

Cooperatives and Cooperative Education in Ghana: Perspectives from a Cooperative Educator

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Historical Background

The British Colonial government, in its effort to get the best quality cocoa beans from Gold Coast (now Ghana) set up a group farm venture in 1928 through its Department of Agriculture at a small village called Atasomanso, near Kumasi in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. This led to the formation of several cooperative cocoa societies throughout the forest zone of the country.

The success of the cocoa cooperatives led to the formation of other agricultural cooperatives as well as industrial, services and financial cooperatives. The Cooperative Movement became quite successful but political events some years after Ghana's independence led to undue interference in the affairs of the cooperatives, which eventually led to the seizure of the assets of the Ghana Cooperative Marketing Association, the pillar of the Cooperative Movement. This seriously undermined the strength and independence of the movement until successive changes in governments brought in their wake some semblance of sanity into the movement.

Current Situation

Today, there are over 2,200 registered cooperatives in Ghana. The breakdown is as follows:

- # 1080 Agricultural cooperatives
- # 740 Industrial cooperatives
- # 241 Financial cooperatives
- # 205 Services cooperatives

Agricultural Cooperatives include:

- # Production and marketing cooperatives
- # Poultry and livestock cooperatives
- # Fishing and fish marketing cooperatives
- # Food processing and marketing cooperatives

Industrial cooperatives:

- # Are largely the local gin (Akpeteshie) distilling and retailing cooperatives
- # Also includes handicraft and artisan groups which are worker cooperatives

Financial Cooperatives include:

- # Credit Unions
- # Susu Cooperatives, which are small, locally-based savings cooperatives

Services Cooperatives include:

- # Transport cooperatives
- # Pharmaceutical cooperatives (a purchasing cooperative)
- # Consumer cooperatives

Among the four sectors, the agricultural cooperatives have the best potential for growth due to an ongoing governmental promotion called “AGSSIP.”

Supporting Agencies/Organizations

Cooperatives in Ghana are supported by several organizations, including:

- # The Department of Co-operatives (DOC) under the Ministry of Manpower Development and Employment

- # The Ghana Co-operative Council (GCC)
- # The Ghana Co-operative College (CC)
- # Various other government and non-governmental organizations using cooperatives as a tool to meet developmental goals.

Cooperative Education and Training

Due to their relative lack of financial resources, cooperatives in Ghana meet their education and training needs from the services rendered by the above-listed supporting agencies, almost for free. These agencies are either fully funded by the government (DOC) or are on government subvention (GCC and CC).

DOC

Apart from its statutory duties of registration; audit and inspection; arbitration; and liquidation; the staff of DOC also work to promote the sustainability of cooperatives by educating cooperative members about cooperative principles and practices. The DOC also provides training for employees, members and board members of cooperatives.

Ghana Co-operative Council (GCC)

The GCC is the umbrella organization for all cooperatives in Ghana. Its membership is made up of the National Associations of the various types of cooperatives and central societies, totaling eleven (11).

The Council receives almost all its funding from the Government of Ghana, with the member-associations contributing very little financially. This goes a long way to undermine the independence of the Council.

Apart from representing the Cooperative Movement in Ghana domestically and internationally, the Council also takes up member-education. This is more informal.

Ghana Co-operative College

The College was established in 1971 with British technical assistance, and in collaboration with the DOC and the GCC.

It is located on the premises of a shoe factory in Kumasi. However, construction work on a permanent site is ongoing, on a 50-acre plot of land at Atasomanso, the birthplace of cooperatives in Ghana. The College's mission is to be the number one cooperative institution of high standard that offers quality education and training to its customers (individuals, groups, or associations) to make them successful, marketable, and employable within the liberalized economy.

Training Programs

Currently the College offers two training programs: Basic and Advanced Courses in Cooperative Studies. Plans are for an Advanced level—to add a tertiary Diploma Course in partnership with the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).

(a) Basic Course

Duration: 3 months

Subjects offered:

- # Bookkeeping and Accounts
- # Economics
- # Management / Marketing
- # Introduction to I/T
- # Cooperative Studies
- # Communication Skills

This course provides introductory training for cooperative managers in cooperative studies as well as business management skills.

Entry Requirements

- # Applicants from High School (SSS) should have successfully completed four subjects, including English and Mathematics.

- # Applicants from the Cooperative Movement should have at least basic education, with proficiency in English, and at least two year's working experience.

(b) Advanced Course

Duration: 7 months, including a 1-month internship

Subjects offered

- # Cooperative studies
- # Financial Accounting
- # Economics
- # Management and Organizational Development
- # Auditing
- # Marketing
- # Communication Skills
- # Advanced IT

This course is designed for existing cooperative managers who have completed the basic course, and new applicants who have the qualification.

Entry Requirements

- # Recent High School graduates must have successfully completed five (5) courses, including English, Mathematics, and Accounting.
- # Basic Course graduates must have passed with good grades, and have successfully completed a course in Accounting.

Cumulative Figures of Trainees

Since its establishment in 1971 and up to the present, the College has trained a total of 6,420 people. The breakdown of the target groups is as follows:

Co-operative Societies Staff	3,982
Dept. of Co-operatives Staff	1,136

Private Individuals	1,302
Total	6,420

Certificates

At the end of the studies certificates are issued by the College to successful students.

Problems

- (a) Academic Staff – inadequate quality teaching staff.
- (b) Training Materials – the only teaching aids are chalk, chalkboards and typewriters.
Students must rely on tutors' handouts and a few documents supplied by DOC.
- (c) Library – inadequately stocked.
- (d) Curriculum – to re-package the current curriculum by strengthening the Business Course content and emphasize practical interactive training.

Solutions

- (a) Recruitment of more qualified academic and administrative staff is underway.
- (b) USDA has already started with provision of a Computer Laboratory, and is re-stocking a library.
- (c) Curriculum review and enhancement is ongoing and my presence here is part of it.
- (d) Introduction of short-term Farmer Based Organizations (FBO) training courses. In this regard, the College is participating in two priority areas of the FBO program:
 - (i) Strengthening the capacities of agencies promoting FBOs;
 - (ii) Education and training for FBOs, including training of FBO trainers.