

Local Development and Co-operatives: none, only one, more than one in the same village

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Abstract

This article addresses the issue of co-operatives (none, only one, more than one) in local village communities of Third World countries. Situations of no-co-operatives ("absence"), one co-operative ("monism") or more than one co-operative ("pluralism") in the same village are presented and analysed from a perspective of "top-down" and "bottom-up" development styles. The three situations do not make up a continuum and should therefore be treated as discrete categories. It is argued that resort to monistic organisational systems in top-down projects may prevent the local people from making the best out of their organisational potential.

Introduction

The issue of how many organisations a village community can handle and how we can interpret the presence of different numbers of organisations in the same village does not seem to have been explored in current development literature. Studies of rural development participation in Third World countries have identified a number of major dimensions. One dimension is "organisational capacity" (Honadle, 1982), which includes "organisational stock" (what resources does the organisation control?) and "organisational behaviour" (what are people actually doing?). Another more recent dimension is 'organisational intensity and density' (Cernea, 1994). Intensity emphasises organisational and institutional capacity, density the frequency of people's participation in networks of socially organised activities. The density of organisations has been analysed from the perspective of pooling systems in their horizontal or vertical dimensions, and their impact on the participants in terms of costs, rewards and equity (Galjart, 1992). More focused analysis has addressed:

- the scope of activities of individual households or the intensity of an individual's participation in organisations (Cohen and Uphoff, 1980)
- whether it is better to work with an existing organisation or to create new ones (Gow and VanSant, 1983; Clements, 1986)
- the advisability and effectiveness of having organisations (meaning mainly co-operatives) deal with one or more commodity (in marketing), a single commodity, or mainly with service functions (Rochin and Nyborg, 1988).

This article does not pretend to cope with such complex matters as how to define, assess and measure the local organisational "carrying capacity" of a community or "successful organisational handling". However, it is felt that recent experiences with co-operatives in Third World countries provides sufficient empirical evidence as to the possible local reactions to two broad situations: the presence of one all-village co-operative and of more than one co-operative in the same village. Given the impact that a situation of no-co-operatives can have on local development, we have decided to add the element of "absence" of co-operatives. Our conceptual framework thus rests on three main situations:

- 1) absence of the phenomenon under consideration;
- 2) monism as a system based on one single organisation; and
- 3) pluralism as a system based on more than one organisation.

Background

By "co-operative" is commonly meant an organisation formally registered as such. A well-known definition used by international agencies presents the co-operative as:

an association of persons who have voluntarily joined together to achieve a common objective through the formation of a democratically controlled organisation, making equitable contributions to the capital required and accepting a fair share of the risks and benefits of the undertaking (ILO, 1966).

The all-too-frequent association of co-operatives with governments in Third World countries, however, has led to the need to dissociate the formal aspect from the co-operative content. It is well known that an organisation may be formally a "co-operative" without necessarily meeting the above criteria of voluntariness, democracy and equity. Conversely, an organisation may meet the above criteria without necessarily having a formal co-operative status. Besides co-operatives, other organisations work in rural areas of Third World countries, either in the form of traditional patterns of mutual aid, or - more recently - as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which again may or may not be formally registered. For the purpose of this article, 'co-operatives' will usually mean organisations formally registered as such.

Table 1.

Is it formally registered?

**Is it a
Co-operative?**

	Yes	No
Yes	common-type co-ops	pre-co-ops
No	NGOs	NGOs and traditional forms

Though broadly conforming to the common definition of "member-based organisations", these types differ with regard to their origins and the types of assistance received. Distinguishing between the political-administrative source of development initiatives ("from above/from below") and the geographic-territorial one ("from without/from within"), enables us to differentiate between two broad categories of development styles: a formal "top-down" style and a more participatory, locally based and "bottom-up" style. As the sense of locality ('without/within' the community) is broadly rendered by the "top-down/bottom-up" distinction, the latter will be used throughout this article. Formally registered co-operatives tend to be associated (though not exclusively) with governmental initiative and control; other organisations - regardless of their formal status - tend to be more associated with grassroots origin and participatory growth. This broadly corresponds to the "top-down" and "bottom-up" distinction.

