable to realize the same advantages as men. Indeed, the integrated model may be widening the gap between male- and female-headed ICMs. One positive exception is that female-headed ICM households had a livelihood diversity index as high as male-headed households even

though their incomes, land base, livestock holdings, and other assets were considerably lower than their male counterparts. Their diversity index was also more than twice that of female-headed SCM or NCM households,

This persistence of disadvantage for women should be a source of concern for the Ugandan co-operative movement, which is working hard to integrate and empower women as farmers and co-op members. While their disadvantage is linked to other institutionalized arrangements impacting gender equality, co-operatives need to recognize and compensate for these factors if they are to meet goals of equitable inclusion. This too is an important area for further study.

The research presented here demonstrates the importance of gendering analyses of co-operatives and rural development so as to garner clearer understandings of what is happening to women and men. All households can experience adversity. Gender and co-op membership are not the only predictors, and they rarely operate in isolation from other factors. Wealth-related differentiation of households is an outcome of complex processes involving capabilities, vulnerabilities, access, and exclusion. Co-operatives, particularly co-operatives effectively linked to other proactive and democratic organizations, can contribute to poverty reduction and reducing inequalities. To do so reliably, however, they must avoid unidimensional diagnoses or programming.

Dr. JoAnn Jaffe is a professor of sociology and social studies at the University of Regina. She teaches sociology of development, environment, gender, rural sociology, and social theory. Her work has included collaborative studies with communities and universities in the Global South, as well as more conventional academic research. Recent research relates to the social impacts of co-operatives in East Africa; social practices related to agri-food production in Ethiopia; and the restructuring of rural life and agriculture in Saskatchewan.

Dr. Lou Hammond Ketilson is the Fellow in Co-operative Management at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, and Adjunct Professor, Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Saskatchewan, Canada. Dr. Hammond Ketilson is recognized for her research and publications on financial co-operatives, Aboriginal co-operative development and gender and diversity in co-operatives. Her work has a strong policy focus, specifically the role that co-operatives play in achieving sustainable economic and social development.

Dr. Johnny Mugisha is a Professor of Agricultural Economics in the Department of Agribusiness and Natural Resource Economics, Makerere University. He teaches macroeconomics, international trade and research methods. He has been doing applied research in the discipline of socio-economics with interest in technology adoption, resource optimization, and cooperatives and marketing. He has supervised and mentored over 80 graduate students with whom he has founded "The Johnny Mugisha Foundation" (<http://johnnymugishafoundation.org/>).

Dr. Bernard B. Obaa is a Senior Lecturer and the Director of Continuing Agricultural Education Center at Makerere University. He teaches rural sociology, community development and agricultural development in Africa. His research mainly focuses on analysis of social networks and resource access, food security, agricultural technology development, farmer organizations including cooperatives and agricultural extension services in post-conflict and pastoral communities in Uganda and South Sudan.

Diana Namwanje has an Msc. in Agricultural and Applied Economics from Makerere University, Uganda. Currently she is working as a consultant with DataCapital International Consultancy. Her work has included monitoring and evaluation studies, policy evidence-based research, rural development, and studies on intellectual property.

Mercy Nimusiima is a Research Officer/Agricultural Economist at Kachwekano Zonal Agricultural Research Development Institute (KaZARDI) under the National Agricultural Research Organization (NARO) in Uganda. She has a strong background in agricultural and rural development with expertise in value chain development, farmer-led institutional development, commercialization of smallholder agriculture, and project monitoring and evaluation. Her research interests relate to the role of institutional arrangements on organizational performance and socio-economic impact evaluation of agricultural technologies on livelihoods of smallholder farmers.



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## Notes

- i We use this label in part because this model of locally controlled but collaborating and regionally, nationally, and internationally linked rural co-operatives overlaps with the idea of networked rural development proposed by Shucksmith (2018).
- ii Ntungamo District is in southwest Uganda. Originally part of the Ankole Kingdom, Ntungamo is native soil for the Banyankole people.
- iii Nebbi District is in northwestern Uganda. It is home to the Alur tribe of Luo people.
- iv This research used a Simpson index to compute the livelihood index because of its computational simplicity, robustness and wider applicability. The formula for Simpson index is given as  $S.I = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^N P_i^2$ , where N is the total number of income sources and  $P_i$  represents income proportion of the  $i$ th income source. Its value lies between 0 and 1. The value is zero when there is a complete specialization and approaches one as the level of diversification increases.
- v It may also make little sense from a conventional agronomic or economic perspective, but this is a topic for another paper.

# Co-operatives and the Sustainable Development Goals: The Role of Co-operative Organisations in Facilitating SDG Implementation at Global, National, and Local Levels

*Jeffrey Moxom and Arielle Romenteau, with contributions from Erick Obongo, Mohit Dave, and Carlos Enrique González Blanco*

## Abstract

*This paper argues that co-operative organisations play a key role in facilitating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation at the global, national, and local levels. It will review both the practical and theoretical co-operative contributions to the SDGs, with a tri-partite framework of analysis and a focus on SDGs of particular relevance for co-operatives. First, at the global and regional level, it discusses the role of co-operative umbrella organisations and how their key tools and initiatives facilitate a 'trickle-down' effect throughout the co-operative movement, highlighting examples such as regional development platforms and their policy linkages. Second, at the national level, it incorporates a brief analysis of large national co-operative enterprises and apexes and their substantial contribution to sustainability. Finally, through an action analysis of local co-operatives, we demonstrate their major role to foster inclusive and sustainable development at the grassroots level. We conclude by arguing that co-operative actors are particularly well placed to facilitate an articulation across these three levels, due to features of the co-operative model, including the values of democracy and solidarity, as well as the principles of cooperation among cooperatives and concern for community. Strong partnerships between and within co-operative organisations can be instrumental in enhancing the emerging role for the co-operative movement as a pivotal actor in SDG implementation.*

## Introduction

More than three years after the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (hereafter SDGs) and leading global climate commitments such as the 2015 Paris Agreement, the topic of sustainable development and how we go beyond 'business as usual' have become central to the global policy agenda (Harvey, 2018). In parallel, key figures within the co-operative movement have highlighted the model's relevance for sustainable development against a backdrop of shifting political landscapes, war, rising inequalities, demographic changes, and environmental degradation



(Voinea, 2016). Although a mainstreaming of the SDGs into policy approaches and business strategies appears to signal progress, recent warnings from international institutions on the pace of climate change suggest that significant strides in policy practice and implementation are now required (IPCC, 2018). This paper argues that co-operative organisations, as value- and principle-based, people-centred businesses, have a growing role to play in facilitating present and future SDG implementation at the global, national, and local levels.

