

# **TOWARD A CO-OPERATIVE WAY**

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## FOREWORD

This publication is not intended to be a scientific study and in fact does not pretend to be as such. It merely poses various perspectives and issues that reflect on the development and growth of the co-operative movement.

A great deal of information grows out of personal and other experiences that have been shared at various levels, both individual, group, workshop/conferences and visits of actual co-operatives at work.

The main people who have shared these experiences have helped, in one way or another to shape this publication. To them, and they know who they are, a very warm and special word of thanks.

A particular note of appreciation for Sonja Sleight and the members of the Peace Centre, who spent many hours in the typesetting and actual compilation of the publication.

It is hoped that at the end of the day, that the questions and issues posed in this publication will serve towards enriching the growth process; the growth toward a richer and more human society.

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# 1) INTRODUCTION

The following paper deals with the human condition and the struggle to transform society on an economic basis, whilst at the same time focusing on those elements that create community.

The theme, as the title suggests, is co-operatives. I have looked at the whys, wherefores and hows of the co-operative movement, both internationally and as it relates specifically to our time and country. I have done this on an analytical basis without paying much attention to the definition of co-operatives, which can be found in several publications. The aspect with which I am most concerned is the problems of co-operatives in practice, and how the various problems are worked through, if at all.

This publication draws on a range of experiences and research. The underlying theme to these experiences and research is co-operation; how do we co-operate with one another on an economic basis, and how, in our co-operation, do we co-operate with the rest of society. That there is a need to co-operate is not in doubt.

The unresolved tension in all of the historical attempts to answer these questions has been the tension between the personal individual needs and the needs of the community. This tension has been behind numerous large and smaller wars.

The co-operative movement is often seen to take place within the ever present debate between socialism (ala Marx, Mao tse Tung, African Socialism, etc) and Capitalism, with a mish mash of theories and practical variations on a theme thrown in. Many a co-operative has found itself slung onto this ideological compost heap, and has left behind it a trail of wasted potential and very little learning.

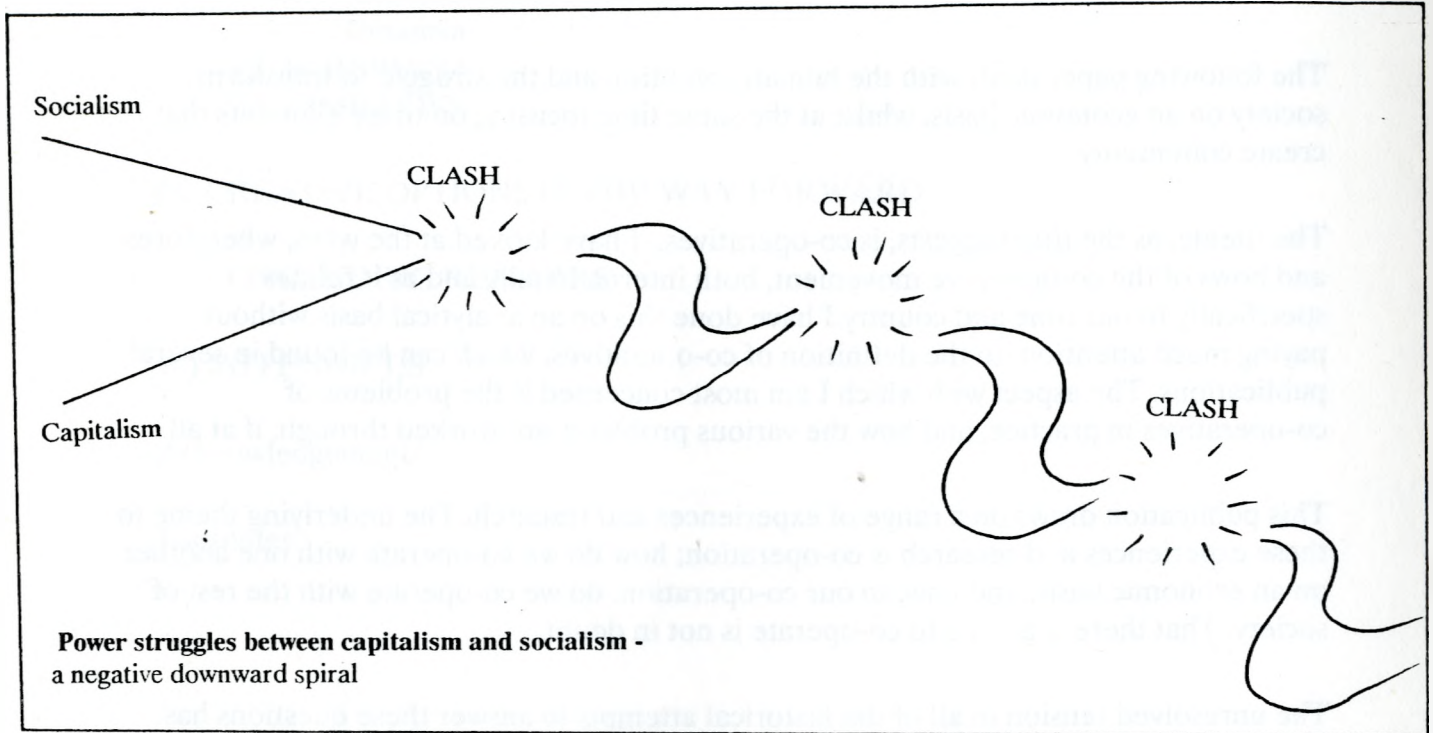
Rather than becoming disillusioned and confused, we need to see the co-operative movement as a struggle toward a new society, moving from the social to the economic and back to the social, the last stop always being one of improved human conditions, before the new cycle is begun.

In South Africa, instead of seeing this tension as creative, and instead of recognizing that all parties have valuable contributions to make, we have had the alarming tendency to act on gut reactions. These have proved to be most destructive, and have set back the progress of co-operatives.

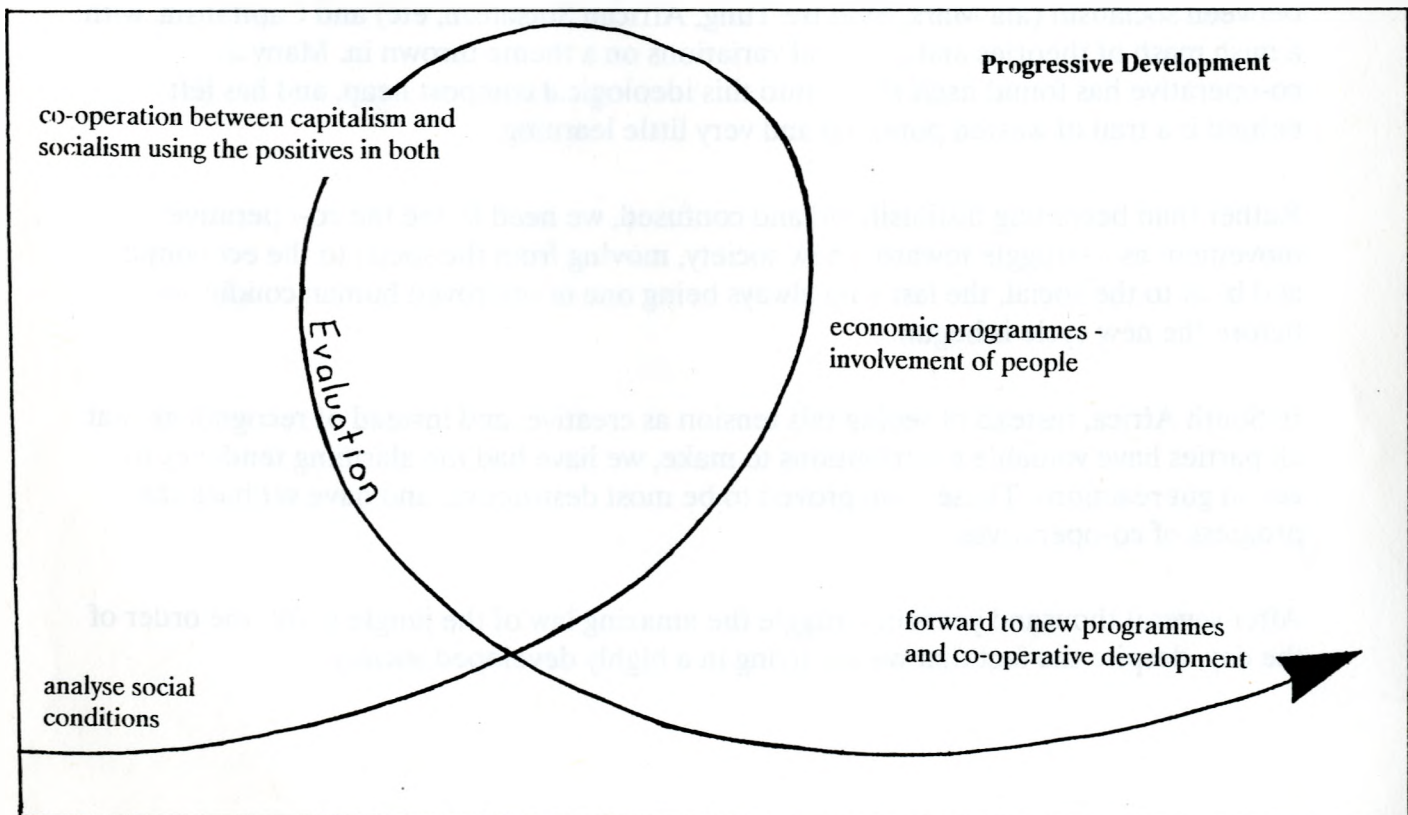
After several thousand years of struggle the amazing law of the jungle is still the order of the day, despite the fact that we are living in a highly developed society.



The present-day struggle could be depicted as follows:



The above diagram appears very cynical, but I believe that it contains a great deal of truth and requires real looking at.



This publication is by no means exhaustive. It merely attempts to hold under the spotlight the various dilemmas and responsibilities incurred in this movement toward a more human society. The challenge of course is, can we deal with the conflict in a creative way so that real learning can take place and progress is achieved. Conflict is inevitable in a multi-variable society. How we deal with it determines whether it is destructive or leads to healthy realization of the human potential.

## 2) HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CO-OPERATIVES

From a historical point of view, it is interesting that the concept of holistic business is possibly best shown as early as 1750 in England, in the various Quaker responses to business. It is quite interesting how in one group certain basic religious principles could have such far-reaching consequences in terms of business practice and ultimately influence the co-operative concept and development to a large extent. Some of these religious perspectives and principles together with their application bear some closer examination due to uniqueness and character.

From 1750 until well into the 20th century Quakers were debarred from practicing certain professions, because of their beliefs, with the result that they were forced into business. This produced various dilemmas because Quaker belief made it impossible to exploit humanity in any kind of way, this being fundamentally contrary to Quaker principles. This introduced quite a challenge to Quaker businessmen and resulted in the then rare exercise of business responsibility within a co-operative framework. "Rare" because it must be viewed against the background of the industrial revolution in Britain where exploitation of children was common. Child labour was so accepted that a philanthropic gentleman could argue with alacrity about the advantages of child labour; namely that children are obedient and give very little trouble as workers, the only problem being that they tended to lose concentration after a certain time, resulting in accidents.

It was against this background that many Quaker businesses were in one way or another turned over to workers or developed a method and example of worker participation or even co-ownership. For example, investments would be drawn or sold out, and worker interests protected through the establishment of worker villages and trusts, to ensure decent educational and community facilities. A key example of this type of social responsibility can be seen in the Cadburys firm, which of course now is no longer a Quaker enterprise. Prior to being sold, it had trusts established, and land divided up amongst workers, a 6th of an acre each. A 6th of an acre was at the time considered adequate for each family to grow its own vegetables and participate in a healthy kind of environment. One of these villages - called Bourneville - still stands today near Birmingham. Here workers had their own houses and all the communal land around, including parks and colleges. The whole network of land was protected by a special trust. The area today is the most beautiful in Birmingham, and ironically would not be classified a working class area, although it is still owned by the working class.

The development of the co-operative movement has at no stage meant a rejection of business. Rather, it stresses a different approach to capital from that of the conventional business; how it is employed and how any profit is used. As far back as 1698, John Bellars, a Quaker and a prophet of his time, saw the unbalanced relationship that had developed between industry and the society in which it was couched. He saw the problem of unemployment and the devastation that it caused, and encouraged the



development of cottage industries, or what was probably the earliest form of co-operative in England. He did not oppose the development of machinery, but saw its development as a very important phase growing out of man's creative spirit. His point was that machinery had to be used to the benefit of the individual as well as the society, and not just purely for profit.

It was during John Bellar's time that the working class of England were experiencing the most vicious form of exploitation, with pure brazen profit the only criterion to employers. Marx was later to refer to Bellars as "a veritable phenomenon in social economy".

Between 1700 and 1924 Europe experienced tremendous changes. The industrial revolution had progressed with incredible speed, and with it came tremendous changes in economic and social relationships. This was the period of the great philanthropists, among whom Cecil Rhodes numbered, and of whom Basil Davidson said, "He was a philanthropist who came and greedily grabbed with both hands."

It was also a period when the First World was rapidly developing, and where an unbalanced relationship was growing between First and present Third World. The Third World was regarded purely as a resource for raw materials, with the market at the time concentrated within the developing First World. (Today it is of course very different where, with saturated First World markets, the attention has rapidly moved toward the Third World, now seen not only as a source for raw material, but as a viable market.)

It is against the background of the industrial revolution that we see the development of co-operatives. The only way the poor had a possibility of survival against aggressive industrialists, was to band together in a co-operative form. The co-op thus became, in a sense, the mechanism through which it was possible for the poor to survive. In Rochdale in 1844, for example, a number of poor weavers left their employers and banded together, as an alternative to the poverty of lowly-paid jobs.