Table 2. Strategies of rural co-operative formation

Variables	The top-down model	The bottom-up model
I. Origin of initiative to create the co-operative	External, decreed	Internal, free
II. Who promotes the formation of the co-operative	Mostly external agents	Mostly local agents
III. Underlying motivations to create the co-operative	Government interests and personal career of agents	Local needs and interests
IV. Source of policy-making	Centralised	Decentralised
V. Emphasis on legal aspects of co-operation	Maximal	Minimal
VI. Organisation size of co-operative	Preferably big and ambitious	Preferably small and modest
VII. Main fields of action of co-operative	Emphasis on major crops for export	Emphasis on local needs
VIII. Type of technology used by co-operative	Modern and not necessarily attuned to local culture	Intermediate and attuned to local culture
IX. Style of work of the co-operative	Routine, along with authoritarian guidelines	Pragmatic, flexible
X. Nature of external financial support to co-operative	According to top-down decisions	Contingent on local demands
XI. Nature of overall external assistance to co-operative	Not necessarily related to local demands and capabilities, enduring	Contingent on local demands and possibly temporary
XII. Members' approach to ways of using surpluses	Tendency towards immediate distribution and gratification	Readiness towards reinvestment and deferred gratification
XIII. How the co-operative is seen by members	As yet another arm of government	As their own creation
XIV. Attitude towards failures	Tendency to ignore failures and to maintain the co-operative	Readiness to admit failures

Source: general literature and author's teaching experience

This distinction has its roots in the disappointing record of most governmental initiatives in co-operative policies. Development literature is replete with critical evaluations of co-operatives as tools of rural development, and with more sympathetic appraisals of newly emergent NGOs, which mostly do not have a formal co-operative status, in their two-fold connotation of grassroots support organisations (GSOs) and membership support organisations (MSOs) (Carroll, 1992). Despite the lack of general agreement on the superiority of the NGO model over the government-induced one (Bubington et al, 1993) criticism of governmental co-operative policies has been repeatedly stated in uncompromising terms. A few examples will suffice:

It is a valid and unsurprising generalisation of world wide experience that the greater the degree of interference by governments in co-operative enterprise, the greater the degree of incompetence and failure (Bottomley, 1989:142-143)

where co-operatives collaborate with governments as agents for the implementation of public programmes, they usually lose their money, their member support and their identity (Münkner, 1993).

In the recommendations for a reform of rural co-operatives in Kenya, there was a call to

... replace the present co-operative law with legislation that protects co-operative societies from government intervention (Gyllström, 1989).

Aim and scope of the article

This article will attempt some exploratory insights into the issue of "none/only-one/more-than-one" co-operative in the same village. The monistic pattern will be examined mainly against the background of the Israeli model, due to its popularity and its impact on co-operative policies in developing countries. The pluralistic pattern will be examined mainly against the

background of the common Multi-Purpose Co-operative (MPC) model. As with most dichotomies in development, an 'either/or' approach fails to account for the nuances of reality. So, throughout this article, cases of mixed initiatives will be considered along with top-down and bottom-up ones. Following our observations, a few suggestions for further research will be formulated.

A few propositions underlie our approach. First, the extent of inter-organisational compatibility at the village level (as specified by law) can encourage or stifle the development of local organisational potential. At the low end we find the monistic model, usually based on the exclusion of another formal organisation having objectives similar to those included in the statutes of the all-village co-operative. As these statutes usually contemplate a wide range of activities, the likelihood of a new organisation to emerge is virtually nil. At the mid level, incompatibility may restrict the new organisation only in so far as it deals with a specific activity. Such a case was reported to this author from the Ivory Coast, where groups eager to benefit from the economies of scale of joint marketing of coffee or cocoa, and meeting the legal minimum of seven people, applied for co-operative registration. They applied under the official policy of the Groupements Villageois Pré-coopératifs, yet met with difficulties as their interest collided with that of the local MPC (Multi-Purpose Co-operative). At the high level of compatibility we find no restrictions as to the setting up of formal organisations.

Second, a situation in which there is a low density of co-operatives, or their complete absence, should not be seen as a vacuum to be filled by means of co-operative solutions but rather, under specific conditions, as having the potential for development through means other than co-operatives. The issue is illustrated in the situation of "absence of co-operatives":

- monistic organisational systems of top-down origin tend to be associated with macro-projects dealing with country-wide objectives.
- monistic organisational systems of bottom-up origin tend to be associated with strongly motivated and rather homogenous groups dealing with local problems.

- pluralistic organisational systems tend to be associated with bottom-up and mixed initiatives dealing with local and wider problems
- as measures of organisational density at the village level, "absence", "monism" and "pluralism" do not constitute a continuum but rather discrete categories, each to be analysed in the light of its potentials and limitations.