This paper falls within the scope of the knowledge building activities undertaken by the partnership for international development signed between the European Commission and the International Co-operative Alliance in 2016, to strengthen the co-operative movement and its capacity to promote international development worldwide<sup>1</sup>. As SDG implementation seeks to address core issues worldwide, including in—but not limited to—the global South, such as a stable economy, energy supply, access to healthcare, education, or technology; we argue that co-operatives can offer an alternative approach to meeting a range of human and societal needs. This paper seeks to outline in concrete terms this practical and theoretical contribution from the point of view of the practitioner, utilising a tri-partite framework of analysis with a focus on SDGs of high relevance for co-operatives. As a practitioner perspective taken from the heart of ongoing work towards SDG implementation from both a policy and operational perspective, it aims to provide a complementary account that will be useful for co-operative stakeholders, including scholars and decision makers.

After outlining the theoretical links between co-operative values and principles and featured SDGs, it first discusses the role of co-operative organisations in relation to the SDGs at global and regional levels. At this level, the paper argues that key tools and initiatives facilitate a ‘trickle-down’ effect throughout the co-operative movement,

highlighting key examples such as regional co-operative development platforms and their policy linkages. Second, at the national level, it analyzes large national co-operative enterprises and apexes, such as those showcased in the *World Co-operative Monitor* (ICA & EURICSE, 2018) and their growing contribution to sustainability. Finally, through an action analysis of local co-operatives at the grassroots level, it demonstrates the major role that these co-operatives are playing to foster sustainable development. This paper suggests that participation of co-operatives in these three levels, with a special attention to the local and the national level, is crucial to SDG implementation.

The paper concludes by arguing that co-operative actors are particularly well placed to facilitate an articulation across these three levels of action, owing to the specific features of the co-operative model, including the values of democracy and solidarity, as well as the principles of cooperation among cooperatives and concern for community. It also proposes that strong partnerships between and within co-operative organisations can be instrumental in improving the emerging role for the co-operative movement as a pivotal actor in SDG implementation.

## **Theoretical Framework: What Makes the Cooperative Model Well Suited to Sustainable Development?**

As key stakeholders such as the United Nations (UN), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) have argued, the co-operative model is very well placed to address the challenges posed by transitions to sustainability, including those such as poverty, gender inequality, or economic and social exclusion (ILO & ICA, 2014). Three main lines of thought can support this argument.



First, the original co-operative values and principles stand in a close and harmonious relation to the aims and objectives set out in the 17 SDGs and 169 indicators. Second, in a similar way, co-operatives can act along what Simel Esim, Manager of the Cooperatives Unit at the ILO in Geneva, has termed a 'triple-bottom line': as social organisations, environmental actors, and economic actors, co-operatives often meet these goals simultaneously. Third, and in addition to the triple bottom line, co-operatives also address challenges of governance, by fostering member economic participation and facilitating education and training, ways in which they can solve common problems and enable people to take charge of their own development. In the following brief theoretical section, we first outline the co-operative values and principles that are deeply interlinked with the SDGs, before establishing the interrelation of the triple bottom line to the Sustainable Development Goals, providing a useful starting point to support concrete examples of co-operatives' contributions to the SDGs subsequently outlined in the paper.

## The Co-operative Values and Principles: Hardwired for Sustainable Development

What makes the co-operative model well suited to sustainable development? The first clear relation is at the very root of the definition of a co-operative by the International Co-operative Alliance: "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" (ICA, 2015, p.2) A key, implicit component is that in their very DNA, co-operatives meet a diversified set of needs, which go beyond profit generation or shareholder return. The wide range of needs identified, whilst not specifically clarifying an environmental aim in this case, continue to acknowledge that people, in order to

voluntarily achieve well-being, require more than simple economic well-being. The emphasis on the commonalities suggests that one's need does not necessarily lead to the detriment of another, and links strongly to the co-operative value of solidarity.

The co-operative movement has indeed considered environmental protection as having implicit recognition within its values and principles. The most recent addition to the co-operative principles, *Concern for community*, was adopted at the Manchester Congress in September 1995, and included strong debate over the links between the co-operative movement and environmental protection (Hoyt, 1996). The principle reads, "While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities." Co-operatives, therefore, have a tangible relation to their host communities. Not only do co-operatives arise from a more genuine need, when compared with the frequent manufacturing of consumer needs by conventional capitalist companies, but profits also stay within and are reinvested by the community. There are incentives therefore, both economic and social, to ensure this investment, in order for a community to come together to meet their needs through the formation of democratically accountable, member-based organisations.

In addition, two more features that solidify the case for sustainability include co-operative longevity (permanence and resistance to short-termism) and *cooperation among cooperatives*. With respect to longevity, permanence is a concept that links to the discussion of concern for community; cooperatives are not driven to pack up and move to an alternative location in times of economic hardship (Archerd, 1996). Though recent critiques of larger co-operatives (such as Mondragon) have focused on the case of expansionism and non-member subsidiaries, it is indeed clear that co-operatives have a strong resilience in the face of economic crisis (Birchall, 2013). They

have proven to act according to member needs in the long term, rather than push like investor-owned companies to respond to logics of expansionism, economic externalities, or shareholder value (Flecha & Ngai, 2014). Moreover, *cooperation among cooperatives* is a further principle that makes the co-operative movement uniquely suited to solving problems linked with sustainability, such as climate change, which supersede national governance structures.