Over the same period, we also saw the evolvement of consumer co-operatives. In a consumer co-operative, the structural separation between customers and owners is eliminated just as in producer co-operatives, the separation between workers and owners is eliminated. The customers in this case gain equal votes in choosing the board of directors of their own company. In England by 1830 there were about 172 co-operative shops. They generally suffered great losses, because they sold their goods to members on credit, suffered cash flow problems, and often ended up having to close down.

In America in the 1930s, when workers were turning to Unions, many Quakers who were middle class and not engaged in industrial work, turned to consumer co-operatives. Several co-operative grocery shops were founded in Pennsylvania, Indiana and California. Many of these are still operating.

Going back to the 18th century, we find another very influential person in the form of William Allan (also a Quaker). He took the then unheard of step of redistributing the assets of his company, in the strong belief that business had to be seen to be acting in relation to the poor society in which it was situated. A business enterprise had to bear a strong relationship to the surrounding community. William Allan bought two 5 acre plots and allocated these to workers on an ownership basis, with the idea of their becoming producers. For several years in the 18th century he was to grapple with the land problem, and continued to search for solutions.

### <sup>3</sup> Conference of Quaker Employers

More recently, and yet to us surprisingly radical in its proposals, was the 1918 Conference of Quaker Employers, held in Birmingham. All Quakers who employed more than fifty persons were invited, and there was an actual attendance of ninety participants, representing 75 firms employing approximately 44 000 workers.

At the time of this four day conference, the Whitley Report which recommended the appointment, by Trade Unions and Employers Associations, of Industrial Councils and Works Committees, had been approved by the government about 6 months previously. In many places Whitley Councils had already been formed, and seemed likely to play an important part in industry. There was, at the time, a shortage of labour in the country and unemployment was not a problem. Employers were competing with each other for such help as was available, The Shop Steward Movement was spreading throughout the country, socialist in character, and more concerned with status and conditions of employment than with wages. In many places the shop steward had acquired great influence in matters of works management. It was generally held that there would be an increase in trade after the war. The working class expected that the improved pay and status that they had already received would at least be retained, while the employing class recognized that it may be forced to concede a great deal to the demands that were being made.

Such was the setting to the Quaker Employers' Conference.

The purpose of the conference, it was explained at the outset, was to discover and define the duties of the employer within the current industrial system. It had in mind the plight of the workers and the possibility of their increased participation in business (the co-operative spirit) in the context of social responsibility. It was stated that a <sup>4</sup>"fundamental re-organization of society's economic arrangements" was open to discussion, and that <sup>5</sup>"as citizens, we should work toward the alteration of the industrial system in so far as we regard it as inconsistent with the principles of our religion." This existing inconsistency gave rise to the questioning of the worker/employer relationship.



As might be expected, the conference dealt faithfully and confidently with questions relating to wages, hours of labour, good working conditions and security of employment, the planning of work to avoid short-time, the education and recreation of employees, the improvement of their status, and a sympathetic understanding of their thoughts and aspirations.

The vision of the conference had a wide range. There was spiritual discernment and penetration in the treatment of the workers' demands. Instead of being resented, the already accomplished encroachments of labour were welcomed and future advances encouraged.

It was agreed that the worker ought to have more than an improvement in his economic position. He must be admitted into co-operation. "This position," says the report,  
<sup>6</sup>"involves the surrender by capital of its supposed right to dictate to labour the conditions under which work shall be carried on. It involved more; the frank avowal that all matters affecting the workers should be decided in consultation with them, when once they are recognized as members of an all embracing human brotherhood."

Friends (Quakers) were advised, in co-operation with trade unions, to assist the formation, as recommended by the Whitley Report, of National and District Industrial Councils and Workers Councils, and it was recognized that full partnership was the ideal. "...experience on Works Councils may and should train the members for greater participation in the control of the business, and enable them ultimately to take part in the commercial and financial administration."

## **The Broader Social Context of the Business**

The conference also recorded its opinion that neither the proprietors nor the workers should be entitled to the whole of the surplus profits of a business, though each might reasonably ask for such shares as would give them an interest in its financial prosperity.  
<sup>8</sup>"Our point is that the bulk of them at least belongs to the community, and should be used in its interest." (This aspect introduces the question of community accountability.) The final paragraph is worthy of serious attention.<sup>9</sup> "We would ask all employers to consider very carefully whether their style of living and personal expenditure are restricted to what is needed to ensure the efficient performance of their functions in society. More than this is waste and is, moreover, a great cause of class divisions."

Shipley N Braynston ("Unemployment and Plenty", 1933) observes that these positive proposals are, firstly, capable of gradual introduction; secondly, can be made compulsory without violence as soon as a stable working majority is convinced of their soundness; thirdly, instead of barring the way to future progress are important steps in the right direction; and fourthly, if carried out to the full, would be nothing short of revolutionary.

It is interesting that these proposals are a natural progression of religious principles. In 1918 the Quaker Yearly Meeting accepted a statement of principles as Foundations of a True Social Order. These principles are often referred to as the "Eight Points" and are as follows:

<sup>10</sup>  
1) The Fatherhood of God, as revealed by Jesus Christ, should lead us to a Brotherhood which knows no restriction of race, sex or social class. 2) This Brotherhood should express itself in a social order which is directed, beyond all material ends, to the growth of personality truly related to God and man. 3) The opportunity of full development, physical, moral and spiritual, should be assured to every member of the community, man, woman and child. The development of man's full personality should not be hampered by unjust conditions nor crushed by economic pressure. 4) We should seek for a way of living that will free us from the bondage of material things and mere conventions, that will raise no barrier between man and man, and will put no excessive burden of labour upon any by reason of our superfluous demands. 5) The spiritual force of righteousness, loving-kindness and trust is mighty because of the appeal it makes to the best in every man, and when applied to industrial relations achieves great things. 6) Our rejection of the methods of outward domination and of the appeal to force applies not only to international affairs, but to the whole problem of industrial control. Not through antagonism but through co-operation and goodwill can the best be attained for each and all. 7) Mutual service should be the principle upon which life is organized. Service, not private gain, should be the motive of all work. 8) The ownership of material things, such as land and capital, should be so regulated as best to minister to the need and development of man.

## **"A Modern-day case study - the Scott Bader Commonwealth**

In 1951 Ernest Baker, a Quaker factory owner, decided to re-organize his firm along participatory lines. He owned a plastic resin manufacturing company in England. He gave 90% of his shares to the "Commonwealth", as he now called his company, inviting his employees to become members; in 1963 he gave the remaining 10% to the Commonwealth.

Membership to the Commonwealth company was made open to all employees after a probationary period. Its main "legislative body" became the General Meeting, which met quarterly, to review the general conduct of the business. Its power included the right to approve large investments before they were made, and to dispose of the profits recommended by the Community Council and the Board of Directors. The Community Council was the main administrative body, composed of 12 people; nine elected by the membership, two nominated by the Board, and one representing the local community.

All company members had one vote at the General Meeting. All employees had a high degree of job security. (They were only fired for gross misconduct or incompetence, and were allowed to appeal). There was also greater income equity between the highest and the lowest paid member; a ratio of 7:1 between two extremes.

The 450 members of the Scott-Bader Commonwealth now have much greater access to much more information about the affairs of the enterprise than those who work within conventional firms. Management must answer all questions raised by members through their internal newspaper or at their General Meeting. Members have the right to inspect accounts and ask for any information through their representatives, or in personal interviews with the management.

**The basic beliefs behind the venture:**

**(Taken from the preamble to the Corporate Constitution).**

<sup>12</sup>"Power should come from within the person and the community, and be made responsible to those it affects. The ultimate criterion in the organization of work should be human dignity and service to others instead of solely economic performance...Common ownership of our means of production, and a voice in the distribution of earned surplus and the allocation of new capital, has helped in our struggle toward achieving these aims.

<sup>13</sup>"The Commonwealth has responsibilities to the wider national and international community...To be a genuine alternative to welfare capitalism and state-controlled communism, such an order must be non-violent in the sense of promoting love and justice, for where love stops, power begins and intimidation and violence follow"

Other companies based on common-ownership followed in England.

<sup>14</sup>**The Swiss Model - earliest known co-operatives**

Switzerland at the time of the 9th and 10th centuries was not feudal, like the rest of Europe, but was organized along the lines of small co-operatives. Feudal lords did exist, but they struggled for control of the land with the free peasants, who farmed along co-operative lines as a means to overcome the land shortage. Each peasant farmer would own his own capital and a small piece of land for growing vegetables around his home; the rest of the Alpine meadows were co-operatively used by all. At the end of each summer, the cheese that was produced was distributed to all whose cattle used the land.

The struggle of the free peasants to retain control of their land is the story of the founding of Switzerland. As a bulwark against invasion from the Austrian lords who tried to impose feudalism, the peasants had to strengthen their agricultural co-operatives and develop them into political co-operatives. The very name of Switzerland, "Schweizerische Eid Genossenschaft" literally translated, means "Swiss Oath Co-operative Society". There was a natural spill-over from the economic to the political. It was from the economic model that the Swiss derived their particular form of democracy. What started as a means of protection against foreign intrusion evolved into a model for organizing society.



This tradition still prevails to some extent in Switzerland today. Large areas in agriculture are organized co-operatively, particularly those that are too expensive for any one farmer to manage individually. For instance, with the modernization of agriculture, the financial outlay on machinery is a heavy burden. Consequently, it is the mechanized side of farming that is organized co-operatively. There are village co-operatives that buy the expensive machinery, allowing everyone in the co-operative access to it. In this way the co-operative generates the ability to own things which would not be possible otherwise.

It is interesting that a couple of years ago, Helmut Hubacher, a member of the Social Democratic Party, said in an economic debate, "Let's not forget that Switzerland is a co-operative and not a shareholding society."

## AN AFRICAN SOCIALIST CONCEPT

In looking at the historical development of co-operatives in Africa, the name Julius Nyerere appears as a giant. His Ujamaa ("family-hood" or "brotherhood") concept places the co-op idea firmly within a co-operative society context. This grows out of the African tendency to " ... always respect values related to collective ownership of land, co-operative organization of labour in lineages and age-sets, and the process of collective decision-making." As Nyerere says; "I think that this idea that there is one pure socialism for which the recipe is already known is an insult to human intelligence. It seems to me that man has yet to solve the problem of living in society and that each of us may have something to contribute to the problems it involves."

The practical implementation of the Ujamaa concept involves a number of aspects that need to be looked at. Note that 90% of the Tanzanian population is composed of rural people, and so when we speak of the "grassroots" we refer to the vast majority of Tanzanians.

Ujamaa as a process basically consisted of grouping all of the peasants together in villages - a process called village-ization.

The object of this was :

- <sup>17</sup> 1) To fulfill the Ujamaa concept of family-hood
- 2) To put into practice economic development programmes using local materials and resources, in a community-based approach to development.
- 3) To form co-operative groups.
- 4) To improve the lives of rural people nationally, with this grassroots approach.

Apart from attempting to fulfill the basic needs of the people for water, health services, education and jobs, Ujamaa strongly emphasizes the involvement of villagers in the planning of programmes to fulfill such needs. The planning and implementation of national development is thus seen as an integral part of development; the how as well as the what.

The Ujamaa concept should be seen in the light of a critique on what constitutes "development". Tanzania, like virtually every other African state, was beset with problems that grow out of a legacy of colonialism, and where agencies, churches, and United Nations support programmes were seen as still helping from a colonialist perspective. e.g. they encouraged cash crops, irrespective of local needs. It is a fact that people were growing coffee without ever having tasted it.

Furthermore, Father Supa Severini, a Minister in the Tanzanian government, says of development; <sup>18</sup> "Many times "development" has connoted "catching up" with the existing industrialized societies. This is wrong, because those societies are not marking time, waiting for us to "catch them up".

He goes on further to say that <sup>19</sup> "... in Tanzania, development includes changes in people, having to learn new skills and attitudes, and involving new patterns of relationships; changes in institutions and organizations, in respect of increasing their capabilities to respond to problems of society and economy. It is the great question of national development strategy which stresses development, by the participation of all concerned, from grassroots to the very top."

In looking more specifically at Tanzanian development, J. Mwabuki presents an interesting summary, including some background of one specific village, as representative of the Tanzanian model:

<sup>20</sup>

#### **MULTI PURPOSE CO-OPERATIVES IN PRACTICE - THE CASE OF CHEKERENI VILLAGE**

Chekereni Village is situated in the fertile Moshi District of the Kilimanjaro Region. It is a highly populated area, due to the favourable conditions, and land shortages are thus one of the strains to which the village is subject. It is a village actively engaged in the process of stabilizing the re-establishment of the co-operative way of life, and reflects many of the stresses inherent in this movement.

The farmers of Chekereni are expected to satisfy a local constituency while at the same time honouring national commitments. The two are not always compatible. Its economy is a mixture of food crops for local consumption and cash crops. Like other villages in the region, food supply is not always consistent. This is as much due to the attention given to cash crops, as to land shortage, competition, urbanization, black market activities and variable distribution.

In the village, we see the manifestation of centre-periphery relations at a variety of levels. Local participation in food production depends on the internal dynamics of the council (centre) and the work "brigades". For this reason certain inter-village relations are significant, and can be extended beyond the immediate operating environment. Foreign technical assistance, meanwhile (in this case a Japanese-established research centre for the development of a hybrid rice paddy) offers interesting insights to the process of "outside" assistance. The inter relationships that exist here between local, long-term food needs and national policy are based on certain assumptions. The timing and emphasis of food strategies depends, to a great deal, on the tendencies these key relationships play.

