

Co-operative Colleges in Developing Countries

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Co-operative education is an essential part of the Co-operative Movement, as it helps a wide spectrum of co-operators in numerous capacities to make a significant contribution towards Co-operative development and management. It helps:

1. members to gain knowledge, increase their confidence to assess economic activities of their societies, make appropriate decisions and improve leadership skills
2. co-operative staff to realise their full potential and abilities which they could put into effective use in their working environment
3. government officers in their role as advisers and administrators to perform par excellence

In this regard, the role of Co-operative colleges in developing countries as providers of Co-operative education and training is of significant importance. These colleges have to work within a complex socio-political and economic environment. Within this environment, college administrators have to develop a management and organisational structure to meet the challenge of providing training programmes to satisfy the needs of the movement in general. This is even more important for co-operatives as their personnel have to work at both grass roots and apex levels. These are at two extremes. This article examines the provision of educational services by the Co-operative colleges in developing countries. The basis of information for this article is partly from a survey carried out on the management and organisation of Co-operative training institutions in developing countries.

Almost all Co-operative colleges in developing countries are funded by respective governments, and hence they are either directly or indirectly controlled by the government ministry concerned or by the Department of Co-operative Development. A large proportion of college staff, including the Principal or Director, are government officers. As a consequence, the majority of students in these colleges are government officers from the

Co-operative Department and related branches. The number representing the Co-operative Movement is comparatively low: the student ratio between the two sectors ranges between 62:38 and 15:4. Usually, the policy decisions are taken at the Ministry or Departmental levels. The teaching staff are transferable from the field to the college and vice versa.

All colleges have similar objectives, and aim to carry out practically oriented training for low, middle and higher level personnel from the Department of Co-operatives and other organisations associated with Co-operative development and management. They target a wide range of groups who need Co-operative education and training, including members of societies; board/committee members; government officials; co-operative society officials; the general public; politicians and policy makers; staff in other organisations involved in Co-operative development; school children and school leavers. Board members, co-operative society officials and government officers form the nucleus of this target group. Their training needs vary immensely, but the colleges seem to make a greater emphasis on subjects like book-keeping; accountancy; management; marketing; Co-operative law; and Co-operative principles and practice.

Types of courses and curriculum development

The types of courses offered vary from college to college and country to country. A large Co-operative college may offer as many as 12 certificate and diploma courses, ranging from one year to three years' full time study. An advanced, three year diploma programme is considered equivalent to an undergraduate degree. At the other extreme are smaller colleges which run programmes of only one to six weeks. In between are colleges which run long term certificate/diploma courses and short term specialised programmes. Co-operative education and training is a highly diversified activity in developing countries. They are expected to keep pace with a changing environment and improve human resource skills.

All Co-operative colleges make an important contribution towards in-service training, particularly for field staff and rural workers. Some of these programmes are funded by international agencies who engage the services of expatriate consultants. The opportunity for college staff to be associated with these programmes, as local resource personnel and participants, enhances their own development in the field of training.

Curriculum development is the construction, implementation and continuous updating of education and training programmes. There does not seem to be any uniform pattern as to how colleges develop curricula; it varies according to the types of courses and programmes delivered by individual colleges. The majority develop their own curriculum, and others

do it in consultation with government ministries and Co-operative societies. Important aspects are the teaching and training methodology; teacher-student relationships; student background; and the extent and manner of the college's involvement with the Co-operative sector. On average, the colleges review their curriculum every three years (though some have five year periods, and others review whenever required). With the introduction of liberalisation programmes in developing countries, the Co-operative societies today are in a period of transition from a state monopoly to an open market economy. This situation has brought about many challenges to the management of Co-operative societies; updating the curriculum to focus on, and accommodate, changes in the socio-economic and political environment of the country is one of these. Curriculum development begins with a thorough analysis of all factors which may influence the objectives, structure and content of a particular programme. The objective should highlight what the function of the students would be after completion of training. For Co-operative education and training, a curriculum is largely conditioned by the current occupational positions held.