Exchanges between organisations that share the same co-operative values and principles are more likely to take into account concern for the community and thus sustainability concerns; and frequently they co-operate together to that end through sharing of experience or joint trainings<sup>ii</sup>. When cooperation takes the shape of co-op-to-co-op business, co-operatives' value-based and people-centred approach raise the chances that the value chain will benefit both sides, including smaller suppliers in Southern countries (contrary to many conventional firms' transactions).

By supporting the growth of the co-operative movement through these principles, co-operative federations can help the values of equality, honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others to become instrumental in the debate on SDG implementation. We argue that these values and principles are closely interlinked with the objectives in the SDGs.

## The Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were negotiated in light of the missed targets of their immediate predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). They are unique in their commitment to all countries contributing toward their achievement, rather than just low to middle income nations. The SDGs, through a large

number of indicators, cover all sectors of economic activity (agriculture, industry, housing, health, education, production, consumption etc.), and address a wide range of key global concerns (poverty, equality, employment, gender, climate change, peace etc.). Co-operatives can contribute to all SDGs, both because they are involved in the very diverse economic sectors, and because their impact contributes substantially to the global objectives pursued. Of course, a number of SDGs and their indicators may be more particularly well suited to the co-operative identity; for example, SDG 1 on reducing poverty (in line with their endeavour to meet members' social and economic needs); SDG 8 on decent work (supported by co-operatives' democratic and member-based approach, coupled with their concern for community); SDG 12 on responsible production and consumption (promoted by the principle of concern for community and the value of equity); and SDG 17 on partnerships (upheld among others by the principle of cooperation among cooperatives). Further, work has also been carried out on the links between co-operatives and SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, a topic on which the late Ian MacPherson and Yehuda Paz produced an important book (MacPherson & Paz, 2015). Cooperatives Europe (2019) has also recently released a report on the topic, focusing on SDG 16 among other SDG themes. To highlight this overlap, a short table (Table 1) highlighting the links between the selected SDGs and the co-operative identity and actions is below (ICA, Roelants, & Eum, 2018).

**Table 1. Links Between Co-operatives and the Sustainable Development Goals****COOPERATIVES /for 2030****ANNEX**

SDG	Type of cooperative	Some key contributions
 <b>1 No poverty</b>	All Credit Insurance Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— 10% of world employment</li> <li>— Micro-credit to the poor</li> <li>— Micro-insurance to the poor</li> <li>— Employment for disadvantaged people</li> </ul>
 <b>2 Zero hunger and food security</b>	Agricultural Fishery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Estimated 32% of food products market share; providing food security; enhancing diversified agricultural production</li> <li>— Providing quality foodstuff at lower prices</li> </ul>
 <b>3 Good health and wellbeing</b>	Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Health services including HIV/AIDS to over 100 million patients</li> </ul>
 <b>4 Quality education and lifelong learning</b>	All Student  Worker / social  Credit  Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Education as one of founding principles</li> <li>— Providing practical training on how to run a cooperative for children and teenagers</li> <li>— Imparting education (in particular through around 2700 cooperatives)</li> <li>— Providing educational micro-lending and financial education</li> <li>— Providing consumer education</li> </ul>
 <b>5 Gender equality</b>	All  Worker / producers'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— High ratio of women's inclusion in membership and elected positions as shown in several studies</li> <li>— Important cooperative networks are exclusively dedicated to women</li> </ul>
 <b>6 Clean water and sanitation</b>	Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Safe water filtration and distribution</li> </ul>
 <b>7 Affordable and clean energy</b>	Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Energy channelled to rural and remote areas; generation of renewable energy</li> </ul>
 <b>8 Decent work and economic growth (including sustainable tourism)</b>	All  Social Worker / social Producers' / freelancers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— 10% of world employment; decent, stable and resilient work; market access; more value in hands of members</li> <li>— Providing employment to disadvantaged people</li> <li>— Sustainable tourism, cultural heritage</li> <li>— Providing shared services and social protection</li> </ul>
 <b>9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure</b>	Worker / social Agricultural (agro-industries) New types (multi-stakeholder, community, platform etc.)  Water, energy & telephone supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Virtually all industrial activities, maintaining enterprises in their communities</li> <li>— Innovating in new business forms and democratizing online platforms</li> <li>— Promoting energy, water and internet infrastructure in remote areas</li> </ul>
 <b>10 Reduced inequalities</b>	All  Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Redistribution of surplus to members, reinvesting in communities, lower wage gap than average</li> <li>— Financial inclusion</li> </ul>
 <b>11 Sustainable cities and communities</b>	Housing  All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Upgrading slums and providing affordable housing for a significant part of the population in a number of countries, either through ownership or rental</li> <li>— Resilience to disaster and contribution to after-disaster measures</li> </ul>
 <b>12 Responsible consumption and production</b>	Agricultural Consumer New food coops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Networks between agricultural and consumer cooperatives increasingly promote responsible consumption, including organic food, food chain and fair trade products, limiting food waste, promoting circular economy</li> </ul>

## COOPERATIVES /for 2030

### ANNEX

SDG	Type of cooperative	Some key contributions
 <p><b>13 Climate action, 14 Life below water and 15 Life on land</b></p>	<p>Worker / social Fishery Agricultural</p>	<p>Green jobs, protecting natural spaces, dealing with waste recycling</p>
 <p><b>16 Peace, justice and strong institutions</b></p>	<p>All  Social / worker</p>	<p>Key role after several armed conflicts, participation in reconciliation processes  Increasing involvement in welcoming refugees and addressing their plights</p>
 <p><b>17 partnerships</b></p>	<p>All</p>	<p>International development cooperation developing within the cooperative movement and with other actors, including South to South cooperation</p>

+ Cooperatives' role after disasters

Source: ICA Brochure for SDG Fundraising Activities (ICA, Roelants, & Eum, 2018). Reprinted with permission.