Situations of "no co-operatives", "only one co-operative" and "more than one co-operative" will be taken up in turn. Following some general considerations of a historical and conceptual nature, a variety of practical cases will be reviewed. These are based on the relevant literature and the author's field experience.

General considerations

1. Absence of co-operatives

Absence of formal co-operatives may convey a two-fold signal: "not-yet", or "not-any-more/never-again". The first refers to a situation where the ground is "virgin" from the co-operative viewpoint, to mean that no such experiences have occurred yet on the local territory or in its vicinity. The second hints at the opposite, that negative prior experiences give co-operatives a bad name and that cautious pragmatism is in order when dealing with questions of local organisation. This will be illustrated by two examples from the author's experience.

2. One co-operative for the whole village

The background to this option is well known. At the birth of the modern co-operative movement there lies an identification between the co-operative and the local community. Attuned to Robert Owen's school of thought, the Law First of the 1844 Rochdale Statutes stipulated that the fifth and last stage of development of their co-operative would be the establishment of a "self-supporting home colony of united interests" in charge of "... production, distribution, education and government"

(Lambert, 1963:292). In the co-operative literature these "colonies" came to be known as the Owenite "villages of co-operation". Quite independently of Western models, the identification between the village community and an all-purpose body governing it also appealed to traditional rural societies. In India, for instance, we know of the Gramasahba, an ancient form of organisation responsible for social and economic village affairs and forming a village council (Hatti and Rundquist, 1989). Commenting on instances of co-operative villages in Africa, Pickett (1970) has made the point that these villages deserve the attribute of "co-operative" only in so far as the co-operative becomes the leading institution in the village life through meeting most of the needs of the majority of the villagers. According to Guernier (1966:200) the village in developing countries

... becomes on its own efforts a co-operative nucleus of development based upon the sole management of the inhabitants ... a village can become a village community where four-fifths of the family heads decide to do so and adopt the necessary statutes.

Israel's is probably the best known model of monistic village governance. Its origin goes back to the early 1920s and the beginnings of labour settlements in what was then Palestine. Three main factors explain the emergence and evolution of this model. The first, of clear ideological character, was the ethos of return to the land of the Jewish people through the creation of a new egalitarian society based on self-labour and national land ownership. This suggested the establishment of cohesive and solidary rural communities under a common management system. The second, of pragmatic nature, stemmed from the physical hardships and the absence of any governmental support, all of which necessitated strong self-reliant rural units. The third, of later development, was based on arguments of economies of scale: the settling and land authorities, as well as the various supply organisations, both before and after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, found it more expedient and less costly to deal with one single all-purpose village organisation rather than with a pluralistic system. The monistic system functioned without any formal arrangements until 1958, when the law first legalised

the long established practice of one single co-operative fulfilling all the economic, social and municipal tasks in the village. This refers to the three main patterns of rural co-operative communities in Israel, namely the kibbutz (collective settlement), the moshav shitufi (collective moshav) and the moshav ovdim (smallholder settlement). Inherent in the system is the exclusion of a co-operative (or related organisation) having objectives similar to those of the all-village co-operative. The three types share the voluntary character of their foundation, with the exception of the moshavim (plural of moshav) established in the 1950s at the time of mass immigration (Levi, 1998).

Critical to our concern is the distinction between collective and smallholder types of settlement. In the former, the virtually unlimited occupational mobility and the fact that the whole community constitutes one production unit (as in the kibbutz and moshav shitufi) makes it compatible with a monistic organisational system, whose functioning depends on the ongoing voluntary character of the organisation. This is not the case in the smallholder village (the moshav ovdim) where the identification of co-operative and municipal functions in the same committee left unresolved the question of municipal rights to non-continuing sons and non-member residents. The recent crisis of the moshav ovdim sector in Israel shows the severe limitations of a smallholder structure - as distinct from a collective one like the kibbutz - in coping with the inflexibility of an all-village co-operative, characterised by the dual role of co-operative and municipal management performed by the same committee (Zusman, 1988; Ottolenghi and Levi, 1990). This is of particular relevance in those moshav settlements established in the 1950s.