### **Criticisms**

Whilst Ujamaa is a lovely concept, it has experienced serious problems in practice. Although Nyerere was strongly supported by the peasants who voluntarily moved into villages, the size of these villages became a problem. They were way beyond the size of any traditional sized village which, beyond a certain point, can no longer hold together. In fact they developed into little urban centres, without the necessary infra-structures required to support them.

There was also inadequate preparation for this move in order to support it economically. The lending of military support to liberating Uganda also strained resources and created problems. Fundamentally, it was the way in which the village-ization was implemented which proved highly problematic and lead to an economic breakdown, although droughts, too, played a role. This must however be viewed in the context of Africa's socio-economic struggle to piece together a society largely disrupted by slavery and colonialism.

### **BRIEF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CO-OPERATIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The South African co-operative movement has a relatively short history. Interestingly, it was the Afrikaner Volk that first really developed the concept, after the Anglo Boer War (1899 -1902). As a direct response to economic domination and oppression by the British, Afrikaners developed a sophisticated network of consumer and producer co-operatives. Their economic success through this method made them aware of the need to have special legislation restricting the use of co-operatives to Whites only. Such legislation was implemented when they came to power. Many of their co-operatives still exist today and form part of the State structure, in that they feed into the various boards, eg. Maize Board, Wool Board, etc. The interesting aspect is that this development had its roots in the church as the discipline, trust and solidarity base albeit very sectarian.



The result of course is that the movement hardly touched oppressed communities, except for a few examples. The most important of these was the Athlone Consumer Co-op, one which did not last very long and due to organisational and other reasons failed miserably.

Within the ranks of the oppressed, the co-op movement is very young. The first major signs of development occurred in the 70s, during the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement, and were enshrined within Black Consciousness programmes, under the leadership of Steve Biko. However, these projects tended to be more of a self-help nature, rather than fully grown co-operatives. What this means is that the emphasis was on black ownership and control rather than the development of co-operative structures. Usually there tended to be a dominant figure. Self-help projects were really only concerned with generating own funds and support.

The self-help concept was to dominate very much within church circles, where most projects were initiated. Numerous self-help projects were created through Inter Church Aid and other agencies, all of them tending to a hierarchical nature, with a minister or some well-meaning person at the head. eg. Vukhani, Whittlesea Factory Project, etc.

The most meaningful and truly co-operative project that I spent some time with was the ASH (Association for Self Help) project in Wentworth, Durban.

The implementation of a co-operative consciousness really only got going in 1979. ZAKHE, in Hanover Park, Cape Town, was the first organization to concentrate on co-operatives as a service organization. It is only in the last few years that a major thrust toward co-operatives has occurred within the oppressed communities. Prior to this we had most project being of an income generating nature i.e. a project which has the potential to be a co-operative but whose sole purpose is to generate income for its participants without too much emphasis on structure and nature of participation.

### 3) ISSUES CONFRONTING THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT TODAY

Within the co-op movement, several obstacles occur in various forms, and require serious attention and concern.

#### 3.1. Educational System

Central to these is the psychological factor, the result of an educational system that we have all been through. Our educational system teaches us to get ahead, to get to the top of the class, without due regard for others. Whether it be a socialist or a capitalist system, we are all taught to be achievers; we weave patterns of affirmation for those individuals who prove to be successful; we give them medals, we write books about them; our mentality is geared toward affirming the achiever. We forget, of course all those who helped the achiever, and without whose support achievement would have been impossible. Our educational system also upholds the "knockout" principle, i.e. our way of relating to one another is by overpowering and being victorious; economically, socially, psychologically, etc. It is very harmful in a social environment. Its obvious consequences are violence, poverty, lack of affirmation, unequal, individual development, exploitation and frustration. For every winner there has to be one or several losers. What happens to the losers?

The undue stress on the achievements of the individual highlights for me the ever-present tension between the individual and the community in society. One system affirms the one, the other system affirms the other. Socialism seeks to affirm community, and does so at the expense of the individual. This results in oppression, where community takes on the level of state, and is very coercive and destructive of individual creativity. (Hence<sup>21</sup> "perestroika", to try and rectify this problem).

In capitalism we feel the other extreme, where everything is geared toward the individual. Laws seek to champion the individual in any circumstance, allowing him to express his creativity to the maximum, often through exploitation of others and often at the expense of community. The co-operative seeks to address this tension; by affirming the creativity of the individual, recognizing his economic, human and spiritual needs, and at the same time working and relating in a community-oriented way, sensitive to community development, not bedevilment.

Of course, in practice, the co-op that springs from a particular context finds itself having to overcome whichever emphasis has been dominant in its society, whether it is socialist or capitalist.



### 3.2. The Mentality of Oppression

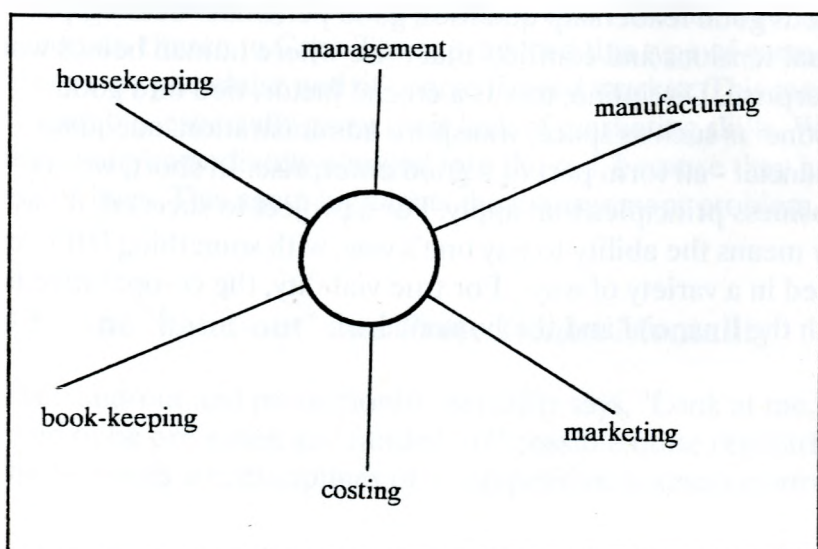
For example, the co-op that exists in a capitalist society has the particular problem of the worker/management mentality. It is a very profound problem and a difficult one to overcome. Here the worker is accustomed to entrusting all responsibility to the manager, and is quite content to rest in the knowledge that her wages will be forthcoming at the end of the week. This means that she refuses responsibility for the success of the enterprise, and hence the inevitable lower standard of work, lower rate of production, etc.

When the co-op exists in a socialist society a similar problem occurs in that the work is guaranteed, and so apathy is often the result.

The problem with any co-op that sees itself purely in terms of an ideological conflict is that it loses sight of its potential as precisely a business with a more human face. In a capitalist country, where co-ops see themselves as part of an alternative movement, the "democratic process" is emphasized to an almost ridiculous level. This was confirmed to me at two national workshops, attended by trade unionists and several co-ops from around the country. Here the emphasis on democracy was carried to extremes. As much as one would like to sit around and talk in a democratic way about democracy, at the end of the day, there is such a thing as, and a reason for, authority. Authority of course means a variety of things. I am referring to the body of knowledge that constitutes the basic disciplines of sound business practice. Without accepting this authority, a group can sit around and discuss the most effective way of doing things ad infinitum, and in the end simply be re-inventing the wheel. This refusal to accept the authority of previous experience and knowledge is the cause of much time wastage and frustration.

### 3.3. Stress on Ideology causes confusion

In many co-ops, there seems to be a confusion between authority and authoritarianism. People start thinking that within the democratic process there is no room for any "authority" - whereas, in fact, it is authoritarianism, or an authoritarian attitude, to which they are reacting.



The success of the co-op depends on each role being carried out responsibly. Each role carries with it a degree of authority.

The one role that comes under fire and is most misunderstood in the co-op movement is that of manager. Management, far from being seen as a vital role within the whole, is seen as a manifestation of authoritarianism. The thinking is, since management is a key factor in capitalism, and capitalism is the evil we are trying to fight, we cannot have a manager. In many cases it is a gut reaction, the product of strong emotions growing out of an exploitative society.

The emphasis in the socialistic model on each member as an equal participant, each with his or her inviolable rights, leads us to another fundamental problem area. Workers in a co-operative frequently take the attitude that, since I have decision-making rights, "therefore I can do what I like". The worker, from the situation of being told what to do and how, suddenly finds himself in a position where he can participate in decision-making, and has a problem coping with this sudden change - almost a non-acceptance of the situation. This non-acceptance comes out in various bizarre interpretations of responsibility. The same individualistic streak that can be misapplied within the capitalist model, manifests itself in the attitude of "I can do what I like". The individual refuses to accept the disciplines of an economic enterprise, and reacts to any discipline as an infringement of his democratic rights.

### **3.4 Lack of Economic Viability**

In Zimbabwe, of approximately <sup>22</sup>1000 co-ops that were started in the post-revolutionary period, perhaps 50 have been successful. In South Africa it is difficult to identify more than a tiny handful that have achieved some success. The problem is one of economic viability. What constitutes an economically viable project?

Firstly, in order for an enterprise to be viable, there has to exist a market. Secondly, it needs to be able to produce excellent quality products which continue their marketability. It needs excellent management, in order to ensure that production is maintained at a level for economic viability. It needs manufacturing controls. It needs certain pre-requisites, like costing, and economic analysis. It needs skilled manpower, and if there is a training element built into it, this needs to be well-organized and production-oriented. It needs good leadership qualities, good personnel dealings, the ability to cope with the usual tensions and conflicts that arise where human beings work together in a common enterprise. Discipline, too, is a crucial factor, tied into good management. Other components such as space, transport, administration, adequate capital - be it labour or financial - all form part of a good enterprise. In short, we are looking at a set of basic business principles that apply. For a project to succeed, it has to be viable. Usually viability means the ability to pay one's way, with something left over for profit, which can be used in a variety of ways. For true viability, the co-operative has to make ends meet on both the financial and the human level.

Particular obstacles to financial viability are:

**a) Production costs too high - hence uncompetitive**

Since the most common type of co-op is the sewing co-op, I will discuss the problems as they relate to sewing groups. In the W.Cape alone there are several service organizations, each with affiliated sewing groups, eg. COBET, (Council for Black Education and Training), the Catholic Welfare Bureau, Operation Hunger and Inter Church Aid . All the satellite sewing groups of these agencies are producing into a very competitive market. Moreover, they have little chance of becoming competitive, as they lack the buying power to get raw materials at competitive prices. They are subject to having to buy their materials from retail stores like O.K. Bazaars and second-hand places, rather than manufacturers and suppliers like SBH Cotton Mills. In order to buy from these places they would have to be ordering 1000m at a time per colour etc, and of course this is beyond the reach of any one project.

Thus their product is immediately starting at a price disadvantage.

**b) Inefficient methods of production**

Whereas in a factory you have a production line, with specialized input from different individuals, the tendency within the co-operatives is to have every member do every part of the garment, and knowing everything from pattern-cutting to finishing. While one can only laud the human side of this approach, it is not efficient. It means that a seamstress, in making one dress, has to manage about 30 or 40 different operations, while in the factory she would handle only 2 or 3, perhaps only one. This means that it takes longer for each individual to be trained. The end product of the "holistically" produced garment is one that costs much more than one produced by the "production line" method. We see here a tension between the "human" and the "efficient" approach. The efficient approach is for people to behave like machines. The human one means that people come first and allowances are made.

The only time the co-operatives can offer any real competition is when they produce specialized items, eg Xhosa traditional wear. Elethu, a co-operative operating from a suburban church in Cape Town, produced this type of garment, and for a while slotted into a very particular and of course limited market. This meant that the group was very vulnerable, especially given their lack of marketing skills. When their market dried up they were immediately plunged into the red, because they had not developed any other major lines. This again highlights the management problem.

### **3.5. The "hand-out" and Protectionist Mentality**

The hand-out and protectionist mentality says, "Look at me, I am oppressed, therefore I need to be protected and funded." (If possible quite regularly). Protection here is from the demands and disciplines of a competitive business environment. Many agencies,



companies and churches have lent support to this mentality and contributed to the current apathy and disbelief that co-ops can be successful. At a recent workshop of Trade Unions and co-ops, some expressed the belief that co-ops could only survive if they were protected; i.e. community and progressive groups should buy from co-operatives from a sense of solidarity. This is of course very molly-coddling and paternalistic, and ensures that co-ops will never be successful.

### **3.6. Funding of co-operatives**

What are the fundamental problems with the granting of funds to co-operatives?

#### **a) Amounts granted are totally unrealistic to launch a business**

"R5000 ought to be enough to get you started" - usually this is not enough, and the result is that the group keeps re-applying and re-applying for help, and ends up swallowing more capital than would have been necessary if all the capital had all been invested at one time in a thoroughly-researched launching. This begs the question of what accurate analysis is carried out by agencies prior to making loans or grants.

#### **b) Money is handed out without the thorough research necessary**

In the case of the church donor, here the donor frequently does not understand all the implications of a business enterprise and adopts a very "social welfare" approach. The ins and outs of the proposed enterprise are rarely gone into, resulting in an enormous loss of money. My experience with some church workers entrusted with the responsibility of vetting projects prior to their possible funding has been:

- a) They do not understand costing
- b) Even less do they understand the management factors that are involved in a project.
- c) They do not understand the major technicalities involved in the manufacture of whatever the co-op intends to produce.
- d) They rarely have adequate technical resources to draw on, and often don't even think about or see the need for such resources.