Building on the previously highlighted links between co-operatives and the SDGs, and the overlap between the cooperative identity, values, and principles and the objectives of sustainable development, the next section addresses actions conducted by co-operative organisations at the global and regional levels that strongly advance the SDGs, employing a practitioner perspective on their policy and knowledge-sharing activities.

### Co-operatives and the SDGs at the Global and Regional Levels

At the global and regional level, co-operatives do not yet receive full recognition of their ability to be strong players in international development. The recent Framework Partnership Agreement signed between the European Commission and the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) for the period 2016-2020, *Cooperatives in development: People-centred business*

*in action* (ICA-EU, 2018), is designed to enhance the profile of co-operatives in development. In coordination with its four regional offices, the ICA, as the global apex for co-operatives, is working hard to demonstrate and communicate the relevance of the co-operative model for sustainable development, enhancing visibility, advocacy, networking, and knowledge building, so that the co-operative movement can become key in implementing the SDGs. At the EU level, a number of political declarations have successfully highlighted the relevance of international co-operative development. For example, within the 2017 European Consensus on Development, a key framework guiding EU development policy, co-operatives have three distinct mentions as key actors in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In the Consensus (European Union, 2017), the EU recognised that "cooperatives have become instrumental partners in reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised people," alongside other actors, and the EU pledges to promote

and defend the “space where these development actors can operate safely ... for achieving sustainable development.” The EU is further committed to “promote the creation of farmers’ organisations and cooperatives, to address among others, better productivity of family farms, land use rights and traditional farmer-based seed systems” (European Union, 2017, p.29), underlining the role co-operatives are playing in poverty eradication and food security. The EU also expresses its commitment “to promote private sector initiatives and social enterprises, cooperatives, and women and youth entrepreneurs, to boost the provision of local services as well as inclusive and green business models,” acknowledging the unique democratic and inclusive nature of the cooperative model (p.26).

In addition, the resolution of the European Parliament on the Consensus on Development calls for “specific EU development strategies to better target, protect and support vulnerable and marginalised groups” such as, among others, small producers and cooperatives “in order to offer them the same opportunities and rights as everyone else, in line with the principle of leaving no one behind” (European Parliament, 2016, Article 5). At the global level, the United Nations General Assembly declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, highlighting the contribution of co-operatives to socio-economic development, particularly their impact on poverty reduction, employment generation, and diverse forms of social integration (ICA, 2013a, 2013b; United Nations, 2009; UN, 2012; UN, 2013; UNDESA, 2012).

## **Building on Political Recognition Through Collaborating in International Platforms to Foster Sustainable Development**

In addition to statements at the political level by the United Nations and the European Union, the ICA-EU partnership has cemented the establishment and operation of international and regional platforms bringing together organisations active in international co-operative development. Established in 2008, the Cooperatives Europe Development Platform (CEDP) is a European network of ten co-operative organisations working on development policy and implementation along with members of Cooperatives Europe, the European regional office of the International Co-operative Alliance<sup>iii</sup>. Similar initiatives have been taken in other regions, such as the Cooperatives of the Americas Platform for Development, launched in October 2018, which gathers member organisations from seven Latin American countries. At the international level, the recently established International Cooperative Development Platform (ICDP) has been recognised since 2017 as the global thematic committee on international development within the ICA. The ICDP brings together experts from Cooperative Development Organisations (CDOs) based around the world, meeting regularly to promote exchange on themes of common interest and strengthen global collaboration on international co-operative development (ICA, 2018a).

The benefits of these platforms are multiple. The Cooperatives Europe Development Platform, for example, has been instrumental in improving best practices, through knowledge sharing among experts in international co-operative development. Its members outline a key distinction between ‘traditional’ international



development and international co-operative development (ICD), which is an enterprise tool that fosters economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Cooperatives Europe, 2017). Workers and practitioners share collective knowledge for business activities, as well as hands-on co-operative approaches with partners in developing countries, with the aim of creating wealth and reducing poverty in a sustainable and participatory way. Co-operative development moves away from the more paternalistic approach of aid-based projects to focus on building people's capacity to work together to strengthen livelihoods and build communities. Guided by the co-operative model and principles, this approach has a proven ability to promote democratic decision-making, shared ownership and solidarity within communities, becoming a tool for sustainable development in many different contexts.

We argue that at the global and regional levels, knowledge building, advocacy and technical support activities of co-operative organisations and apexes act both as a transmitter of ideas that are favourable to sustainability, especially by providing valuable input and expertise to policymakers, and as a centralised support network that can create 'trickle down' effects of co-operative governance. In addition, supporting the start-up and growth of co-operatives is becoming an established way to enable people to take charge of their own development. Working towards a conducive legal and economic environment for co-operatives is also a vital area to which co-operative networks are contributing. On a smaller scale, co-operatives in an incubatory state, or even further developed, can look to the co-operative movement as support and partner for knowledge exchange, as innovative practices in co-operation are developed and disseminated in response to sustainability challenges. There can also be a multiplier effect when these platforms are supported through synergies with the

work of other co-operative bodies, such as the Gender Committees at the global and regional levels within the ICA network.

Reflecting on the previous points, SDG 17, which focuses on partnerships and brings together national governments, the international community, civil society, the private sector, and other actors, proves particularly relevant for the co-operative movement, reinforced by the aforementioned international platforms. Not only is it important for co-operatives to partner with one another, but they are also well placed to engage with other civil society actors and their own networks so as to achieve sustainability targets. This is particularly important in areas in which progress on the SDGs is lacking (such as food and agriculture), or in channelling and democratising local communities' views towards policymakers, among other valuable advocacy and networking functions. Partnerships with actors such as local authorities, fair trade organisations, or trade union movements, can be instrumental in facilitating the conditions for people to take charge of their own development.

