



Evaluation Summary



International
Labour
Office

Evaluation Unit

Impact assessment of the COOP Africa Project External Evaluation

Quick Facts

Countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Tanzania

Impact Evaluation: Jan 2011

Technical Area: Cooperatives

Evaluation Management: HIVA, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven, Belgium

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Executive Summary of the evaluation report

The *CoopAfrica* programme was given a three year period (2008-2010) and an all things considered limited budget of just 10 million US\$ to mobilize the cooperative self-help mechanism and strengthen the cooperative movements in 9 African countries. The hind-laying objective was that through cooperatives some important policy goals could better be achieved, such as creating jobs and generating income for the poor layers in society, reducing poverty in general, providing social protection and giving people a voice in society. Other issues like gender equality, HIV-AIDS impact mitigation and environmental awareness were also among the set goals.

CoopAfrica's task therefore has to be understood as a causal chain: to find methods to strengthen cooperatives in order to enable them to tackle the issue-related challenges listed above. It took on this ambitious proposition by using triggering and leverage mechanisms and working through existing structures. *CoopAfrica* has to that end combined different approaches: direct support, match-making with competence centres, a demand-lead approach through a challenge fund mechanism, and lobbying, advocacy and networking in order to bring cooperatives in the sights of international agencies and policy makers.

This impact assessment study has employed a broad definition of impact, being a combination of:

- changes in people's lives to which the intervention has contributed (impact in the strictest sense);
- changes in regulations and institutions which have direct repercussions on the lives of the beneficiary group (institutional impact); and
- human and institutional dynamics set in motion through concrete interventions (outcome).

In order to carry out the assessment in a methodologically sound way, we have used a combination of documentary study and field research in four countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho and Tanzania. The field research comprised a series of interviews with key stakeholders in order to establish a before-and-

after comparison, as well as visits to concrete projects set up by grants from *CoopAfrica*'s Challenge Fund.

It was found that in the countries studied, cooperative movements are expanding and that *CoopAfrica* has contributed to that. *CoopAfrica* has also successfully strengthened a number of movement structures (apex, federation, unions...) by involving them in *CoopAfrica*'s focal points and National Advisory Committees in the different countries.

Visibility of the cooperative movements, however, remains still at a low level, resulting in a poor presence of cooperatives at decision-making forums. *CoopAfrica* has also tried to strengthen the Cooperative Colleges and direct them more to the needs of the primary societies. This proved to be altogether a difficult proposition, as the outcomes of a UK Cooperative College study, suggesting innovations and redirections, collided with financial constraints of the Colleges. As the governmental cooperative department is in practice often the only reference point for cooperatives in rural areas, strengthening these departments (as happened for example in Ethiopia, Lesotho and Zanzibar) has shown to hold significant leverage effects to primary societies and their members. In both Lesotho and Zanzibar, *CoopAfrica* has also contributed to review the current legislation.

Whether the expansion and strengthening of cooperative movements between 2008 and 2010 did result in a stronger significance in the domains of employment, social protection, gender equality, HIV-AIDS impact mitigation etc. is of course a highly speculative matter. The impact of *CoopAfrica*'s interventions in these cannot be but an indirect one. Anyway, employment in and through cooperatives is rising. *CoopAfrica* has also shown that campaigns and specific actions can lead to an increase of female participation in unions and cooperatives. As for HIV-AIDS impact mitigation, *CoopAfrica* went into great efforts to link cooperative movement institutions with campaigning international agencies. That said,

campaigning for this issue is a lengthy process and it is not considered a priority for most of the primary cooperatives.

Through the Challenge Fund mechanism, *CoopAfrica* aimed for innovative cooperative ventures through concrete projects, with the potential of sorting direct impact, as well as impact through its demonstrative effect. Guided by a closely monitoring process and a thorough institutional set-up in the target countries, this mechanism worked out remarkably well. Projects included the combination of technical innovation with a network approach (e.g. Dundiliza, Tanzania), investments in order to improve the sustainability of dairy farming (Kenya), inducing new activities or diversification (various projects) and still other types. The quick and positive impact proved very much in evidence as for production, employment, access to goods and services, standard of living, but also togetherness and solidarity, and therefore social protection.

On a more critical note however, one can question the sustainability of initiatives like these once the funding and the close monitoring would disappear. Besides aiming for direct impact at micro-level, *CoopAfrica* also sought to maximize its effectiveness by bringing cooperatives in the picture of political bodies, international agencies and established development actors. The impact of this can only be felt after a certain time which largely exceeds the three year programme period. However, it will affect large groups of the population and is therefore a highly defensible approach. The potential of *CoopAfrica* and – through *CoopAfrica*'s promotion and networking – of cooperatives in general has not escaped the eyes of the African Union, the East African Community and the ILO's Global Jobs Pact. Other than that, *CoopAfrica* has established quite some synergetic set-ups by linking development programmes of international agencies to cooperatives. This has been the case for decent work and social dialogue, but also for gender equality, child labour, social economy, HIV-AIDS prevention and impact

mitigation, and also for the programmes of One UN, bilateral donors (such as JICA, AGFUND and SIDA) and many cooperative agencies from the North (CHF, DGRV among others). The overall conclusion of this assessment study is that *CoopAfrica*, by diversifying its approaches, deploying triggering and leverage mechanisms, matching supply and demand and working through existing structures has certainly made a significant impact on the growth and the strengthening of the African cooperative movements.

Therefore *CoopAfrica* has also had a positive – be it indirect – impact on the policy issues to which cooperatives can contribute, such as employment, social protection or poverty reduction. By consequence, the recommendation on the basis of this assessment is that the *CoopAfrica* programme should be extended, again focussing on a well selected set of countries where collaboration of both government and movement is ascertained on beforehand. At the same time *CoopAfrica* should take lessons of the 2008-2010 programme period in terms of channelling its efforts to those approaches and sectors that have proven the most efficient and reducing the other ones.