So far, we have been discussing the monistic model in Israel, mostly within a "bottom-up" context. However, the Israeli moshav (smallholder) model became popular in Third World countries in the 1960s and 1970s. Its alleged suitability to overseas contexts was based on its relative lower degree of co-operative integration than the kibbutz and the moshav shitufi. In practice, however, the transferability of the model to widely different areas characterised by strong top-down policies and reliance on major export crops proved highly questionable (Kahan, 1986; Levi, 1995). The co-operative-municipal issue became less prominent, yet the exclusiveness of the all-village cooperative

was retained. Under a typical externally-induced approach, Weitz (1971; 1979) assigned to the village co-operative in less developed countries a demanding role with three prerequisites for its success

First, the village co-operative must be multi-purpose or all inclusive, that is, it must cover all the services needed by the farmer; second, it must be a statutory body officially recognised by all the service supplying organisations as representative of the farmers and supported as such by government agencies ...; third, the village co-operative must be the only organisation which provides services in the village, and membership must be obligatory to all farmers, notwithstanding the size of the individual farms (1971:101; 1979:18) ...; the village co-operative is so indispensable that, if necessary, it should be established even from above by official decree. It is only at a much later stage, when the phase of specialisation is reached, that the farmer can dispense with the village co-operative and safeguard his interests by himself. At that phase, he is already capable of dealing directly with the service suppliers as the European farmer actually does today (1979:18).

The above recommendations seem to rest on a number of disputable assumptions, such that rural development is linear and that at a certain stage "specialisation" is expected; that the village co-operative can be seen as a temporary device to be dispensed with at a later stage; and that the European farmer can offer a desirable and achievable model to Third World rural populations. The model is unrealistic. First, by claiming to provide an umbrella for the needs of all the farmers, it overlooks the diversity in wealth, social status and interests which are characteristic of most of the villages under discussion. This reality belies the myth of the consensual community based on homogeneity of interests, once seen vital for the building-up of co-operative village communities. As early as in the late 1960s the world-wide research by the United Nations Research Institute (UNRISD, 1969) pointed to the failure of Third World co-operatives to achieve a more equitable distribution of income and to empower the poorest in the village. Co-operatives all too often tend to reproduce within themselves the inequalities and socio-economic stratification prevailing in and around the village, as clearly shown by an Indian study of Karnataka:

... in a markedly stratified society where income differentials are significant, co-operative members tend to have higher incomes than non-members, while caste-group differences are retained ... Brahmins, with their traditional socio-economic position, tend to dominate the local co-operative (Hatti and Rundquist, 1989:131-149).

A recent study of credit unions in Northwestern Ghana has shown how heterogeneity in wealth, ethnicity and literacy levels can erode the performance of the co-operative and help the process of extraction of capital from women to men, from less to more wealthy farmers and from rural to urban areas (Songsore, 1992:82-101). Second, by presenting the village co-operative as "indispensable", and, if necessary, to be established "from above by official decree", the above recommendation seems to defeat the purpose of participation which ideally should underlie the creation and performance of the very co-operatives.

3. More than one co-operative in the same village

Ideally, there should be a pluralistic system of organisations, allowing potential beneficiaries to organise in accordance with their various needs and objectives. In fact, what happened is that the early single-purpose and single-commodity co-operative societies of the colonial time specialising respectively in specific activities (credit and inputs, supply and marketing) and crops (cash crops, cereals, dairy, etc) proved insufficient to service the farmer in his or her multiple needs. In the post-colonial time, in most countries a process of amalgamation took place, of single-purpose co-operatives into multi-purpose ones. In their quest for territorially-based units of integrated rural development, the governments chose the village as the basic unit and encouraged the broadening of the Multi-Purpose Co-operatives (MPCs), beyond the common credit-inputs-marketing mix. The village became the site of primaries, in turn affiliated with extra-local secondary co-operatives or unions and this often curtailed local autonomy.

Case studies

1. *Absence of co-operatives*

In a cross-national study of self-management in new land settlement projects in Latin America (Levi and Naveh, 1988) it was found that in one case (3 de Octubre, Honduras) the Peasant League in charge of the project had intentionally avoided a formal co-operative status to the local settlement, as part of its ideology and nationwide policy. The settlement is a local legally-negotiated branch of the Asociación Nacional de Campesinos Hondureños called subseccional. Purposeful avoidance of formal co-operative status by the Peasant League to its affiliated units manifested its disavowal of the official use of co-operatives in rural policies. While preventing governmental interference in the affairs of the subseccionales, this provision also helped to make their daily administration simpler by freeing them from the need to prepare an annual balance sheet, a duty transferred, in this case, to the regional co-operative. Here we have a case where avoidance of formal co-operatives becomes a local strength.