## Monitoring and Pledging at the Global and Regional Levels

The international co-operative movement has also provided different spaces for co-operatives to track progress and to pledge further action on the SDGs. One of the data sources currently available is the World Cooperative Monitor, developed with the European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises (EURICSE), providing a ranking of the Top 300 and sectoral analysis based on financial data (ICA & EURICSE, 2018). The 2018 report includes an additional section on sustainability, analysing how the largest co-operative enterprises and mutuals in the world are moving towards achieving



the SDGs in a diversity of sectors, and examining documents reported to the UN Global Compact project and Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) (ICA, 2018b). The decision highlights the growing role that mainstreaming the SDGs plays in larger enterprises, with the Report now providing an excellent overview on how co-operatives are currently engaged in this task and a potential source of inspiration for others. While the reports emphasize the actions that the enterprises want to communicate, not all actions that are highlighted will be fully implemented. By the same token, what has been fully implemented may not necessarily be reported. The following section of this paper discusses cooperatives' contributions, many of which have been enacted through pledging a commitment to concrete actions related to the SDG targets and indicators, via the Coops for 2030 campaign.

Co-ops for 2030 is a campaign for co-operatives to learn more about the SDGs, commit pledges to contribute to achieving the SDGs (often through initiatives already in place) and report their progress (ICA, Roelants, & Eum, 2018). Towards these aims, a dedicated website was launched by the ICA in 2016, where co-operative organisations can provide data on their commitments to specific SDGs and targets, information then made publicly available to all site visitors. This helps both to raise public awareness on cooperatives' SDG contributions and to assess internally the progress of the movement in that field. It is certainly argued that many, particularly larger co-operative s may lack awareness on the transformative potential of the co-operative model for the SDGs (ILO & ICA, 2014). There is a strong need to communicate interlinkages of co-operative values and principles and the SDGs, as this section on global and regional action demonstrates. In the following section, we discuss the concrete ways this action is being operationalised by large-scale co-operative organisations in different countries.

## Cooperatives and the SDGs at the National Level

At the second level of analysis, co-operatives contribute to sustainability at the national level. Both co-operative apexes and larger co-operative enterprises, through member contributions, are actively considering how to streamline the SDGs into their activities. For larger co-operative enterprises, this can be in the form of reporting or monitoring, national sustainability reports, or through analysis and reassessment of value chains in production in annual sustainability reports. For co-operative apexes, integrating objectives championed by the SDGs such as gender and economic solidarity into their member-based structures creates a 'trickle-down' effect, whereby SDG implementation can take place across multiple levels of governance, including the local. This section on the national level focuses on gender equality, sustainable production and consumption, and decent work, three SDGs interlinked with co-operative values and principles.

### SDG 5 Gender Equality

Despite commitments in many international agreements and treaties<sup>iv</sup> to the principle of gender equality, women worldwide continue to face oppression and discrimination in health, education, political representation, labour market—with negative consequences for the development of their capabilities and their freedom of choice. Gender inequality is not perpetuated exclusively through control over material resources, but gender norms and stereotypes are reinforced by gendered identities and constrain the behaviour of women and men in inequitable ways (Ridgeway, 2011). Given this backdrop, SDG 5 seeks to end all forms of discrimination against women everywhere. It is a particularly important goal, to ensure that other SDGs do not fail to reach half of the world's population.

Even in co-operative structures, it seems clear that further gender equality is needed, with an ILO (2015) study on gender reporting that women comprise less than 50% of the members in many co-operative boards; 10% for 25% of those surveyed. In a study of US worker cooperatives, the higher positions of both CEO and president were held mainly by men, with 60% of the CEO positions and 58% of president positions held by men (Miller, 2011). However, despite these limitations, co-operatives can make a concrete contribution to gender equality by ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities as well as equal rights to economic resources, through their participatory democratic and egalitarian structures.

Such implementation can be found in Uruguay, where the Uruguayan Federation of Housing Cooperatives for Mutual Aid (FUCVAM) which won the World Habitat Award from the Building and Social Housing Foundation, represents more than 22,000 families (2% of households). Since its inception, FUCVAM has pursued the goal of equal roles for men and women, reaffirming the concept of gender equity, maintaining that everyone has the same rights and obligations. In the most recently established co-operatives, the election for positions is based on aptitude and includes women on an equal footing. FUCVAM have also released a recent guide addressing the issue of violence against women, which acts as an important educational source (FUCVAM, 2017).

Another example is FEDECOVERA (2019), a second-tier co-operative based in Guatemala. Its main activities include working with farmers to improve quality and increase production, enhance competitiveness, and provide funding and training for technical support. In 2016, FEDECOVERA had 43 member co-operatives and 33 organized groups, including more than 25,000 small producers. 75% of the activities of the

plant nursery are carried out by women. In addition, FEDECOVERA encourages the participation of women in the top-level management of cooperative organisations, developing their skills. Thanks to growth and reinvestment, the members of the Santa Maria Cooperative decided to buy a new production area in 2010 to develop their own business, produce more and diversify their income. Incorporating gender equality within a co-operative can lead to both direct and indirect social and economic benefits.

In the region of Africa, the Cooperative Federation of Nigeria (CFN) has also committed to SDG 5 by conducting interactive meetings and consultations with both Federal and State departments of co-operatives, which play a large role in facilitating women's participation in co-operatives. A CFN representative described how this would be achieved: "We will meet with women leaders of the States. We have women leaders of political parties who are good mobilizers that I will work with to achieve the involvement of women in cooperative societies" (ICA-Africa, 2014). Members claim that this can be taken further and involve leadership of the co-operative unions and apexes in sensitization, in collaboration with some selected State Departments of cooperatives in the field of advocacy.

### **SDG 12 Sustainable Production and Consumption**

Decoupling economic growth from resource use is one of the most complex challenges facing humanity at present, with many academics such as Hickel (2017) arguing that a post-growth society and economic redistribution programmes are crucial to address the twin challenges of climate change and environmental degradation. Co-operatives can make concrete contributions to a reformed approach to production and consumption by ensuring the equitable management and efficient use of natural resources through

their democratized structures. At the local level, co-operatives support economic localization and the reinvestment of surplus within communities, and larger co-operative enterprises or cooperative apexes can implement and replicate co-operative values and principles across global value chains. In Europe, this can take the form of co-operative supermarkets, which attempt to source products from the global South in a sustainable manner. At the national level, we discuss diverse examples of co-operative apexes making a difference in their countries, selected from around the world.