Consequently they submit approvals for projects where a vast amount of educational input has been completely omitted - input that is vital for any co-operative before it is even considered for approval of capital input.

Let us look at Prodcum, the carpentry co-operative just outside Guguletu. Prodcum had business expertise do a proper financial projection for the project, building in a training component and a production component, and budgeting accordingly. A proposal for funding was submitted for approval, in this case to Inter-Church Aid, who forwarded it to a Dutch church agency.

The first problem occurred at the Inter-Church Aid level. The ministers concerned felt that the proposed figures were telephone numbers and totally unrealistic. They therefore submitted their own revised proposal that was a quarter of the original proposal. (It must be borne in mind that an agency like ICA is constantly faced with the dilemma of spreading the jam thickly or thinly, due to the immense size and numbers of the problems confronting them.)

The end result was that the people involved in facilitating the project had to make do with a very skimpy budget, and found themselves always falling short. They didn't have enough money, for example, to employ a decent manager, and had to make do using a skilled worker who had to double as a manager. The result is that from Day One the project ran into problems and ended up becoming what one priest called a "sinkhole".

When I came on the scene my first task was to try and get away from the kind of emotionally-charged style that churches tend to get involved in, and to rather adopt a much more business-like approach, working on the areas of budgeting, employment of capital and sound management. This proved extremely difficult and is still in process.

The churches' attitude is that they only have a certain amount of capital available for self-help projects, and therefore, to cover as wide a territory as possible, it should be spread as thinly as possible. The problem with this is of course quite obvious - namely, that you have quantity but inevitably lack quality. In the long run you end up with a huge wastage of capital and nothing really qualitative emerging. Its like scattering a lot of seeds, hoping they will grow, without having prepared the ground sufficiently to enable meaningful growth to take place. Adequately prepared ground ensures that a project not only is more cost effective, but has far greater "spreading" potential.

In effect what happens when a project is given money in the way described above, is that it ends up having to absorb more and more. If the same amount had been ploughed in sufficiently in the first place, it would have had far better results.

This problem has been the malaise, the vital influencing factor, affecting the viability of projects, particularly co-operatives. The same applies to the way the U.N.'s development programmes have been applied. They have come up with similar problems. Although they have been far more conscious of the need for expertise, by and large they have fallen short in the implementation. This is because the energy required in preparing the groundwork has demanded far more funding, far more expertise, and a far longer-term approach to education, than has been the case, before projects can be considered economically viable. The result is that billions of dollars have been wasted in favour of the short-term approach. A perfect example is the case of Khula Home Industries, a



sewing co-operative in the Eastern Cape. It struggled along, receiving and re-receiving small grants - until it was completely turned around with the help of a volunteer who stopped all funding and concentrated on training in business principles - see the "Khula Home Industries" case study under 5) Hope for Southern Africa pg 43.

### **c) Lack of adequate training and unsuitable equipment**

On the whole most co-operatives start off without an initial training period, as opposed to the Mondragon experiment, where 15 years was spent in training. This lack of preparation is not built into the funding of the enterprise, resulting in a built-in failure factor. This story is to be seen in virtually all the co-ops in the country.

It was certainly true in Zimbabwe, where the failure rate was in excess of 90%. Interestingly, the success of those that did make it was largely due to the training in discipline and trust gained in armed struggle.

At Rosboom/Ezakhene (outside Ladysmith) one Reverend sat with 10 tractors of which only one was operative. No-one was skilled in repairing tractors, resulting in great frustration, let alone waste of money. One questions the suitability of tractors in the first place.

In Mozambique, East Germany donated rice harvesters totally unsuited to conditions there. The result was that people had problems of operation and faced a total crop disaster. The late Samora Machel called out civil servants, peasants and well-wishers who, together with traditional implements and methods, went into the fields and saved the situation.

## **3.7. Relationship with the Trade Union Movement**

Within the Trade Union Movement the question of co-operatives should become quite a natural progression, since within the socialist framework the worker owns the means of production. The co-operative is of course a natural implementation of this concept.

However, the Trade Union Movement in South Africa is no different from the churches in its attitude to co-operatives; essentially it has adopted a "let us help the unemployed" approach. There has been nothing really aggressive in its efforts, and for me this is a problem. If you embark on a co-operative as a welfare action, then your attitude from the start conveys a belief that it is not likely to succeed. This seems to be an attitude of some Trade Unions in South Africa. Thus the co-operatives started by Trade Unions lack the aggression of business enterprises; it is not seen as vital that co-ops be run in a business-like way.

The significance that the co-operative model has for the worker movement is that it exposes the contradictions within the Trade Union Movement: that while claiming to represent the struggle for a democracy, the unions in fact still work perfectly within the whole so-called capitalist system, concentrating on better wages, improved conditions in factories, etc, rather than looking at creative alternatives. These creative alternatives should be part of the natural progression toward a more participatory-style economic system - and here of course co-operatives go way further than the trade unions.

To illustrate the union approach we have only to look at the case of NUMSA (National Union of Metal Workers). A dispute within the Sarmcol BTR factory resulted in the dismissal of hundreds of metal workers. The Union was then forced to try and find alternatives, resulting in the formation of a worker co-operative. The unfortunate reality was that the co-operative model had never formed part of the Trade Union's programme; it took a desperate situation before they would even consider this alternative. This lack of expertise resulted in a woefully poor economic example of a co-operative. The T-shirt operation, for example, depended entirely on the goodwill of workers buying T-shirts for solidarity purposes - a bad marketing principle. Members of the co-op therefore needed financial assistance on a regular basis. The Union, to its credit, took the step of getting in a skilled person to help the situation in order to get a better economic footing. The relationship of the co-op to the Union, however, is problematic, in that it could easily be confused with a boss-employee relationship, which has in fact happened.

Moreover, in the existing co-ops started by unions, so little skill has been invested as to make their projects demoralizing and unempowering places to be. In the Northern Transvaal, where NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) is operative, the NUM employee responsible for starting co-ops was humble enough to point out that he really didn't know much about co-operatives, and admitted that he needed a great deal of assistance. At this stage they have no hope of viability, there is just too much groundwork necessary.

By way of contrast, it is interesting to look at the Mondragon Co-operative in Spain, where I spent a little while. The chief concern of the priest who initiated this the Mondragon experiment was education. Fifteen years were spent in the development of a technical and management training unit, before the co-op was even considered a going concern. This is of course a considerable time commitment, which sounds ridiculous. But it is interesting that the period of training provided the valuable pool of people who became the dynamos behind the very successful Mondragon co-operative.

The experiment, by the way, has since become very elitist in the sense that membership of it is limited to those who can afford the initial financial investment demanded. The amount is prohibitive. The co-op has lost the sense of commitment to community and is rapidly becoming just another enterprise, which only looks after its members, and the fact that the enterprise must be a successful one with appropriate evaluations carried out prior to any financial commitments. The discipline is important, the lack of real community responsibility is questionable. Ironically the project was originally started because of a community condition of poverty and need.

### 3.8. Cultural Problems - Traditional vs Modern

In looking at the development of co-operatives within an African context, there are a number of people in different countries in Africa who have presented various and very interesting insights. These are based both on personal experience, and the insights of scholars, who have tried to come to terms with the dynamics of the co-operative movement in Africa and its particular problems.

Here we are looking specifically at Zaire, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Botswana.

Father Joseph Segers of Kinshasha, Zaire, presented a very interesting paper, which included insights from other scholars. In Zaire co-operatives do exist, but those that have succeeded are very few. According to Fr. Segers,<sup>23</sup> "...the co-operative system could be a perfect instrument for the development of rural areas in Zaire - and, I suppose, elsewhere in Africa - where a crowd of little peasants, scattered throughout the country, exploited by the traders, should unite in order to produce together, to sell together, to buy together, to save together."

It would seem that according to the above position, co-operatives should succeed. However, Fr. Segers goes on to say the following:

<sup>24</sup> "REAL CO-OPERATIVES, WHICH REALLY SUCCEED, ARE VERY FEW

During my first stay in Zaire, in 1949 - 52, I had the good chance to observe the beginnings of the famous co-operative in Kinsantu in the Lower-Zaire, created by a Jesuit father in relatively very favourable conditions; it was situated in a region with a fertile soil, only 100 km from the capital Leopoldville - now Kinshasa; it developed strongly during 10 years, but failed soon after 1960, the year of independence.

Since then, especially during the period 1967 - 75, as secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Development, I had the opportunity to observe the evolution of many other co-operative projects, and my conclusion today is that the co-operative system is a real solution in only exceptional circumstances, in Zaire .

I know the situation in other African countries only from what I have heard and read. My overall impression is that most existing organizations, named as "co-operative", are, in fact, either public organizations for commercialization of primary products, dictating their terms to their "members", or private organizations managed in fact by one or some persons, with some exceptions.



In 1975 I had the opportunity to learn about the situation in Asia, when I was invited to a seminar on rural development, organized in Bangkok (Thailand) by DRAWWH.

The final report, formulated by a committee, acknowledged that successful co-operatives are very rare, and that they should be created only as an answer to a need, profoundly and durably felt by the population concerned, and after serious preliminary training.

These conclusions of the Bangkok seminar can be applied literally to the Zaire situation, and it proves that some fundamental problems of our co-operatives exist elsewhere."

According to Father Segers' analysis, it is the lack of solidarity between the members of co-operatives that is responsible for their continued failure. He goes on to try and understand how this particular phenomenon has influenced the development of the co-operative system. He looks particularly at the scholar, Henri Desroche, who studied the origins of the co-operative movement in his book, "Le Projet Co-operatif". In his analysis of co-operative ethics, Henri Desroche looks at the background to the difficulties that the co-operative movement in Africa faces. Father Seger goes on to quote Desroche in looking at "co-operative ethics":

#### "Ethics of creativity"

This co-operative creativity includes the entrepreneurship, worshipped by the free enterprise, but combined with all the demands of "co-partnership". It is difficult to create an enterprise; it is difficult also to start an association; but to create the first one in the second multiplies the difficulties. It requires an inclination towards risks, towards a capacity in the day-after-day improvisation, a rapidity of reflexes, a mental and nervous endurance in order to save the project from rupture, which threatens constantly.

#### "Ethics of solidarity"

In co-operative practice, solidarity manifests itself in the limitation of the rights of capital, in the social ascription of results, in disinterested devolution of net assets; these dispositions do not square with the calculations of "homo economicus".

<sup>25</sup> "He who gives by solidarity, expects something back in return. He gives part of his money, of the time he owes to his wife and children, not in order to receive back the equivalent, but hoping for a better economic system where he will have more independence, more security, or a better standard of living. He exchanges a present good for a possible future good; he gives up part of his individual personality in order to enlarge his social personality." ( Gide, *La Solidarite* cours 19727-28 PUF 1932 p. 200)

In looking at the traditional African value system, it would appear ideally suited for the co-operative movement. In fact this emerges in a statement made by Mamadou Dia, then chief of the Senegalese government, in a circular letter of 21 May 1962:

<sup>26</sup> "On the level of the concrete human communities, the co-operative movement constitutes the organization allowing the promotion of a modern development, together with the preservation of the traditional communitary values".

<sup>27</sup> Fr. Segers points out; "Many people persist in hoping that the traditional African solidarity is a plant apt for the grafting of co-operatives." This is of course confirmed in the Mamadou Dia quote. Fr. Segers goes on to say that from Desroche's analysis, it is evident that; "...the co-operative kills, in some cases, the traditional group; in other cases, the traditional group rejects the co-operative, mostly, both are living juxtaposed, but invisibly separated one from the other; behind the co-operative frontage, the traditional community persists."

The question that Segers is posing is whether in fact the traditional solidarity does still exist.

We know of course from the South African situation that we sit with a mixed economy, with a rural/urban problem, and all its influences, in addition to the devastating effects of the migratory labour system. So when we look at this question of traditional solidarity within the village African society, we know that a considerable amount of this traditional solidarity has in fact broken down. Segers, in his analysis of his own situation in Zaire, tries to understand this breakdown against an historical background. He says;

<sup>28</sup> "During centuries, Africans have lived in a social system, where customary law and the authorities prescribed to members of the same clan or the same tribe, a solidarity, a duty of sharing, which aimed at levelling and equalizing.

First since colonial penetration and later since independence, almost unlimited perspectives of individual promotion have been



<sup>29</sup> opened up, and the desire to liberate oneself from the equalizing pressure of the group became general among all the social strata; each one aims first at his individual promotion, to liberate himself from the pressure of the traditional group.

Risking to scandalize the people, I think that the attitude of the Zairese today is fundamentally individualistic, with an exacerbated individual "super-individualism" which has not yet discovered the utility and the advantages of a freely accepted solidarity. The typical Zairese enters into a co-operative, not in order to unite his means to those of others for the common interest, but in order to make quick profits in the shortest possible time."

Obviously there are several factors which have to be taken into account. At the time when I heard Fr. Segers talking, he acknowledged that he had not the time, within the short paper he was delivering, to enter into a more balanced appraisal of the situation. But he did say that in fact the kind of dualism that emerges in his analysis is characteristic of developing countries everywhere, and very evident within the Zairese co-operative experience.

The dualism to which he refers is the fact of some co-operative members being dominated by a "traditional mentality", while others are modern-minded. This he sees as endangering the success of any co-operative venture.

(Here we have only to look at our own situation to see to what extent this very phenomenon has devastating effects. For example, we have had the so-called "Witdoek" situation. "Witdoek" was a term used to describe a certain faction in the conflict of Crossroads/KTC in 1986. The "Witdoeke" were in fact the traditional folk, who clashed with the youth, whom they saw as representing the modern position and ideology, and undermining deeply rooted cultural values.