In 1986, this author acted as a consultant to the government of Costa Rica regarding the absorption of Nicaraguan political refugees in a new settlement near the Panamanian border. The agencies in charge manifested a clear co-operative bias. The prospective settlers, however, insisted that the organisational form of the new settlement not be a co-operative: they remembered the coerced co-operatives of the Sandinist regime they had just left behind. Despite the author's recommendations, the settlers were incorporated into a production co-operative under the control of the settlement authority. This was one of the factors that ultimately led to the project's failure and the demise of the settlement and proves *a contrario*, our thesis of the appropriateness, in certain cases, of avoiding a formal co-operative system. Absence of formal co-operatives does not preclude village-wide self-help programmes and organised action, as exemplified for example in Tilonia, India (Roy, 1986) and countless similar instances as recorded in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere in the world (see for example Hirschman, 1984; Haubert, 1991; Taylor and MacKenzie, 1992).

2. *One co-operative for the whole village: top-down cases*

In those regimes eager to speed up nation-wide socialistic policies, 'villagisation' and all-village co-operatives were used. Tanzania, Ethiopia, Tunisia and Algeria provide such examples, with results heavily lagging behind expectations. Membership in the co-operatives became obligatory for the farmer in order to benefit from reforms, and the co-operatives soon turned into dominant factors in the village. Commenting on the negative experience of the Tanzanian Ujamaa villages, Porvali (1992) makes the point that the policy of "one village one (co-operative) society" damaged the economic viability of co-operatives by defining the area of operation to coincide with administrative boundaries. No agricultural co-operative could be organised within the boundaries of an Ujamaa without the approval of the Ministry. Of particular relevance was the situation of women (as a consequence of Sections 22 and 23 of the 1982 Act providing for the formation and recognition of only one co-operative society in a village):

Women's economic groups, which are often not part of the village co-operative society, are therefore not covered under this Act, leading them to be placed at a disadvantage. Even when women's economic groups can form a branch of the main co-operative society in a village, they cannot function entirely under the control of women, since the society falls within the jurisdiction of the village government which is dominated by men (Nkoma-Wamunza, 1992:211).

The difference in Tanzania's rural policies became evident with the transition from the Co-operative Act of 1982 to that of 1991:

Under the 1982 Act, with its policy of implementing socialism, the norm was for one society for each village to be established regardless of the economic consequences. Establishment under the new Act is based on purely economic criteria and members choice, and consequently the area of operation is not defined in terms of administrative boundaries (World Bank, 1994:73)

Similar policies have been observed in post-revolutionary Ethiopia:

Once a PC (Producers' Co-operative) has been formed inside a Peasant Association no other agricultural co-operative can be formed there. Peasants who become interested in collective production may join the existing PC (Stahl, 1989:65).

To evaluate the performance of a number of cases influenced to varying degrees by the Israeli moshav model, a study was carried out in 1981-1982 in five new land settlement projects in Latin America (two in Honduras and one each in the Dominican Republic, Peru and Argentina). All shared the original intention of the development agencies to arrive in the course of time at an all-settlement co-operative caring for the needs of all the settlers. The results (Levi and Naveh, 1988) showed that in one case (Haras Nacionales, the Dominican Republic) twelve years had proved insufficient for a settler's organisation to emerge and endure. In another case (28 de Agosto Peru) the all-settlement production co-operative (CAP, Cooperativa Agraria de Produccion) was strongly resisted by the settlers as it was alien to their culture. In yet another case (Nueva Coneta, Argentina) what emerged was a pluralistic pattern with one main co-operative coexisting with two other producer associations. In only one instance (the two Honduran settlements, 3 de Octubre and Salamà) could the original objective of an all-settlement organisation be achieved with the full collaboration of the settler-beneficiaries. As already mentioned, in one of these settlements the organisation was co-operative in content yet not in form. In both Honduran cases there was the least involvement of government when compared to the other settlements. This shows the unpredictability of planning and the limitations of a monistic model which is applied in differing contexts and under strong external guidance.