Based in Brazil, the cooperative network *Justa Trama* (2019) is made up of workers organized in solidarity economy projects. The core of the co-operative activity is a production chain, a process that begins in the agro-ecological sowing of cotton right up to the commercialization of pieces of clothing. *Justa Trama* has 600 members and partners from five states, and act in accordance with the principles of solidarity economy and fair trade. The network is made up of eight economic solidarity enterprises—co-operatives, associations and groups of self-managed workers—distributed across Brazil and motivated by the search for an alternative income and decent work. Members are committed to environmentally sustainable management practices and the guarantee of decent working conditions and gender equality. The *Justa Trama* network offers professional training and the improvement of the quality of life of the family farmers and workers. The impact of the network is reflected in the increased income of participants and ultimately in the preservation of natural resources and social inclusion.

In the region of Asia-Pacific, co-operatives are addressing sustainable production and consumption, with a key example being the Maldives Fishermen's Association (2019). The Association is professionalising the Maldivian fishery industry, setting the

end of 2020 as the target for educating and certifying 30% of Maldivian fishing skippers. Their initiative is in line with target 12.3 to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses, by 2030. In addition to actions on the ground which impact the value chain, reporting and monitoring also play a key role in measuring progress on SDG 12. Further afield, a key example of sustainability reporting is the CBH Group in Australia, which commits to including sustainability aspects into their annual performance reports to all members. This is in line with the global goals' target 12.6: to encourage companies, especially large and trans-national companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.

This reporting practice is largely implemented by European co-operative organisations, such as Confcooperative in Italy and the UK Cooperative Group Ltd, who release annual sustainability reports. For the UK Cooperative Group, they wish to continue a longstanding commitment to Fairtrade, measuring and monitoring the sales of Fairtrade products. For Confcooperative, the sustainability reports contain the scope, results, and objectives of its activities supporting co-operatives acting to build a more responsible, fair, and sustainable society. Another key role played by co-operatives in Europe in favour of sustainable production and consumption is providing outlets for smallholder co-operatives from the South to sell their products at a fair price, sourced with decent and fair conditions. The well-known Divine Chocolate, of the Kuapa Kokoo cocoa farmers' co-operative in Ghana, is one example stocked by large retailers in the United Kingdom and other EU member states. The rise of co-operative supermarkets in European Member States has been a

recent development, and their popularity is growing as traditional consumers become more aware of inequalities within the global food value chain. At the other end of the value chain, a recent Oxfam report has shown how such smallholders can command a higher share of the consumer price (up to 26% increases) when organised into producer co-operatives (ICA, 2018c; Willoughby & Gore, 2018).

In addition to monitoring and reporting, labelling and certification is another important step towards responsible consumption and production. In Africa, Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union (OCFCU, 2019), Ethiopia is a smallholder coffee grower-owned co-operative union. Members of OCFCU are the growers, processors, and suppliers of high quality, organic Arabica coffee for direct export. OCFCU promotes Fairtrade for socially and environmentally sustainable techniques and long-term relationships between producers, traders, and consumers, helping small-scale coffee farmers access the Fairtrade coffee market. Such an example demonstrates the important role that co-operative apexes can play in facilitating market access and strengthening employment and decent work, another key SDG relevant for the national level.

### **SDG 8 Decent Work**

SDG 8 aims to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Co-operatives, through the principles of voluntary and open membership and democratic member control, have been instrumental in shaping working conditions aligned with a decent work agenda, supported by international organisations such as the ILO, who outline, through Recommendation 193, the central role that the co-operative model occupies in this regard (ILO, 2002). Through the provision of a collective voice

and negotiation power for their members with the public authorities, or by providing decent work opportunities through training and education programmes, co-operatives make a strong contribution to economic and social rights.

In the region of Asia Pacific, for example, Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO, 2019) has pledged on the Coops for 2030 platform to implement afforestation projects on 29, 419 hectares of waste lands, which will also generate employment for rural populations. This will contribute towards target 8.5; to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value by 2030. Similarly, National Cooperative Bank Limited (NCBL, 2017) in Nepal intends to raise awareness about SDGs within their training activities. Their skill development training links with micro finance, self-employment loans to create and increase employment, expansion of financial access and inclusion. These initiatives strongly impact target 8.3: to promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, through access to financial services.

Returning to the African region, in Nigeria, the ICA member Odua Cooperative Conglomerate Limited (2019) registered a Coop Food trademark for food processing in Nigeria. They have ventured into production of plantain flour and a range of related products to provide healthy and nutritious food. The farm will not only provide food to local Nigerians but also, eyeing the international market, will enhance Nigerian industry access to international markets, as well as food security and safety in Nigeria and globally. Contributing also to SDG 8, the plantain farm will create secure employment and



encourage entrepreneurship among women as well as young people. They intend to source raw materials from farms across the region.

As outlined, co-operative apexes play an important role as an interlocutor for their members, providing invaluable services through knowledge sharing, capacity building, networking and training, and technical and co-operative governance support. By acting as a central hub, apexes fulfil an important co-operative principle of cooperation among cooperatives, bringing the co-operative movement together to tackle challenges such as poverty, gender discrimination, social exclusion, or environmental degradation.

## Cooperatives and the SDGs at the Local Level

Co-operatives may arguably be at their most effective at the local level, where they form and bring together local communities through daily interactions with members and non-members. The co-operative model also lends itself very well to localised economic models, due to the reinvestment of surplus and member-based economic participation. The co-operative principle, concern for community, also lends itself to the local level, as co-operatives can invigorate the spaces in which they are based when they focus on activities within the community. Co-operatives at this level often take the form of primary co-operatives and depending on the sector and the type of co-operative (user, producer, worker, or multi-stakeholder), these activities can take the form of community investment, community education, or the provision of services and employment. This section has a particular focus on SDGs 5, 1 and 2.