While I agree with some aspects of Segers' approach, there is another which I consider far more serious, and that, essentially, is the "worker mentality" which I have gone into in the section on problem analysis. To me this has been far more devastating, and is linked to the question of profits, incentives, discipline, etc.)

However, in continuing his look at analysis of dualism, Segers goes on:

<sup>30</sup> "The members, dominated by traditional mentality - not necessarily the poorest - will be inclined to reserve access to the co-operative to the clan brothers - while in fact a co-operative should unite persons with common interests and similar activities. "Traditionalists" will be inclined to leave management to traditional authorities, who rarely are experienced in these matters; they will find it normal that a good part of the profit

<sup>31</sup> should be spent on feasting, and that the part of the profit which is given to each member should be determined by his place in the social hierarchy, rather than by his contribution to the co-op activities.

Other members are modern-minded. They have a sense for organization, efficiency, rational calculation, which are fundamental conditions for the success of a co-operative. But this modern attitude serves often personal enrichment rather than the interests of the co-operative."

## 4. SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY CO-OPERATIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA

The following is a summary of problems and obstacles encountered by co-operatives in South Africa, most of which have been expanded in some detail above.

### 1) Worker Mentality

This is reflected in a nervousness and refusal to accept responsibility for risks/input in a co-operative enterprise. Workers are stuck to the wage concept, and tend to confuse anyone fulfilling a management role with that of an employer. Requires considerable education.

### 2) Problem of Incentives

Partly as the result of the worker mentality, and partly because of a strongly materialistic value system, cash returns are seen as the only incentives. Social incentives are still very dim.

### 3) Co-op viability

Still a serious area, and a direct cause of de-motivation. Issues that relate to viability are:

1. Poor understanding of management
2. Confusion of the application of certain business principles with capitalism
3. Lack of authority, and the attitude, "I can now do what I like".
4. Dependence on hand-outs
5. Little or no education or training before starting a co-op.
6. Non-existent discipline in terms of **feasibility studies** and analysis, together with accurate projections and hard planning.
7. Co-op seen as needing to be "molly-coddled" or protected from the competitiveness of business.



8. Lack of expertise.

9. Lack of real struggle mentality - one that goes beyond slogans and mass meetings.

10. Lack of full appreciation of the value of co-ops and their implication for a future South Africa.

11. Harsh, unyielding capitalist system, with all of its blocking mechanisms; including the tying up of vital direct supply lines, thus rendering the small co-operative non-competitive.

12. Poor or non-existent analysis of community resources and resourcefulness, and thus the use of these.

13. Political instability and dogmatic ideological application, regardless of how co-ops are affected. eg. Co-ops are devastated by the many 3-day strikes or stayaways, when they are expected to act in solidarity, without the consideration that they do not have the resources to survive as capitalist enterprises do. They also do not have the planning, nor community supports of a practical nature. Co-ops are hence used as a political weapon, and are easily neutralized by the State.

14. Poor financing and financial strategy. A tendency toward a social welfare approach, ie. to help a little in order to keep people busy and "earning something"

#### **4. Balance of skilled power and the dominant role this plays**

eg. a co-op has to draw on skilled people in the form of ex-patriates, Whites and Coloureds who have had better training, etc. This creates problems of communication, domination, unequal participation and leadership dependencies. Racial problems also become a factor.

#### **5. Cultural limitations**

1. Use of women and their role being undermined.

2. Nature of the enterprise, eg. uninterested in coffin-making, even though it serves a great need.

3. Inability to overcome compartmentalizing of social/religious/political life. eg. Funeral Committees must remain as such. "Mgalelo" system restricted to personal level, etc.

4. Problems of rural situation where chiefs and headmen abound - also tied into political oppression. Rural conservatism a reality, though.

**6. Confusion over the reality that the co-operative ideal is a process.**  
Instead, a desire for instant perfection, ideologically and otherwise.

**7. Co-operative/Trade Union tension**

**8. Protest mentality and lack of creative approach**

**9. Poor understanding of training in human dynamics.**

The fact that human dynamics influence an enterprise positively or negatively, and is to a great degree a serious cause for failure.

## 5. THE VALUE OF CO-OPS IN SOCIETY in a move toward a more human society

The entire co-operative movement presently, historically and throughout the world, represents a search for a new way in human and economic relationships. This grows out of a long historical economic relationship between management and employee that has proved, to a large extent, to have certain devastating social consequences. It is true that jobs have been created, but at the same time there has also been high unemployment. It is an attempt to move away from the almost unethical mutual exploitation or "prostitutional" type of relationship which exists between worker and employers. Its task is to transform that relationship from one of mutual prostitution to one of mutual responsibility, both in the workplace and in the society in which the business is situated. In simple terms the co-operative movement is representative of a movement toward a deeper, more far-reaching and longer-lasting democratic value system, which has respect as its fundamental principle, and from which all else emerges.

### 5.1. Sowing the seeds of democracy

Democracy has tended to be seen purely in governmental terms, namely the control of the people by the people, etc. It is seen very much in respect of a power condition. We tend to forget, however, that government can provide little more than a superficial democracy. What we have beneath that superficiality is a much deeper element; that of the principle of deep human respect and value of the human person, both individually and in community, that governments are meant to enhance and protect. This is accorded practically through various principles and laws outlining basic human rights.

The important element which feeds it all is the spirit of democracy. It is the spirit of democracy which advocate Dullah Omar referred to at the recent CTPA (Cape Teachers Professional Association) conference at the University of the Western Cape. He emphasized the much deeper significance of a democratic struggle, namely the struggle to maintain the principles of respect, love and non-racialism. A democratic government or organization, then, is one that, in its dealings, enshrines those values. Hence the move toward a more co-operative style of business. **The co-operative style is essentially a struggle for humanity within an economic context; in the sense that the co-op style affirms the humanity of individuals, enabling them to develop themselves and their creativity in a socially responsible manner.**

Moreover, in the struggle of an emerging democracy, the co-operative model represents small seeds of the democratic process. Without democracy being enacted in a small way it is impossible to have it enacted in a major way. What this means is that if people do not have meaningful structures that govern their everyday lives, where they can participate in a democratic way, then their chances of true participation are greatly minimized, or worse still, removed altogether. What then results is that power and responsibility are transferred to a bureaucracy. This seems to be true whether you are in



a capitalist or a socialist state. Both end up with the same bureaucratic structure on the pretext of enshrining democratic values. Let us not forget that bureaucracies thrive on ignorant masses. In Africa, whenever there is a takeover of government, it is difficult for democracy to operate for any real length of time, because to a large extent the democratic process has never filtered down to the grassroots. Participation has been ineffective, resulting in autocracies and various forms of demagoguery, eg Idi Amin, Milton Obote, Hastings Banda, Kenneth Kaunda, Dr Savimbi, etc, etc.

In the more sophisticated democracies, in both the socialist and capitalist states, we see essentially the same thing demonstrated. For instance, in the U.S. you have the strange phenomenon of two houses locked in combat, and the vast public sitting with a choice of either this one or that one, expressed through a piece of paper. Real, meaningful participation is non-existent. It is left to the bureaucracies to take whatever decisions they will - with some control built into the system, but without the creative, meaningful participation which really guides power.

This naturally leads to abuses. In the West we have seen the Nixon/Watergate affair. In the East we have seen the rampant power of Stalin.

## **5.2. Connectedness; conducive to human creativity**

How often have we heard the word "system" being used? "You can't fight the system". Is this not in fact symptomatic of peoples participation being reduced to the level of the apathetic?

It is this sense of powerlessness that seems to be world-wide. It merely demonstrates how effectively democracy has been removed and held within a very small framework of technocrats and bureaucrats, who control with minimal outside controls. Those that do exist are of a purely legal nature, which can be circumvented. The human mind is creative enough to circumvent most laws.

To take this argument further, we need only look at the phenomenon of "masses". In the struggle for democracy, there is always the "call to the masses", to "organize the masses". It is interesting that at a mass meeting, when the masses come together, as they did with Martin Luther King, as they do here at trade union meetings, etc, essentially they always remain a mass of individuals who are by and large disconnected, and only remain connected during the short time of the mass meeting.

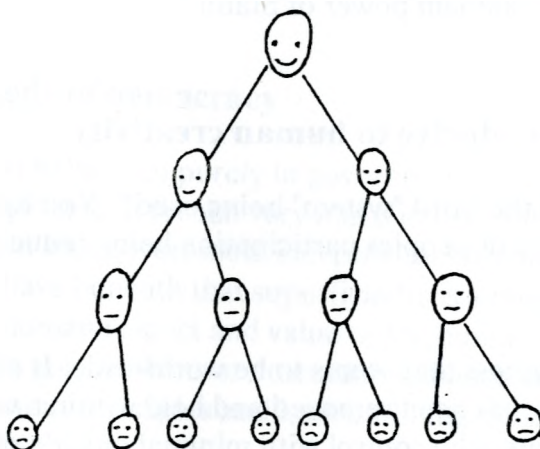
It is precisely this disconnected-ness that is the basis for a continuation of a condition of apathy. The absence of any adequate long term support networks uphold this condition.

Where there is a connected-ness, where individuals come together and stay together, interacting in a responsible way, we find a situation of mutual support, which grows into what we call community.

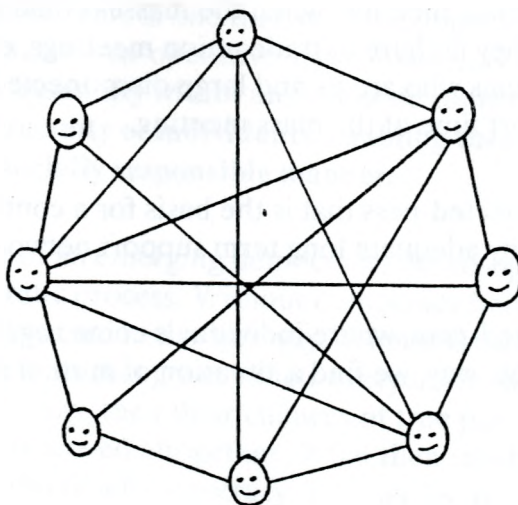
Essentially, the co-operative framework is intended to enhance precisely this value, namely the value of community. Through the co-op, community becomes effective in a small way and grows toward a larger dimension. This does not mean that bureaucracies fade out altogether. Wherever you have masses of people you will have bureaucracies. But it at least enables a more meaningful movement toward community participation, which eventually can keep some level of human control over bureaucracies, rather than leaving it to a flimsy legal structure.

### 5.3 Leadership expressed through different roles within the co-op

So then, in the co-operative process we are talking about a way of co-operating responsibly on both the economic and the simply human level. It represents a different style of leadership, which is very different from the usual pyramid structure of leadership.



The wisdom pyramid, expressed in the education field, and many decision-making structures.



The Co-operative way with wisdom and roles being affirmed and respected.

This does not mean that everybody within a co-op immediately becomes a leader. But it does provide the opportunity for each individual to exercise some form of leadership within a given framework. That is, exercising leadership according to skill, according to wisdom, according to some personal quality or role within the group.

For example, in a production co-op, there still has to be someone in a managerial role, somebody in charge of production, somebody skilled at costing, somebody skilled at managing the store, somebody skilled in the actual manufacturing, etc. All of these roles are of an essentially business nature and still have to be adhered to. The difference lies in the fact that everybody, from the shop floor to the office, will have a say in how the business is run. The business does not rely solely on the wisdom of the person on the top, for one person at the top cannot see it all. There is value in seeing things from the position of the floor. Even the sweeper notices things which could be of value, such as flaws which could be eradicated to make the business more productive and more viable.

It is this area of real participation that draws a clear line between the co-op and the usual, run-of-the-mill business enterprise. The one tends toward affirming humanity, and the other creates a situation of inhumanity. Hence the strikes and various other responses of inhuman behaviour.

#### **5.4. Human creativity**

In terms of our human development, we should see ourselves as seeds in the soil that are nurtured and develop into beautiful plants that have and give life and beauty. This is our natural creativity. When we are able to express our creativity in various ways, life becomes "meaningful" and we are happy. But when something, some other force, etc., moves in to cripple this creativity, block it in any way, we become crippled, imprisoned, blocked and stunted. We may, like plants, wither and die, or become frustrated, angry and reactionary.

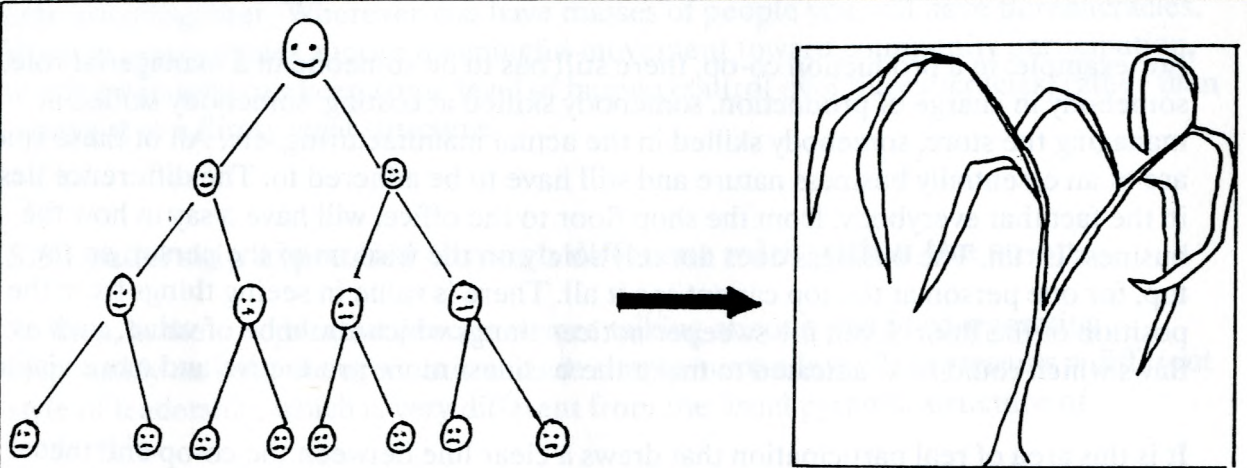
Politically or socially, our behaviour is reactionary when we "react to" what we have identified as oppression. We use our creativity in a reactionary way, ie through demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, etc.