3. One co-operative for the whole village: bottom-up and mixed cases

The local mobilisation of scarce resources can enable peripheral communities with no access to basic public services to achieve an all-village organisation. One such case is provided by Basaisa

(Arafa, 1988) a small "satellite" village in rural Egypt where in 1983 all its 45 households belonged to the local Community Co-operative for Development (CCD), an all-village institution caring for all its needs in services, production and local government. Building on the government's inability to reach to the smallest units, such "bottom-up/from within" initiatives have a clear advantage over "top-down/from without" ones in mobilising local resources and meeting local needs, whenever the members have homogeneous backgrounds and a strong identification with their community. The asymmetry between the scope of activities of a co-operative and its community impact is illustrated by the Deedar Co-operative Village Development Society, a single-purpose savings and loans co-operative of typical grassroots origin benefiting two villages in a variety of services, with achievements which put the local standard of living much above the national averages of Bangladesh. It is ironic that the best co-operative in the country, Deedar - never received any government support or paternalistic supervision (Douse, 1993:132). An instance of mixed origin is provided by the Associations Villageoises of Mali (Belloncle, 1986). In a typical case one such association would include all the farming units of the village, while providing for the affiliation of farmers and youth to other local and extra-local groups. All the above share a strong element of voluntariness and reliance on local traditions. These and similar experiences suggest that the monistic model can offer a valid development option, provided it is voluntarily accepted by the members and is compatible with their value system.

4. More than one co-operative in the same village: top-down policies

Government control over the primary co-ops and the all-too-frequent concentration of the MPCs on basic crops for export, with undue consideration for local food consumption, meant that they failed to contribute to village empowerment through organisational diversification. The MPC, mostly state initiated and controlled, became the most pervasive pattern in rural Third World settings, often representing the main organisation at the village level. Its overall benefits to the community, however, remains questionable as the co-operative may leave outside the small farmers with no access to credit due to lack of collaterals. When these small farmers are a majority in the village, the

solution can be to create self-help groups organised around specific interests, as shown by projects in Thailand, Sri Lanka and India (Verhagen, 1984). As a rule, the capacity of a group for "multi-purposeness" should be carefully checked before a single-purpose co-operative (usually a credit co-op) decides to expand its activities. A critical issue often associated with top-down co-operative policies is poor accountability of second-level co-operatives to their primary affiliates. An efficient secondary is supposed to fulfil the following functions:

- secure information and technical knowledge
- provide economies of scale for indivisible inputs and
- interface with other delivery systems (Vyas and Jagannathan, 1985:169-177).

These functions may easily be neglected by strong secondary unions based on over-dependent primaries and prone to get involved in activities of which the primaries may have little or no information. Such experiences have been reported from Kenya with regard to single commodity (coffee)-multi-purpose local primaries (Gyllström, 1989:38-51) and from Israel with regard to all-village moshav co-operatives (Schwartz, 1995). The multi-purpose co-operative evolved in past decades along modalities greatly differing from those of the all-settlement co-operative of the socialistic regimes. In the main, however, it failed to contribute to the emergence of organisational pluralism at the village level. This is now increasingly helped by informal and voluntary groups.

5. More than one co-operative: bottom-up and mixed experiences

The resort to small groups of directly-concerned farmers was recommended on the ground of the inadequacy for development purposes of a "whole village, officially inspired, primary co-operative" (Hunter, 1978). Organisational diversification is a relatively recent phenomenon, mainly encouraged by NGOs in their aims of supporting grassroots and membership organisations. Of particular relevance are saving and lending clubs which may lead at a later stage to co-operatives proper, as in the case of Zimbabwe (Zinyama, 1992) or act as

para-co-operatives by establishing interesting patterns of coexistence and even complementarity with formal co-operatives, as is the case with the tontines of African Francophone countries (Kamden, 1983).

At times, the relations between newly created groups and existing co-operatives may become problematic. A case in point is provided by Wadhuth (Maharashtra, India), a village with 2350 inhabitants where, in the 1970s, the Fertilizer Corporation of India helped to create two working groups of 100 to 200 members each, not registered as co-operatives, to further guided-farming and fertilisation. These groups enjoyed the collaboration of the local Panchayat and proved more flexible than the existing local single-purpose credit society, but had problems in their relations with this society and with the co-operative sugar-processing societies in neighbouring villages (Kirsch et al, 1980:135-139).

The rationale of organisational diversification to serve a village community according to interest groups is illustrated by the Village Organisations (VOs) within the framework of the Pakistani Aga Khan Rural Support Programme Experience (AKRSP) started in the early 1980s. The programme addresses a variety of services beyond the conventional realm of the MPCs, such as land development, increased productivity, reduction in workload of women and co-ordination with the social sector. The size and lay-out of the VOs are a function of local needs:

The membership of the VOs depends on the size of the interest group ... from 8 households at one extreme to 130 at the other ... the majority of the VOs comprise more than 50 households or 450 adults ... some big villages have as many as six VOs but each VO is geographically and by name identifiable ... in Gilgit district the number of villages is reported to be 306 in official statistics but the number of VOs is likely to be 500 (Khan, 1992).