### SDG 5 Gender Equality

In addition to the examples highlighting cooperatives' contribution to gender equality at the national level, two examples in the African region include co-operatives in Malawi and in the north African country of Morocco. In Malawi, Agricultural and Marketing Cooperative Societies (AMCOS) are demonstrably powerful local networks of economic, social, and political empowerment for women in Malawi. As group-based ventures, AMCOS bring to their members the benefits of joining forces with others. Their central aim is to provide services for smallholders unable to access international markets. Apart from being able to access economies of scale as providers of services, producers or as consumers, participating in AMCOS as a member, elected leader, or manager also brings with its enhanced status and voice in the community and society. With this mandate, AMCOS have been a route to promoting gender equality in Malawi, through ensuring greater economic and social participation for women.

Another key example of local cooperatives contributing to gender equality is the Ajddigue Women's Cooperative in Morocco. Ajddigue in Amazigh (the Berber language) is the word for flower. The women, who are members, produce, package and sell Argan oil together, with the cooperative helping over 100 women. The numerous health benefits of Moroccan Argan Oil are well known, and Ajddigue is one in a network of up to thirty cooperatives, with positive social and environmental impacts focused upon women's empowerment and reductions in deforestation (Hicks, 2016). This economic participation has been a counter to traditional gender roles, as women in Morocco were often prevented from working outside of their homes and were dependent on the income of their spouses. Argan has become a sector of high national and international interest and heritage, not only for the unique and valuable product but also for its socio-economic importance.



The rise of the women's cooperatives is seen as an opportunity and example for emancipation, independence, and development of rural women. Ajddigue has gained a certificate for Fairtrade and organic production. The women produced 16 tonnes of Argan oil in 2018 and had a turnover of 1.7m dirhams (156,000 Euros). Profits are shared between the co-operatives' 60 women according to the amount of oil they produced, ensuring the co-operative practice of dividends relative to interactions with the organisation.

### SDG 1 Eradicating Poverty

Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with complex and interlinked causes. Authors such as Amartya Sen and international institutions such as UNDP agree that it refers to more than simply a lack of income, incorporating the capacity to live a dignified and fulfilling life, including protective economic, political, socio-cultural, human, and economic dimensions (Kwapong & Hanisch, 2013). SDG 1 calls for an end to poverty in all its manifestations by 2030. It also aims to ensure social protection for the poor and vulnerable, increase access to basic services, and support people harmed by climate-related extreme events and other economic, social, and environmental shocks and disasters. Co-operative scholars have often claimed, with differing levels of agreement, that co-operatives have the advantages of identifying economic opportunities for the poor, empowering the disadvantaged to defend their interests, and providing security to the poor by allowing them to convert individual risks into collective risks (ILO & ICA, 2014). It's an approach which is highly relevant in poorer regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, although the provision of services and welfare in the global North can also have an impact on poverty reduction. These impacts are greater if co-operative values and principles are respected and implemented.

A key example of co-operatives tackling poverty concerns *Wabi Burkitu*, a co-operative in Ethiopia, where a joint UN programme provides training in agricultural techniques, improved seeds and time-saving machinery, while also granting loans and encouraging saving. Most women from the Oromia region in Ethiopia have grouped themselves into co-operatives, to leverage the cooperative model's added advantage to curb hunger. Through joining women's saving and credit cooperatives, they save small amounts of money which after some time allow them to obtain loans. With the loans, they have improved their farming methods by using oxen to till the land and making use of the improved seeds they get from the cooperative to plant. One woman describes how this demonstrates a positive feedback loop "Now that we are getting surplus crop, I harvest and prepare the produce to sell in the market. I go to the market three times a week, and each time I make about 1,000 Birr (EUR 31). Today we have one cow, one ox, which we rent in return for crops, as well as 10 sheep and two donkeys. We eat what we like and sending my son to school is not a problem. We can access bank services and we know of opportunities to improve our lives. For me, even the ability to go out, work outside the house and be an active member of a women's working group is new, and it means a lot." In addition to poverty reduction, *Wabi Burkitu* is also contributing to gender equality through such methods.

Concerning collective risk and financial security, the credit union model has been instrumental in bringing people out of poverty, particularly in regard to tackling debt and usury. The roots of the credit union model came from thinkers such as Raiffeisen, a pioneer of savings and credit co-operatives. Facing dire living conditions in rural areas and exploitation from landowners and moneylenders, the members of these co-operatives collectively managed their savings and could lend to anyone who needed money and support at

advantageous rates. A key example of such a network today is Kenya Savings and Credit Cooperatives (KUSCCO). Providing housing as a basic need and worthwhile investment, many credit and savings societies in Kenya have facilitated the purchasing of plots of land for their members. By offering friendly payment terms, the SACCOs have allowed ordinary members to own parcels of land for the construction of residential homes. Unfortunately, insufficient funds, and inability to qualify for long-term loans and mortgages, have rendered most of the members incapable of developing the plots. It is against this background that KUSCCO Housing Fund was conceptualized in 1996 to serve SACCOs and SACCO members, adapting to changing needs in favour of poverty alleviation.

## SDG 2 Ending Hunger

Recent evidence continues to signal that the number of hungry people in the world is growing, reaching 821 million in 2017 or one in every nine people, according to The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO, 2018). Limited progress is also being made in addressing the multiple effects of malnutrition, ranging from growth defects in children to obesity in adult life, the wider negative impacts upon human health. SDG 2 aims to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030. Conflict and extreme weather events linked to climate change are among the key factors causing this reversal in progress, despite previous gains in food security and nutrition since the 1990s.

