

## ILO Cooperative Facility for Africa, COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup>

### Quick Facts

<b>Countries:</b>	Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Rwanda, Swaziland, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia
<b>Final Evaluation:</b>	December 2010
<b>Mode of Evaluation:</b>	Final self-evaluation
<b>Technical area:</b>	Decent work through cooperatives
<b>Evaluation management:</b>	COOP <sup>AFRICA</sup> team Dar es Salaam
<b>Evaluation team:</b>	Carlien van Empel
<b>Project start:</b>	October 2007
<b>Project end:</b>	December 2010 <sup>1</sup>
<b>Project code:</b>	RAF/06/53/UKM
<b>Donor:</b>	DFID
<b>Key words:</b>	Agriculture, business development services, challenge fund, cooperative approach, cooperatives, cooperative support institutions, decent work, finance, governance, hiv/aids, impact, job creation, one UN, policy and legislation, poverty reduction, women, youth.

### Background and context

#### *About COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup>*

The Cooperative Facility for Africa - COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> - is an ILO technical cooperation programme for the promotion of cooperative development in nine countries in East and Southern Africa (Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) and is principally financed by DFID. COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> aims at increasing the capacity of people to get out of poverty using the potential of cooperatives. Together with a wide range of international and national partners, COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> promotes an enabling cooperative legal and policy environment, effective cooperative unions and federations as well as demand-driven services for primary cooperatives. The COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> Challenge Fund is a distinctive feature of the Programme, providing financial support to local cooperatives as well as to cooperative service providers.

COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> is designed to provide support to governments, the cooperative movement and development partners to provide advisory services, technical assistance, training, tools and financial support for cooperative development in Africa.

<sup>1</sup> A no-cost extension until June 2011 was agreed on 20 December 2010. COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> will continue with non-DFID resources (amongst others 500'000 USD from the ILO Regional Office for Africa) until at least December 2011.

The Programme has three levels of expected outcomes:

- i. The capacity of primary cooperatives to create jobs, generate income, reduce poverty, provide protection and give people a voice in society is significantly improved;
- ii. Primary cooperatives have access to and make use of high quality organizational support and appropriate business development and monitoring services provided by vibrant and competent cooperative support structures
- iii. The cooperative approach is effectively incorporated as a key element into national Poverty Reduction Strategies, joint assistance strategies, UNDAFs and DWCPs, as well as into regional and continental programmes and strategies.

COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup>'s approach consists of assisting stakeholders to establish a legal and policy environment conducive to the development of cooperatives; providing support services through identified "Centres of competence"; promoting effective coordinating structures (eg. unions and federations) and establishing and maintaining Challenge Fund mechanisms, for 'services', 'innovation', and 'training'. These funds were accessible through a competitive demand-driven mechanism and a transparent selection of the best proposals.

The Programme has set up strategic partnerships with the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the UK Cooperative College, the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC), the International Trade Union Confederation in Africa (ITUC-Africa), the International Organization of Employers and its Pan-African Employers Confederation (PEC), and the African Union Secretariat. The Programme also worked with other international organizations (e.g. FAO and UNIDO) and closely associated cooperative apex bodies, ministries responsible for cooperative development, cooperative training institutions, universities and NGOs.

The Programme was managed from the ILO Office in Dar es Salaam by a small team of international and national experts, relying on national focal points in the countries. The team was technically supported by the Cooperative Branch at ILO headquarters in Geneva.

### ***About the evaluation***

The final self-evaluation covers the period from October 2007 until December 2010<sup>2</sup> and complements other evaluation and impact assessment exercises of the Programme. The focus of the self-evaluation is on COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup>'s core activities during this period, i.e. those financed by DFID.

The self-evaluation was carried out with the primary objective of learning for future ILO cooperative development activities in the COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> countries, the African region and elsewhere. Aspects of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability have been looked and good practices and lessons learned have been distilled for wider use. It is also a tool to provide analytical assessment to the donor, partners and the beneficiaries about the programme's achievements, taking into account the limitations of a self-evaluation in terms of independence and objectivity.

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<sup>2</sup> COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> continues at least until December 2011 with ILO and other resources.

The clients of this self-evaluation are principally ILO staff concerned with cooperative enterprise development and the cooperative approach to decent work aspects such as women empowerment and gender equality, HIV/AIDS, child labour, etc. The evaluation is also expected to be helpful for ILO staff working on technical cooperation (TC) and resource mobilization in general. Moreover, the evaluation is supposedly of use for COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries as well as for DFID.

## Main findings and conclusions

COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> was highly relevant in the African strategic policy framework and in line with the witnessed renaissance of the cooperative movement on the continent. The demand driven nature of the Programme, mostly operated through the Challenge Fund mechanism, enabled it to respond to the needs of mostly agricultural and financial cooperatives, as well as of cooperative apex organizations and cooperative colleges. The Programme could have gained in relevance if it had been designed and better adapted to variations in the national contexts of the nine countries covered.

The design of COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> was valid in terms of its coverage of the whole spectrum of cooperatives (primary, secondary and tertiary cooperatives) that were addressed through its three intervention levels, i.e. micro: support to cooperative enterprises; meso: cooperative support structures and macro: cooperative policy. The Challenge Fund was an important mechanism in this respect. Moreover, its design as a Facility to service stakeholders and to assist networking and partnerships through a Programme rather than a project approach turned out to be valuable. However, the Programme design lacked focus which made that the available resources were spread relatively thin.

COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> was very efficient in making the best of its presence to create an impact. The Programme has contributed to the expansion of the cooperative movement across the target countries and has made this trend visible at national level and at international level. Moreover, the Programme has evidently created a positive direct, indirect and demonstrative impact at micro-level, especially through its Challenge Fund projects. This micro impact is likely to be sustained as the investments have led to long term improvements of members' living conditions. Finally, the Programme has managed to integrate cooperatives in the development agendas of regional political bodies, international agencies and other development actors.

Key factors of success included the involvement and ownership of international and national stakeholders, the deployment of triggering and leverage mechanisms, the facilitation of demand and supply and the reliance on existing structures. An unintended result of this approach was that the Programme was most effective in countries with a highly structured cooperative movement and professionalized cooperative institutions (Kenya, Uganda) as well as in its host country Tanzania that benefitted from the Programme's and the ILO office proximity. The Programme has not been able to redress this situation due to time and resource constraints.

Given its wide scope, the Programme demonstrated rather a scattered impact though after not even three years of effective operation it is too early to measure impact from a longer term perspective. The focus on sectors instead of on cooperative value chains may have contributed to this outcome. Eventually, it is likely that this Programme design has hampered the design of mutually supporting interventions and hence the achievement of a more systemic impact on the cooperative sector.

## Recommendations

For a future phase, the evaluation recommends to:

- Adjust the focus of the Program by reducing the number of countries and by building in flexibility for country specific approaches. Its new focus should also enable mutually reinforcing interventions for instance by concentrating on selected sectors of activity, cooperative value chains and/or sub-national intervention levels. In terms of the target group, it is recommended to focus even more on women and youth given the reality in the region and the regional decent work priorities.
- Keep the Challenge Fund mechanism whilst addressing issues such as local ownership and transaction costs.
- Learn lessons from other ILO Programmes that deal with assessments, capacity building and certification of “Centres of Competence (CoC)” in order to enhance the sustainability of the CoC approach.
- Explore possibilities for a more intensive involvement of National Advisory Groups
- to showcase achievements of COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> at the occasion of relevant international meetings and conferences, such as the international meetings on the social economy and keep involved in preparations of the International Year of Cooperatives 2012

## Lessons learned

### *Research before project design*

The DFID funded research project “Essential Research for a Cooperative Facility for Africa” that preceded the Programme has well oriented the design of the Programme and resulted in eleven useful baseline studies, including in four out of the nine countries covered by COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup>. The resulting publication in 2008, *Cooperating out of Poverty*<sup>3</sup>, and its (sponsored) translation in French in 2009, has contributed to the early visibility of COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> across the continent. It also turned out to be value for money, as most of the initial research methodology could be applied again to subsequent baseline and impact assessment studies by COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup>. Besides, COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> could rely on much of the research expertise that was capacitated through this initial research project. Therefore, this “research-before-project-design-exercise” indicates good practice for other TC projects and programmes.

### *Institutional framework, national capacity and ownership*

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick Develtere, Ignace Pollet, Frederick Wanyama (eds), *Cooperating out of Poverty. The renaissance of the African cooperative movement*, ILO/WBI, 2008. [http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/ent/coop/africa/download/coop\\_out\\_of\\_poverty.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/ent/coop/africa/download/coop_out_of_poverty.pdf), <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/ent/coop/africa/download/cooperatingpovertyfrench.pdf>

The broad and diverse membership of the SC as well as investments in regular face-to-face meetings including short study visits, turned out to be beneficial to the Programme. Also, the principles underlying the establishment of NAGs have proven their value in the COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> programme and may be useful to other TC programmes too. The COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> experience has learned that:

- a) NAGs can create ownership and promotes involvement of the cooperative stakeholders as well as social partners in the Programme.
- b) In some countries, NAG members benefitted from an increased recognition in the cooperative movement and beyond. The NAG involvement in COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> highlights covered in the media (such as CF calls for proposals, celebrations of International Day of Cooperatives, etc.) also enhanced the visibility of the cooperative movement in general in the countries;
- c) NAGs are an effective means of leveraging capacity building. Transfer of acquired knowledge of one NAG member to another, and/or, of one NAG member to colleagues in the members' respective institutions, and/or through direct training activities with cooperatives. Besides, the exchange between focal points / NAG members from various countries in capacity building experiences and meetings was experienced as highly effective;
- d) NAGs are a cost-efficient option for programmes with thin staffing and a wide geographical coverage.

### ***Leverage and partnerships***

The partnerships and collaboration agreements established by COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> have lead to cost-sharing, resource mobilization as well as leveraging of the work themes (e.g. the recognition of the cooperative approach/cooperative business model) or the use of tools (e.g. My.COOP). Partnership building requires time and focus. One needs to invest in regular information ex-changes, face to face meetings in order to build confidence. A clear focus helps to design a win-win situation, hence cooperating with a concrete objective such as for instance the joint development of a technical manual helps. Partnerships do not necessarily need to be formalized to be effective (unless , for instance, if it would involve grants or in-kind transfers).

### ***Impact assessment***

The development of an impact assessment methodology that is accompanied by capacity building of Programme staff as well as national consultants can be a worthwhile investment. It is recommended to develop the impact assessment methodology as soon as possible. In the case of COOP<sup>AFRICA</sup> the methodology was well aligned with the M&E framework. However, one should be aware of developing too complex M&E and impact assessment methods. Generally it is useful to assess a few indicators well. The early involvement of the ILO evaluation unit is recommended.