This reactionary creativity grows out of a world-wide model of conflict, which we inherit in our educational system. It shows itself in many of our so-called democratic structures. Wisdom and vested interest are seen to lie at the top - in the government, the party, the professors, the leadership, etc.

In the liberation struggle, the concept of "the masses" and the "leaders" employs the same conflict model. At a typical mass meeting, the leaders indulge in platform platitudes while the masses are subject to listening. This top down model inevitably produces conflict, since people's creativity is stunted. The need for a programme that allows for creativity in all the participants is recognized, but largely undeveloped. The co-operative seeks to develop a co-operative educational framework which

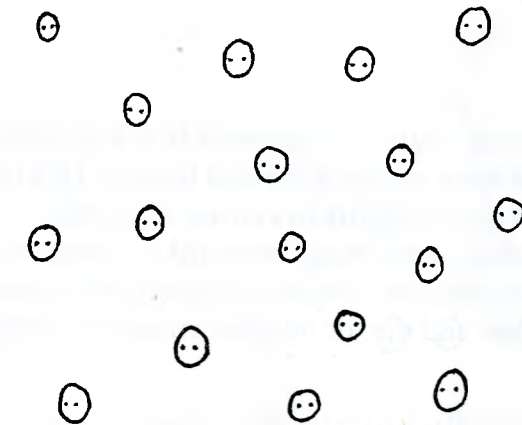


lends itself to the development of individual and communal creative potential. A co-op is also the daily continuation of the living example of community, from small to large scale, and has the power to transform the situation of "the masses".



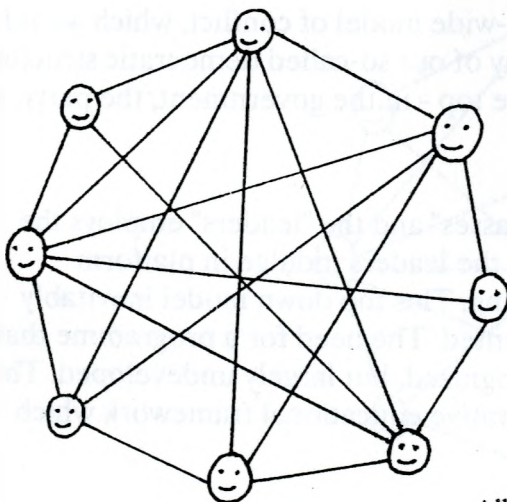
Hierarchical systems tend towards oppressiveness

The result: Individual creativity repressed



Disconnectedness - lack of solidarity

Poor development of true potential



All aspects in co-operation

### **5.5. The concept of a co-operative society**

The idea of the co-operative society is that people need to be linked in a meaningful way through small structures or co-operatives. These organisms, however, do not operate in a vacuum, and relate to a much wider community, which, to all intents and purposes, may still be disorganized.

The co-operative concept is very much tied to how capital is used in society. The present day co-operative movement has tended to ignore the all round significance of its capital, ie. how capital impacts upon the community in which the co-op is situated. Capital, of course, comes in various forms. It may be intellectual capital, which is built up in an individual over a period of time through education, or it may be money. It is the capitalist system's inability to come up with positive or creative uses for capital that has helped shape the vision of alternative systems.

What many thinkers such as Marx have failed to answer adequately is the question of how one develops in individuals a responsible attitude toward capital. How does one come to a point where we deal with capital in a way that enhances the whole of our community, recognizing it as a gift with which we have been bestowed to use creatively and positively? The co-operative, by its very nature, is to a large extent dependent on a healthy, responsible relationship with the surrounding community, from which it draws its support.

The co-operative society concept therefore seeks to begin the process whereby organizations and co-operatives act in a responsible way in relationship to a broader community, through the gradual development of accountable community organizational structures. This can happen on the small to the large scale.

In the following Kenyan example, it relates to a church organism, and is implemented in a holistic way, taking in all the different factors that have bearings on the group. There is the recognition that the failure to recognize this responsibility to the wider community could easily result in the co-op becoming just another individualistic enterprise, as was the case in Switzerland and the Mondragon experiment.

### **CASE STUDIES on the concept of a co-operative society**

I have included most of a paper prepared by Mr Joseph Ikalur of the Kenyan DELTA (Development Education and Leadership Teams in Action) Programme. Its holistic picture I felt merited full exposure and is as follows:

## **DELTA Programme - Kenya**

In order to gain an idea of the context to this programme, I want to include a summarized background of the Kenyan situation.

### **Geography**

Kenya's size is 584 000 sq. km. It is bordered by Ethiopia and Sudan in the North; Somalia and Indian Ocean on the East; Tanzania on the South and Uganda on the West.

### **Population**

About 15 million people; of these 63% are young people below the age of 30 years; and of the young population 50% are youth below the age of 15. The birth rate is steadily increasing at 3.5% Because of improved medical facilities the death rate has decreased in many areas.

### **Economic strength**

Kenya is basically an agricultural country; but 2/3 of Kenya's soil is either arid or semi-arid. Therefore only the remaining 1/3 of the land is fertile, and this where most of Kenya's food crops and cash crops are grown. The population is also concentrated around these areas of fertile and arable land. Now that Kenya has seriously entered into the world money-economy, the emphasis of economic growth is directed towards earning more foreign exchange. The purchase of more and more luxury goods from overseas is causing an imbalance in the economic priorities of the majority of the population in Kenya. Cash crops such as coffee, tea, tobacco, and sugar cane are gaining more land - thus displacing the food crops.

### **Politics**

After gaining independence in 1963, Kenya has maintained a one-party system of government. There are numerous arguments both for and against this pattern of organizing people politically. Under the rulership of the two presidents that Kenya has had so far, there has been general satisfaction on what people feel should be the path of Uhuru/independence. Kenya is guided by the Kenyan interpretation of Africa socialism, K.A.N.U. Manifesto, session paper no.10, 1965.



## Education

Great progress has been made in the field of school education, which is, of course, a carry-over from the British school system. Kenya's attempts to create an indigenous system of education which answers the needs of a developing country have not been successful on a large scale. The result of a purely academic approach to education has been high unemployment among the young people, frustration among both the youth and their parents, and crime."

Given this basic background, we need to be aware of a particular aspect to Kenyan life, which is the tension existing between rural and urban life.

Mr Ikalur continues:

"The phenomenon of towns and cities is quite a new one to the African life experience. The economic system in Kenya today is causing a situation where most people - particularly school-leavers - are forced to leave the rural areas and go to towns to earn a living. But the towns are not helping the rural areas in development. Instead, the towns are more and more becoming parasites on the rural economy. Many problems are created because of urban/rural social mobility, e.g. separation of families, brain-drain from rural to urban areas; money-drain from rural to urban areas; and new concepts for the terms "work", "development" or "progress". Yet about 85% of Kenya's population still live in the rural areas. Kenya, then, is experiencing a period of very fast transition. Perhaps one remark will summarize this experience: "In conditions where Europe "walked" to achieve development, Kenya is "flying at jet speed" to catch up with the modern world." The implications of this trend are alarming.

The case study also needs to be seen in the context of the DELTA programme. The programme operates on the basis of certain key principles, which are as follows :

### 1. Transformation of the World

This principle states that every person is called upon to participate in changing this world to be a better place for all to live in. This can be done at three levels:

- a) We must change and shape our own lives.
- b) We must be involved in changing the life of our community

c) We must be responsible in changing the lives of the people in the wider society

## **2. The subject of education and development must be chosen by the participants themselves**

- that given sufficient and relevant guidance adults can choose and prioritize what is important for them to learn.
- that people know their needs
- that "experts" are often outsiders and they have different priorities from the local people.
- the role of the educator/facilitator is to act as an "education midwife", who enables the local people to identify their needs more clearly and bring out what is best in them.

## **3. Dialogue must be the basis of education and development**

- In tackling the complex problems of community development no one has all the answers
- Likewise nobody in the community is totally ignorant.
- Every person must be helped and encouraged to express and share their different perceptions about the problems that affect that community.

## **4. Problem-posing approach to education**

- Encouraging people to think for themselves, be critical of themselves and to ask the questions that are important to them.
- Enabling people to be active and creative, and to develop initiative in seeking alternative answers to problems.
- To encourage adult-to-adult relationships in teamwork so that paternalism, superiority and inferiority complexes are removed.
- The learning process becomes a living experience in which everyone is learning and growing in community awareness.

## 5. Action/Reflection/Action process

- Self-criticism is built into the learning process and the action performed
- Education and life are interwoven, therefore the un-examined life is not worth living.
- Participants in conscientizing education must plan, act and evaluate their action in order to do a better job.

Within the above context, we can now look at the "co-operative society" concept as developed by the DELTA programme. Particularly interesting is the programme's attempt to keep itself within the context of an African family-ness and village atmosphere, with all of its links and communicational structures - thus retaining and promoting a societal harmony, where each activity is related and interacts with the others in a dynamic kind of way."

The following is derived from a paper by Mrs Teresia Ivita, a Co-ordinator for the DELTA-Programme in the Kitui Diocese in Kenya.

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### "INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT

DELTA has taken many different shapes and directions, which are all related and interwoven, and move toward our vision of a more just society through greater social, political and economic awareness, in response to the call of the Gospel.

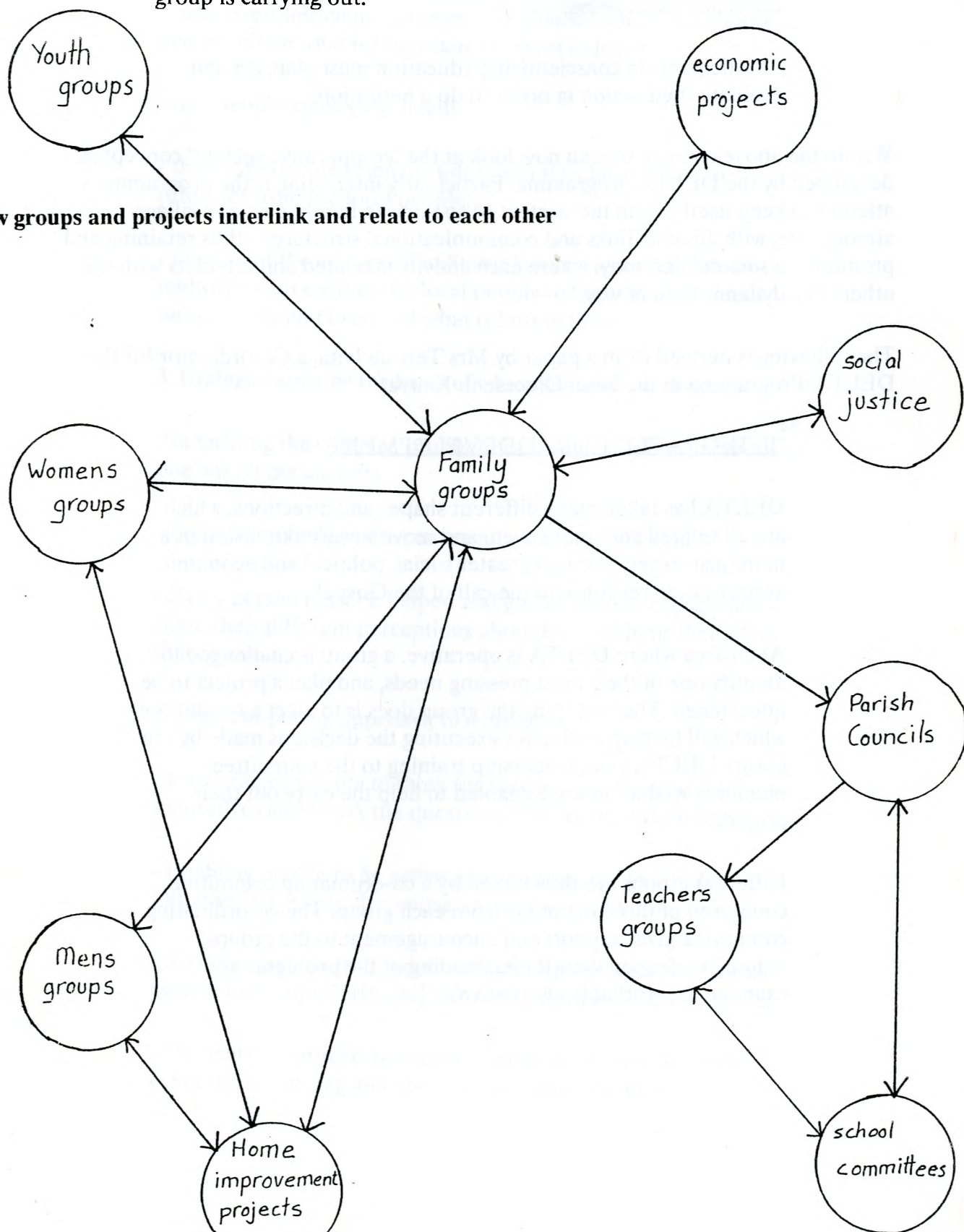
At an area where DELTA is operative, a group is challenged to identify one of their most pressing needs, and plan a project to be undertaken. The first thing the group does is to elect a committee, which will be responsible for executing the decisions made by the group. DELTA gives leadership training to the committee members so that they are enabled to help the carry out their project.