An interesting attempt at collaboration between the government and NGOs is reported from Bangladesh where the Adarsha Gram project includes settling landless people on newly created villages and setting up village groups, not registered as official co-operatives (Douse, 1993:136).

Summary

Our foregoing analysis has dealt with 17 examples of which 6 are country cases, 4 are sectoral/project cases and 7 are village cases. Table 3 offers a summary view.

Table 3: A summary view of cases

Cases	Absence		Monism		Pluralism	
	Not-any-more	Not-yet	Top-down	Bottom-up	Top-down	Bottom-up
Country cases						
Tanzania's Ujamaa			+			
Ethiopia's PCs			+			
Peru's CAP			+			
Israel's Moshv Ovdim			+	+		
Mali's AV					+	+
Zimbabwe's groups					+	+
Sector/Project cases						
W. African Tontines						+
Adarsha Gram (Bangladesh)					+	+
AKRSP (Pakistan)					+	+
Village cases						
Costa Rica	+					
3 de Octubre (Hond.)	+			+		
Salamá (Hond.)				+		
Basaisa (Egypt)				+		
Deedar (Bangladesh)						+
Tilonia (India)						+
Haras		+				
Nacionales (Dom. Rep.)						

Three cases (Ethiopia's PCs, Peru's CAPs and Tanzania's Ujamaa) epitomize the country-wide-top-down monistic combination. The mixed top-down-bottom-up monistic combination is represented by the Israeli case. Two cases (Basaisa and 3 de Octubre) represent the opposite village-based-monistic-bottom-up combination. The pluralistic model has been illustrated by five cases of mixed top-down-bottom-up initiatives at the macro level (Mali's AV; Zimbabwe's groups; Adarsha Gram of Bangladesh and AKRSP of Pakistan), one case of bottom-up initiative at the macro level (the W. African tontines) and two cases of bottom-up initiative at the village level (Deedar and Tilonia). Of particular interest are 3 de Octubre (Honduras) as an example of a purposely non-co-operative all village organisation (a "not-any-more" instance); Basaisa (Egypt) as its co-operative counterpart; Deedar as a bottom-up co-operative comprising two villages and Haras Nacionales (The Dominican Republic) as an example of absence of co-operative organisations corresponding to a 'not-yet' instance. As to the Costa Rican experience, it has been included under "absence" due to the "never-again" perception of the refugees, although the ultimate outcome was its opposite, that is, an all-village co-operative under the control of the settling authority.

Though exploratory in character, the above observations point to the general tendency of monistic projects of national scope to be associated with top-down initiatives and of pluralistic projects to be associated with a mix of top-down and bottom-up initiatives or bottom-up ones. It was earlier suggested that the "absence-monism-pluralism" distinction does not form a continuum, and that each option should be seen in the light of its potentials and limitations. Put in other words, 'bigger' is not necessarily 'better'. The "communityness" of a co-operative (to mean its relevance to the community and its contribution to community self-determination and self-reliance) does not necessarily depend on its size or the scope of its activities. As is nicely illustrated by the Deedar case, a grassroots single-purpose co-operative may have a bigger impact on its environment than can a multi-purpose one, whose origin is "from above" and "from without" and is less sensitive to local problems and needs.

Discussion and conclusions

How do our observations relate to broader theoretical considerations? The notions of monism and pluralism invite an association with monopoly and competition respectively. Counteracting capitalist monopolies has been a typical challenge for co-operatives in the West (Cirillo, 1984). The struggle of the Saskatchewan farmers to curb the monopolistic system of transporting and marketing grain (McLaughlin, 1996) and the achievements of the Swedish consumers' organization KF in reducing retail prices on a national scale (Kylebäck, 1986), provide telling illustrations. It is interesting to note how the roles, in our above cases, have been inverted: co-operatives have turned from anti-monopolistic into monopolistic actors. The state, especially in East Africa, used co-operatives to replace private dealers in major export crops and gave them a monopolistic position. The all-village co-operative served as an efficient means of control at the local level. Such a monopolistic power has been criticised on the grounds that it impaired the efforts to benefit the rural poor through grassroots participation, and is unjustified whenever the co-operatives operate in sub-economic ways (Lele, 1981) or are characterised by high levels of corruption, thefts and the opportunism of power-holders (Brett, 1993).