Co-operatives can be a solution to these drivers of food insecurity. With regard to extreme weather events and the development of resilience within the agricultural sector, the co-operative model provides a unique form of collective insurance and the collective management of risk, including benefits for food security for smallholder farmers in the form of

access to markets, the ability to reinvest in smallholdings, and higher shares of the consumer price (ICA, 2018c). In addition to climate change adaptation or mitigation, the restructuring of the global food system, including the sustainability of value chains, could have a positive impact on food security and by extension on world hunger. The co-operative model is strongly represented within the agricultural sector and uniquely suited to meet these aims (FAC, IFAD, & WFP, 2012).

In the Middle Eastern region, such co-operative enterprises dedicated to improving food security include the Economic and Social Development Center of Palestine (ESDC), which is committed to strengthening the resilience and adaptive capacity of small-scale farmers through improving service delivery capacity of cooperatives and building cooperatives' production, business, and institutional capacity and the technical aspects of their livelihood and business (FAO, 2018). It contributes to target 2.1 to end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round by 2030.

In the African region, an additional example is the Shalom Cooperative in Rwanda, where agriculture cooperatives are helping smallholder producer members (women living with HIV/AIDS) to access inputs, markets at better prices, training and technology through the power of the collective effort. Co-operatives bring people together to help themselves and bring their resources together in one basket and in return this creates economic opportunities that promote the standards of living of the members. With a gender dimension, the Shalom Cooperative is also contributing to SDG 5. There is solid evidence, based on examples here, that local co-operatives are taking an emerging role as actors for sustainability and as critical actors working towards international development objectives.

## Conclusion

It is clear that co-operatives at every level of governance are already working towards the SDG objectives and targets. However, it is also clear that against the backdrop of shifting political landscapes, war, rising inequalities, demographic changes, and environmental degradation, such efforts need to be increased. Whilst there is further work to be done, both in implementing the SDGs and communicating the relevance of the co-operative model for sustainability, this paper demonstrates the different ways in which the co-operative movement does, and can continue to, work toward these aims. However, the select SDGs covered here does not imply that other SDGs cannot be successfully tackled by co-operatives, as demonstrated by MacPherson & Paz's work (2015) on peace (SDG 16), or for instance the recently published research report from Cooperatives Europe (2019), supported by the Cooperatives Europe Development Platform (CEDP), which highlights how co-operatives can act as a source of trust and build bridges between groups in situations of conflict. To tackle such issues, it is important to acknowledge that there is no peace "without co-operation" and no co-operation "without peace" (Mayo; as cited in MacPherson & Paz, 2015, p. v).

In addition, SDG 17 discusses the strength of partnerships. Through cooperation among cooperatives, a core co-operative principle, we propose that strong partnerships between and within cooperative organisations can be instrumental in enhancing the emerging role for the cooperative movement as a pivotal actor in SDG implementation. We see this reflected at the global and regional level, where we have argued that key tools and initiatives facilitate a 'trickle-down' effect throughout the co-operative movement. Not only is it important for co-operatives to join forces, but external stakeholders such as civil society and Fairtrade organisations, or local authorities will prove valuable partners, democratically channelling the views and needs of individuals towards policymakers and advocating for an enabling environment for people-centred businesses. At the national level, we incorporated a brief analysis of large national co-operative enterprises and apexes and their growing contribution to sustainability, which in turn has positive fallout for their membership, as well as a potential for replication at a local level. Further, through an action analysis of co-operatives at the grassroots level, we demonstrated the emerging role that these are playing as actors for sustainability, particularly to foster development benefitting local communities.

We argue that co-operative actors are particularly well placed to facilitate articulation among the three levels demarcated in this paper. Through a discussion of the interlinked levels of governance and the theoretical relevance of co-operative values and principles to sustainability, including the 'triple-bottom line', we have demonstrated why the co-operative movement represents a particularly strong actor for the implementation of the SDGs.

Starting from this promising perspective, there is much to be enhanced. Local co-operatives can reach out at the higher levels of governance for greater support and knowledge sharing. National and larger co-operative enterprises can reassess strategies for sustainability to ensure that the SDGs are streamlined within operating procedures. At the apex level, significant work remains to be done in supporting the start-up and growth of co-operatives as an established way to enable people to take charge of their own development. Working towards a conducive legal and economic environment for co-operatives needs more effort. At the practitioner level, better communication

of the links between the SDGs and co-operative values and principles, particularly in emerging fields of thinking such as post-growth, is also an area of interest. In all of these areas, the co-operative movement will continue to work to ensure that human needs and capabilities can be met and will continue to champion its quintessential values and principles in a democratic and participatory way.



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Jeffrey Moxom is a Research Officer at the International Co-operative Alliance, under the ICA-EU Partnership for International Development. He currently works on a number of research initiatives on international co-operative development, including co-operative statistics, co-operative law and sustainable development. He studied Politics at the University of Leicester (UK) and Environment, Development and Policy at the University of Sussex (UK).

Arielle Romenteau used to work as Research Coordinator at Cooperatives Europe, focusing on international cooperative development and on strengthening knowledge sharing between cooperative organisations, in particular through the Cooperative Europe Development Platform (CEDP). Prior to that, she gained experience in NGOs specialised on conflict analysis, as well as humanitarian aid delivery and training. Arielle studied Political Science and International Relations in Sciences Po Grenoble (France).

Erick Obongo is Research Officer, ICA-Africa; Mohit Dave is Research Officer, ICA Asia-Pacific; and Carlos Enrique González Blanco is Research Officer, Cooperatives of the Americas

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## Notes

- i More information is available at <https://www.ica.coop/en/our-work/international-cooperative-development>
- ii One example is past trainings conducted by Swedish co-operative organization We Effect for small farmers in East Africa on Climate Change Adaption. For further information, see the report Cooperatives Europe (2017). Good practices in international cooperative development. i
- iii For more information, see <https://coopseurope.coop/development/>
- iv The most relevant are the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). 1979; the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993; the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), 1995; the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, 2000, which recognises women's role in peace building and the impact of armed conflict on women. There are also several regional agreements that commit governments to action: The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), 1994; the Maputo Protocol, adopted by the African Union in 2003; the Istanbul Convention, 2011.





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