Different groups are then linked by a co-ordinating committee, composed of three members from each group. The co-ordinating committee gives support and encouragement to the groups, helping to deepen their understanding of the problems and examine the workable alternatives.



The co-ordinating committees are then further represented on a co-ordinating committee on a national level. Each level of co-ordinating committee is responsible for training its members, who in turn train the others, right down to grassroots level. The training given depends on the particular project the grassroots group is carrying out.

**How groups and projects interlink and relate to each other**



The "reflection and action" process encourages each group to think critically, to analyze their resources, locally and personally, and to improve their economic and social participation in day-to-day affairs. For example, local farmers in the Kitui diocese are encouraged in better methods of goat and sheep rearing, without knowing how to read or write.

All the groups with their different projects are inter-related, and recognize that their existence has a direct influence on the community. eg the womens' groups cannot exist very well without involving the husbands.

The aims of the DELTA programme cannot be met without recognizing the interdependence of all the groups, and how one facilitates the growth of the other. If, for instance, we look at the goat and sheep project, we see how the many effects of keeping goat and sheep successfully bear upon other areas of the individuals family, economic and political life.

The integration of different areas of life is then heightened for the individual and the community, because each area has a role to play in the other areas. In a particular group you will have priests, sisters, laywomen, laymen, teachers and farmers, each helping in a particular way with community building. The programme calls for each and every one to act, and to share their riches with other members of the village or community.

To meet some economic needs and to assist the groups to carry out some of their projects, some groups have set up credit societies; revolving funds which are on loan to whichever group needs them.

In South Africa, the concept of co-operative society has been demonstrated by Isinamva, a development programme that operates in 24 villages of Transkei. See case study on "Isinamva".

## 6. HUMANIZING THE FACE OF BUSINESS

The most exciting development within South African business circles was recently expressed through the Managing Director of The Perm, Mr Bob Tucker; specifically, his use of terminology like "holistic business". This essentially means an awareness that business is dependent on a healthy society. This of course implies that businesses operate with a much deeper social awareness, knowing that a healthy society impacts directly on the success of the business. Similarly, an unhealthy society has its effects on the enterprise. The recent wailing on the serious problem of "shrinkage" or stealing by Clive Weil (pardon the pun) of Checkers, Raymond Ackerman of Pick n Pay, etc, confirm this. Supermarkets lose an estimated R750 million per annum.

We have seen this idea come to greater reality in the American firms adhering to the Sullivan principles. Albeit as the result of pressure, there has been an incredible development of social awareness in American firms in South Africa. Some may be very superficial, but there are positive examples where firms have begun their move into the surrounding, suffering society, which is seen for the first time as integrally bound up with the operations of the enterprise. There may be and are mixed motivations for this of course, but this does not take away from the principle of social responsibility.

I have, at various points, taken groups of businessmen around the townships surrounding Cape Town. These people, intending merely an "alternative sightseeing tour", as it were, experienced a de-mystifying of the face of poverty, upon meeting the poor on a face-to-face level. Businessmen were able to see the deeper humanity that hides behind the faceless name called poverty. Just this little experience of businessmen meeting people on the ground level and being touched by the depth of the human side (as I have been touched over so many years, and strongly believe it is with great difficulty we can ever be liberated from selfish attitudes except by being in touch with the human side of poverty), has convinced me that we all need to be touched at our human side. Even the so-called hardened businessmen are capable of being touched. This little experience has definitely borne its fruits, as we have seen individual businessmen from that original group responding continuously over a period of time, with very positive effects. Of course the world hasn't changed, and of course injustice goes on, but what has happened is that responses, in a little way, have changed. (A few more of these little seeds and I shall die a happy man).

There are several other examples which I can quote, but suffice to say that certain concerns within business circles, in particular the use of the term "holistic business", are in fact a very healthy development. It is a recognition that the face of business has to change, IF SOCIETY AND BUSINESS WISH TO SURVIVE.



## 7. HOPE FOR SOUTHERN AFRICA

It is true that the Southern Africa region is faced with numerous problems of leadership and a variety of others. More problematic is the fact that Africa has always been in a situation of "catching up", as Father Supa says. It suffers considerably from a deprivation of skills at essential levels, stemming from a reliance on overseas or expatriate support through provision of finance and expertise. This of course has long term negative aspects as is now being experienced in South Africa. Even if billions of dollars were pumped into the country, it would not be in a position to take advantage of this aid, because of years of deprivation of skills training to the majority of the population. Of course training has taken place, but on a very limited scale and certainly not in areas of high skill or sophistication, eg. aircraft technology, etc.

At the same time it must also be pointed out that the world seems to operate on the basis that the future of a person lies in the formal job market, and therefore all training, skills and vocations must be geared accordingly. This in turn is supported by a world-wide network of educational institutions that, ironically, almost never evaluate their relevance with a view to changing; eg. the fact that 12 million skilled people, including graduates, doctors, etc, are unemployed in Europe, has not even made a dent in the formal type of education that continues to spew out graduates at a rate of knots, and whose only response is to reduce the intake of students at certain levels where there is an oversupply. This is not unlike the implementation of the supply and demand principle. If there is an oversupply, you simply dump the extra into the sea. In the case of humans, they are simply thrown onto the unemployed scrap heap.

This process of dehumanization is what Africa, and more specifically Southern Africa, is grappling with. It is facing the challenge of the question, "HOW DO YOU INTRODUCE AND DEVELOP A VIABLE ECONOMY, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME DEVELOPING A MORE HUMAN SOCIETY?"

The present economic system has a built-in myth, namely, that it can fulfill people's hopes and dreams. People have been taken in by this and are encouraged to continue trying; because Joe Bloggs down the road made it, so can you. The myth is being rapidly exploded, but has yet to reach a deep consciousness within formal business, and certainly in the minds of the general populace.

Despite the many failures, I wish to present some insights into certain signs of hope that grow out of the following case studies:

## 7.1 SOUTH AFRICA

### 7.1.1. Khula Home Industries

Khula Home Industries is an example of a co-operative that suffered under almost all of the illnesses that can beset a small group of uneducated workers struggling to get a business going from nothing. The group had been funded by Inter Church Aid for about 10 years. It had suffered from the exploitative competition of the Taiwanese factories in Dimbaza. Participants had moved to these factories for wages varying from R10 - R15 per week. Only two workers remained - one of them in her sixties, when they approached myself for help. I discussed conditions for such assistance, including the need for various disciplines, sacrifice and hard work, and that in the initial stages it would be a learning process, since business disciplines are not all simply common sense, eg., keeping accounts.

A 74-year old retired and paternalistic businessman was introduced as a volunteer. His name, Francis Green. Couldn't speak a word of Xhosa or Afrikaans, but knew business from a very practical position. He had no degree or academic inclination. His programme was as follows:

1. Met with ladies, listened to problems, and after a few days of some thought returned with a plan of action. This was as follows:
2. Stopped funding even though this was an initial hope of the group.
3. Took entire stock of the situation - this included looking at the desperate state of accounts, stock rotting in the cupboards, the bad debts, etc.
4. Re-organized workplace in order to create a happy atmosphere and a space where communication and discipline were easier.
5. Took one of the ladies to visit suppliers, banks and debtors, etc.
6. Introduced production and simple accounting disciplines.
7. Drew up visual aids/colour schemes to assist production disciplines.
8. Educated and created awareness of quality control.
9. Re-vitalized their marketing.

There were several other aspects. At the end of the day their motivation levels rose. Production advanced. Within six months they were viable and producing a surplus. Their numbers increased to eight. Before Francis left, after his agreed commitment of nine months, he made the group aware of the need to help other groups. This was done in the way that another ailing group in Keiskammerhoek was assisted. One of the Khula group was trained in sewing machine mechanics, since their enterprise was a sewing industry. Two years after Francis left they continued to show an amazing surplus, paying themselves several times the minimum earned by workers in the local factories. I have no doubt that Khula still has a great deal of growing to do. But that there is a lesson to be learned is obvious.

### **5.1.2. Isinamva**

This project is situated in the Transkei region in the district of Mount Frere. It is based in a very rural and traditional community that has experienced the ravages of the migratory labour system, which denuded the country side of its young men, and later women. Being in a declared homeland, it also means that the political situation is precarious, conservative and very reactionary. Heads of state change like the weather, and organizations working for change are banned like swatting flies.

This all goes toward making any operation in this area very difficult and subject to suspicion and careful scrutiny.

Other aspects of the region include a very high rate of illiteracy, poverty and unemployment, ranging from 50% and upwards. Consequently, malnutrition is rampant, with other related diseases, etc.

The rule of the chief or headman is adhered to most strictly and is very much a part of the scenario when tacking any form of development. People will not participate without the sanction of the headman or chief in the district or village.

It is against this backdrop that Rev. Gwilizia started the centre of Isinamva, which he headed until his death. Nokuzola Magida took over in the same spirit, and being much younger, was able to begin the fulfillment of a dream to help people liberate themselves from the shackles of oppressed thinking and economic depression as well as severe health conditions. This in fact meant gearing the centre toward a more strongly-developed support base for the surrounding villages. This in effect meant operating within a radius of 24 kilometers, starting from one village to the present 60 villages some nine years later. The support programmes include:

#### **1. Health Education**

This involves a travelling health worker who helps mothers understand the basics of health, together with a gardening programme, ie. growing vegetables, animal husbandry for protein, eg. poultry, etc. Feeding schemes were also initiated on an emergency basis where this was required.



## 2. Literacy Programme

### 3. Training in sewing

#### 4. Fence-making

This is neccessary for keeping out goats who devour anything that grows

### 5. Harnessing water resources, including building a dam and pump station

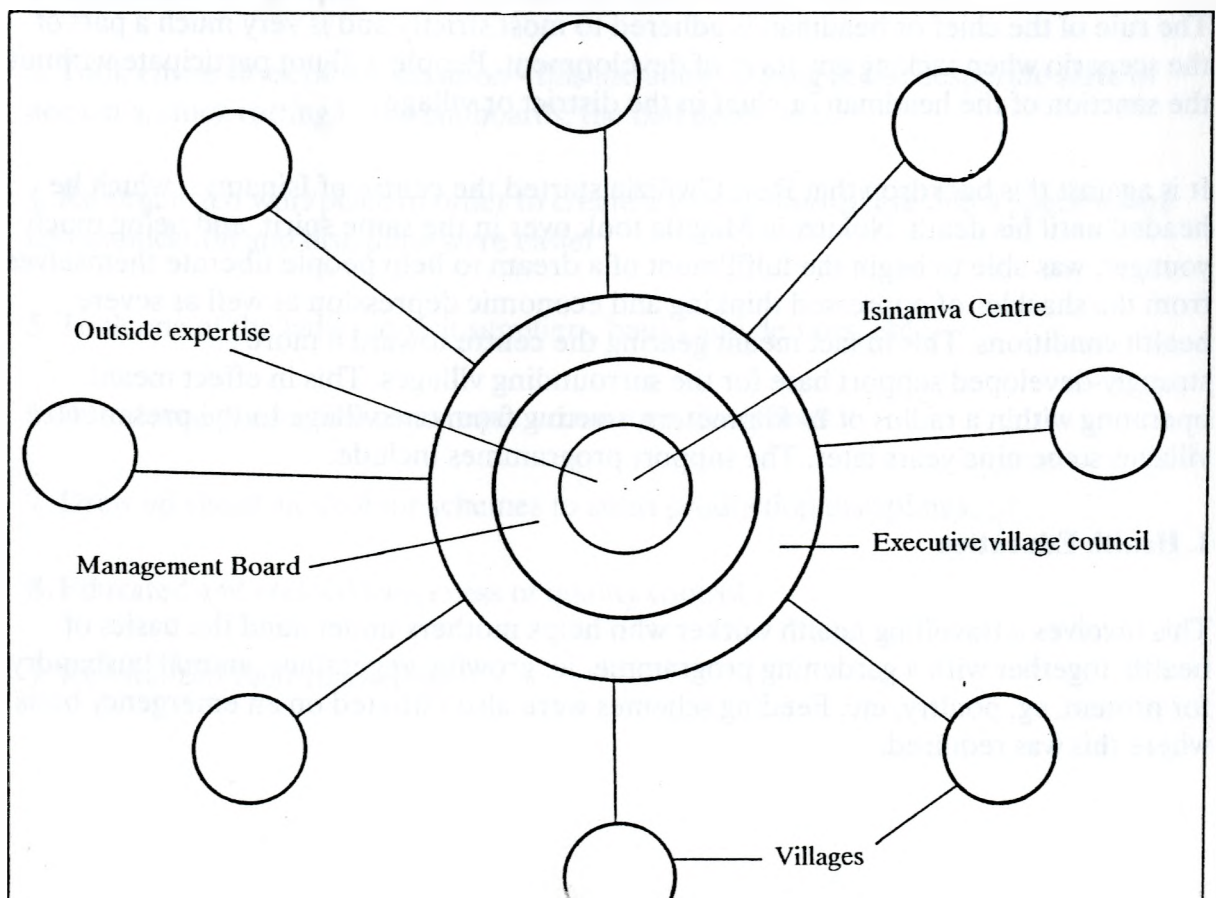
## 6. Promotion of development education in surrounding schools.

## 7. Child care

## 8. Promotion of co-operatives

Small development projects of a co-operative nature, including weaving, pottery, poultry, etc.