Unlike the notion of monism, pluralism invites the association with competition, choice, voice and exit and a potential for multiple linkages to extra-village levels. The mere possibility for a pluralist system to exist does not in itself provide a sufficient condition for its efficient functioning. Competition among groups can have negative effects when groups operating within a relatively limited territory compete for scarce resources, fail to find a common denominator or are forced into desperate survival options, as in some Thai villages (Turton, 1987). Whatever the shortcomings, though, the pluralistic option seems to have an edge on the constraints and inflexibility of monistic solutions.

Moving to a higher level of abstraction can help us to sharpen this view. Monism has been said to occur when "Our separate individual ways of understanding complex systems are merging into a coherent whole" (Norgaard, 1994:62). This can lead to an inability to account for, and understand, local diversity:

Monism denies the possibility of multiple right and contradictory answers stemming from alternative ways of thinking about the same problem ... By publicly agreeing to monism we are unable to look upon cultures with different knowledge systems as equals (ibid: 66, 73).

For a long time, co-operatives in Third World countries served ambitious national goals such as land reform, the production of major crops for export and the building-up of rural socialism. "Co-operatives at the service of national development", "full-fledged co-operatives" and "all-settlement co-operatives" suited the "hard" image sought. The frequent abuses and misuses of co-operatives by governments in developing countries, suggest that alternative thinking and strategies should be adopted. The role of co-operatives in development may be better served by "soft" rather than "hard" choices (Levi, 1994).

The above analysis suggests that the monistic model, far from securing a viable all-village organisational frame, may defeat such a purpose whenever the organisation is decreed from above and serves as a blueprint to achieve national goals. A main conclusion is that in a situation of low inter-organisational compatibility as typical of top-down monistic projects, misuse of co-operatives may prevent the local people from making the best out of their organisational potential. As to the pluralistic model, it seems that due to historic colonial backgrounds, the bias towards strong MPCs failed to contribute to the emergence of meaningful pluralistic systems at the village level. The importance of absence of formal co-operatives, in its two-fold 'not-yet/not-any-more' aspect has been a major concern of our subject matter. The point was not an appraisal of 'absence' per se but rather the need to be aware of the possible negative outcomes of involuntary co-operative policies and, once the damage is caused, to see absence of co-operatives as a development potential. It may be useful to avoid co-operative semantics and formal solutions, in order to prevent further erosion of the co-operative image and to encourage the self-reliance of people and their confidence in initiatives which may be co-operative in content yet not necessarily in their connotation and form.

The new trends of deofficialisation of central government

policies, of structural adjustments and of privatisation, are likely to produce changes in local organisational forms. The role of co-operatives - for long associated with official policies - is about to diminish in favour of new forms of participatory and local institutions, spurred by the recent proliferation of NGOs with their myriad organisational forms and functions (World Bank, 1997, Chap.7). Considering, for instance, recent trends in Sub-Saharan Africa, a number of reasons seem to speak in favour of organisational pluralism at the village level:

- the comparative advantages of formal and informal groups;
- the increased awareness of the advantages of small ad-hoc groups for seasonal activities;
- the increased importance accorded to traditional forms of mutual aid;
- the increased focus given to such activities as community management of natural resources, fuelwood and industrial forestry plantation and private tree farming, pooling labour for critical tasks at critical times, as well as servicing increased needs for family planning (Cleaver and Schreiber, 1994:159).

In our above situations of "absence" and "pluralism", selective approaches towards co-operatives are likely to be eased by the growing availability of alternative organisations. As to the 'monistic' model, it may be relevant for voluntary initiatives of a communal nature and less so for generalisable development purposes. Even in the light of such new trends, though, the main lesson that can be derived from the above analysis concerns the consequences when co-operatives are used to serve the needs of the establishment rather than those of the members and their communities.

The exploratory character of this article invites further research based on systematic selection of cases and more in-depth analysis of issues related to each of the situations under discussion and concerning co-operative and non-co-operative organisations. In conditions of co-operative absence, how are situations of "not any more" and "never again" arrived at and how are these turned towards new "post-co-operative" courses of action? Under conditions of monism, what are the advantages in terms of economies of scale against costs and externalities? Under

pluralism, how is organisational potential assessed and harnessed? What factors affect tolerance and compatibility between organisations? What are the minimum and optimum "carrying capacities" of communities, and under what conditions? How do different patterns of "density" affect extra-village organisational linkages? These are issues for future research.

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