Delivery of programmes

The success of a college depends on its ability to deliver its programmes efficiently and effectively. In this regard, they should ensure that the teaching staff are better equipped for this purpose, through a well defined staff development policy. The staff comprise Co-operative development officers from the Co-operative Department; graduates who have attended Co-operative officer training; Co-operative officials with sufficient experience in the particular field; and others with teaching experience. Good teaching is concerned with the transfer of knowledge and skills applicable now and in the future; this can be achieved by adopting appropriate methodologies for the particular session. The majority of colleges adopt a training by objectives system, although a few use a modular system. It is not the intention here to evaluate which is better, but the latter is favoured for long-term programmes.

The majority of teaching staff take the view that they could immensely benefit from staff development programmes that focus on training methods and identification of training needs. Both are vital ingredients for Co-operative education and training. Attention must be paid to the kind of stimuli that improve the learning process. Participants come with diverse backgrounds, and in order to influence their perception, teachers must try to understand them and relate the material to their level of understanding. It is not simply a case of teacher teaching and the student listening, but one of participation, whereby experiences are exchanged. Teaching staff

consider that training in teaching methods should form an essential element in staff development programmes. However, the opportunity is limited due to financial constraints. Some people believe that anyone can take up a teaching job in a Co-operative college and do it fairly well if that person has communication skills. One comment is of particular interest:

I was simply teaching whatever I learned or read on co-operatives regardless of its relevance to the syllabus

The individual disposition, interest and experience make a lot of difference. On the other hand, training in teaching methods would improve their skills and make them better trainers.

The assessment of training needs is restricted, due to financial and manpower constraints. The training programmes appear to have been designed on the basis of data collected by college staff; part of this comes through course evaluation exercises, field reports, and comments from those responsible for education at national level. However, the information collected should enable identification of the priority needs and concerns of the Co-operative sector.

Autonomy in decision-making

Given the constraints within their environment, the Co-operative colleges in developing countries ponder over the question of whether they could deliver better services if they were autonomous and functioning within a governing body framework, rather than under a government ministry. The administrative authority of colleges extends over policy, facilities, staff and services for education and training. It should also extend to the co-ordination of policy and communication with other, similar institutions, and with relevant government ministries. This objective could be achieved if the director of the college is able to make sound decisions, but the situation may vary with government policy. Where the educational system gives adequate authority to the director, national policies are defined in broad terms, with appropriate legislation; the director and staff have the primary responsibility for development of programmes, within a framework of guidelines laid down by the government department. The director recommends appointment of staff to both teaching and non-teaching positions, and carries the responsibility for budgets. Where there is a governing council, its function is most often advisory, but the central administration may delegate some decision-making authority to it.

As Co-operative principles highlight, co-operatives are democratic institutions. When a college is first established, its objects and programmes have normally been formulated by a government ministry. With the

advancement of the college, decision making may be progressively decentralised, and the director, staff and Co-operative societies given more opportunity for decision-making.

There are many other educational institutions whose work relates to that of Co-operative colleges in developing countries. They include: agricultural extension work; rural development; farmer training; co-operative unions and other apex bodies; and development projects. On occasion, colleges are called upon to link with these in delivery of training programmes; for instance both Co-operative unions and colleges train members, and a co-ordinated effort would enable resources to be utilised most effectively. The collective co-operative effort developed between an educational institution and the community it serves is known as outreach; it is the reciprocal link between the Co-operative college and the Co-operative community at large that ensures that both benefit from the association. Co-operative members and officials benefit because they get access to new information and skills. The college benefits because it becomes more directly involved with officials and members at grass roots level, and with the problems of the rural membership. These experiences can then be incorporated into the college's training programme. This concept has much to commend it, and the new type of director or principal that is now emerging seems to appreciate it.

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