The spirit of the programme is such that villagers began to get involved and indeed were slowly liberating themselves and beginning to take control. The hope was that the centre would eventually be totally controlled and owned by the villagers. This dream is now virtually a reality. Although the initial Management Board is still there, it is rapidly moving into village control, where effective decision-making is beginning to emerge. The structure is as follows:



The success of Isinamva can be witnessed through the action of the community of Betani, one of the member villages of Isinamva, which was nearly decimated by Typhoid, as a result of dirty water. The villagers had no access road. When the survivors from the Typhoid epidemic recovered, they decided to build their own road, realizing that it was useless to wait for the state. This they did with their bare hands and miserable implements, hewing a road of several kilometers up a hill 280 meters high, where rocks abound. This was successful. Today a car can drive up there and reach the village. Mine did. In heavy rainy weather it can be a serious problem, so they also cleared an area for a dam. In the words of a woman there, "Sir," she said. "We have worked hard for ourselves to solve our problems, and now we need some help. We need water in the village from the stream where the cattle drink, and cause problems for our health." This represented the spirit of Isinamva, and is to be found in other villages as well.

Although the programme has numerous problems, and is still in the process of improving its structure and village-participation, it nevertheless remains a potent example of human endeavour and sign of hope for the poor. Isinamva represents the development of a "co-operative society", where villages, schools, health programmes, gardening, etc are linked together in a holistic way. This type of interdependency makes for a healthy society, which I believe is in the making at Isinamva.

## 7.2. BOTSWANA

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### Lentswe la Oodi Weavers

Lentswe la Oodi Weavers is a co-operative in rural Botswana. It has a remarkable history, having emerged from the thinking and enthusiasm of a Scandinavian couple, Peder and Ulla Gowenius.

Ulla was an expert weaver and Peder had years of experience in graphics, communications and business administration. In addition, they both had accomplishments in Africa, starting and running craft centres in South Africa and Lesotho.

Peder and Ulla shared their ideas for starting a "model for development" in the form of a weaving business in 1972, but met with little response from agencies and government. One person, however, took note. She was Sandy Grant, the projects officer for the Botswana Christian Council, whose salary was paid by Church World Service. She felt that Peder and Ulla were "rare birds" who were worth taking a chance on; she began taking Peder to local leaders, including a chief and a district officer. The chief's support of the idea made it difficult for the government to refuse, and the district officer helped to improve the project proposal. As others joined their support to the idea, Peder began looking for a suitable location for the workshop.

Within a brief period of time, a group of interested persons formed to help. Local citizens of Botswana provided insight into the politics of the region. The district council recommended several locations. Meanwhile, funding was arranged as a co-operative venture; The Botswana Christian Council supplied R10 000, derived equally from Church World Service, USA, and Christian Aid of Great Britain. An even larger amount came from Canadian University Services Overseas and the Canadian Catholic organization for Development and Peace.

When Peder and Ulla began their activities in the village at Oodi, they made a very basic assumption; that their presence at Oodi would only be for a period of a few years. Consequently, if the project were to succeed, local citizens had to know every aspect of the workshop's operation. Ulla began with weaving itself, as a starting place, in December 1973. Workers were introduced to the history and development of textiles. Then she turned to spinning, carding and tapestry weaving. As the workers learned each new skill, Ulla sought "absolute perfection from the beginning. You just cannot wait for perfection at a later time. This was something I have learned from bitter experience." Included in training was the skill of evaluating their own products.

By 1975, the workshop's production included tapestries, bedspreads, wall hangings, runners and carpets, depicting stories of rural life. The scenes were African, emerging from the thoughts and creativity of the workers. Artistic talent flowed from these ordinary rural people.

In January 1977, the Gowenius couple began training the workers in every aspect of management. Based upon a short test, thirteen women were chosen. These workers were assigned to each of the five business positions; bookkeeping, accounting, sales, wages, stock and raw materials. After training in each position, the women were then rotated to the next, creating a pool of managerial talent.

By the time Peder and Ulla left in 1978, the original Board of Directors had changed completely; from representatives of the funding sources to the workers themselves. The position of "managing director" was replaced by a management committee of five workers. These persons continue to be rotated among all of the management positions. As a result, "every worker in the factory is aware of all the problems and implications of every activity in the workshop. All the workers were trained to understand the complexities of costs and profits."

Throughout much of 1977, Peder and Ulla watched the workers run their own affairs, making their own mistakes. In March 1978, they returned to Sweden, leaving the co-operative under the ownership of its workers. Under this arrangement the co-operative is now passing a decade of purely local control; it is a successful Botswana institution.



The co-operative demonstrates much that is contrary to current "co-operative theory"; Peder and Ulla were foreigners; the idea for the co-operative sprang from them, and not from the people; weaving is not a craft indigenous to the region. However, it succeeded in its aims of providing employment and a forum for the dissemination of skills. This, through the thoroughness of the research carried out prior to its implementation, the input of sufficient funds to launch a decent business, and the impeccably high standard of training provided to the participants.

### 7.3. ZIMBABWE

In Zimbabwe it is true that most co-operatives have failed and that the movement has become almost a dirty word because of this. There are, however, quite a few successes, including co-ops like Simukai (outside Harare) and the supermarket co-op in Bulawayo.

Some interesting aspects of co-ops there have emerged. At Chitsva Chirri Murotsuka ("There is no Victory Without Struggle") a farming co-op near Harare, members earn approximately 150 Zimbabwean Dollars a month, and have very poor housing. The farm was bought by the members by the pooling of their demobilization funds, and is run along very strictly disciplined lines, with all-round participation. Everyone in the co-op plays a role, no matter how small - this includes the crippled, who are in no way seen as non-earners. Children are taken care of communally during the day, thus freeing the mothers to get more involved.

The community owns its own beer hall, thus obviating the need to leave the community premises and incurring mugging, etc. It also helps to generate a sense of well-being and communication. Food is prepared communally and the evening meal is eaten together. A health programme exists.

The interesting aspect is the co-op's links with and sense of responsibility to the wider community. As part of a career-guidance exercise, local schools children are invited to come and stay with the community and participate in the daily activities. In this way they can make their own choice as to whether to get involved in the usual job market or seek out membership in a community enterprise like Chitsva Chirri Murotsuka. The reality of course is that there are no jobs, and are not likely to be for a long time, so the communal aspect takes on the attraction of a very real vocation in life for a young person. This increases the orientation toward community as opposed to the rife cut-throat individualism of the job market.

Interestingly, if you take all the benefits that the co-op offers and calculate what each member is, in fact, earning, it would probably be in the region of 800 Zim Dollars. The 150 is purely for clothing and other personal needs, with everything else provided.

Also interesting was the very disciplined management-structure and monitoring of the various production units. The community also maintains excellent relations with their white commercial farming counterparts.

The community reminded me very much of the Hutterite communities in the USA. These grow out of the Mennonite tradition, and possess an amazing communal spirit that thrives economically. Private enterprise remains no match for the Hutterite community's ability to produce profitably. In fact their presence close to a small town in New York State has attracted complaints, some against their way of living, and some against the "unfair" competition and threat that they pose economically.

I believe that a communal enterprise like Chitsva Chirri Murotsuka represents a similar situation. Simukai, too, has done better than the commercial farmers this year and is continuing to improve. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the co-operative is the way in which students are encouraged to spend time there in the form of career guidance so that their options are not just seen in terms of the formal sector but also the co-operative way of life as an alternative. In the face of severe unemployment this possibility of course takes on more definite proportions.

## 8. SOME CREATIVE OPTIONS IN THE WAY FORWARD

Creative approaches and strategies for co-operatives are still very much in a process of development, and apply differently depending on situations. However, some examples are as follows:

- 1) The use of Consumer Co-op methods as a means of developing solidarity, and creating support for the Producer Co-op. This still requires considerable development and is long-term. It has particular implications in terms of greater community accountability, since the consumer co-op is possibly the only practical action capable of drawing people together from the different tendencies, activities, social networks, etc. It is also creative and enables leadership-training and skills development on quite a wide front.
- 2) Use of existing church structures to overcome the political/legal constraints that apply to the co-operative. This would include both rural and urban structures. Church structures are not the only ones to be used - also Trade Union and other structures.
- 3) Development of a legal framework to fit in with the nature of the co-op so as to operate as effectively as possible.
- 4) The development of the "co-operative society" concept - as in Isinamva at Mount Frere. This assists in overcoming some of the problems and constraints applicable to rural situations.
- 5) Creation of forums and regional networks, through meetings and workshops, for networking and educational purposes. This would strengthen the awareness and quality of the co-operative movement.
- 6) Use of video, to bring people's experiences in co-operatives to grassroots groups. Particularly where such experiences are far removed.
- 7) Use of different approaches to overcome the hassles experienced by co-operatives:
  - a) The structured approach - using skilled people, with full membership in the co-op staged according to educational development - coupled with an educational programme.
  - b) Financing of projects to include an ongoing link to a service organization, which fulfills the role of community guardian.
  - c) The independent approach - here groups come together out of a need, and make their own inputs and decisions without reference to anyone, remaining unconnected.



## A CHURCH APPROACH

As a vital approach toward improving the effectiveness of church action, I wish to include an important development as related by the Director of the Border Council of Churches (BCC) Resource Development Programme. It represents the Church's attempt to get its act together for greater effectiveness. I quote a section of Smuts Ngonyama's report to a recent BCC AGM. It reads as follows:

### **Historical Background of the BCC Resource Development Programme**

Like any reasonable venture, the Resource Centre has its pre-existence history. We therefore find it fitting to mention all the events that lead to its establishment, as they will help to better understand the historical mission of the Centre.

The following points were interestingly narrated by the two founder members, i.e. Rev. B. Jolobe, the present chairman of the I.C.A., and the director of the Quaker Peace Centre, Mr. R. Roberts, the consultant of the Resource Centre presently.

They went on to say:-

Because of the vast area covered by the B.C.C. certain problems developed and they demanded the attention of the Council.

Some of these problems were:-

- i) All the hardship emanating because of migratory labour.
- ii) General poverty which was the root cause of migratory labour.
- iii) Irreconcilable academic demands and unaffordable stationery also lead to high school drop-outs which resulted in high rate of unemployment and poverty.
- iv) The homelands creation caused lots of forced removals and consequently increased detention as a result of natural resistance to this.
- v) The centralization of the administrative duties within B.C.C. also aggravated the situation.

vi) The lack of development skills within BCC, DC, and education divisions led to projects becoming dependent, with limited chances of becoming self-sufficient.

Because of the honesty on the part of the Council, it was apparent that proper evaluation was needed to check the effectiveness of the Council. Out of this evaluation came recommendations, and inter alia came the need to mount a development programme in Eastern Cape/Border Region.

So a series of workshops were held, which comprised people from different development centres and various organizations outside BCC. ICA projects were also represented.

Out of these workshops, certain needs came up that prompted the BCC executive to set up a workshop on development with the whole of CC in order that the organization could clarify for itself what the understanding of the project was.

It was out of these workshops that the idea of the type of resource centre was born. Subsequent to this, eyes were cast outward for every assistance needed to establish such a centre, and EZE (a German Church agency) was the rescuer.

### **OBJECTIVES FOR THE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

1. Set up an effective support structure/network for a viable community development Resource Centre in response to community needs.
2. To identify the needs and possible solutions in communication with grassroots constituencies.
3. To form responsible committees working in direct co-operation with the centre.
4. To facilitate the formation of a Management Board, representative of grassroot committees/communities/projects.
5. To facilitate the establishment of necessary resources/resource networks.
6. To create the awareness of the Resource Centre in the area. This to be done through workshops.

7. Develop a long term development programme.
8. Undertake pilot projects/studies as guidelines for 7.
9. Develop the resource centre as an autonomous body accountable to BCC and its constituency, as represented by the Management Board.

### **ACTIVITIES**

The Resource programme came to being at a very critical time when the pangs of oppression and exploitation were really being felt and were demanding a response. Because of this socio-econo-politico stress, the Resource Centre finds itself challenged with much harder activities than its age makes feasible. Nevertheless, the activities to date include the ongoing support and facilitation of the following:

1. Masincedane sewing project with the UNEWU (Unemployed Workers Union) group - East London.
2. Khula Home Industries - Dimbaza.
3. Elethu brick-making project - Adelaide.
4. Masibambane project - Ginsberg location, King Williams Town.
5. Formation of Advice Centre - the first in the BCC area.

The programme continues to operate and is spending its first 18 months developing its support capabilities in order to act as a meaningful support programme. This includes a great deal of networking.



## 9. CONCLUDING NOTES

It is clear that the co-operative movement is really very much of a fledgling and is experiencing a tremendous struggle for survival. The examples and criticism mentioned by Fr. Segers confirm this. The struggle in Zimbabwe is an added reality of the nature of this struggle.

For the poor, however, it remains the only hope of survival. This I pointed out at the Stellenbosch Business School, where a small group of traders were being trained in management. They had been experiencing the severe problems of being uncompetitive due to their inability to buy at bulk prices, and yet having to compete against supermarket chains, even sometimes on their own home front. They simply could not survive as individuals, and consequently had to band together as groups (co-operatives), not too dissimilar to the way the Afrikaner community developed its economic power. The Business School in this case found this difficult to accept, as it would create a lack of competition in the townships, but had to concede that there were no other alternatives, because the very suppliers were competing in these areas. This resulted in a grossly unfair situation, one which Clive Weil of Checkers, in a recent retracted statement, accused large supermarket chains of, using the phrase "commercial terrorism" (November 4 Cape Times, pg. 5). This of course is hardly surprising, since the nature of the extremes of capitalism is the same as that of socialism. In their extreme form they both frustrate human creativity and initiative.

Like the Swiss and other examples, the co-operative will continue to challenge inhuman situations, and thus become the hope of the poor.

Already in South Africa, growing with a long history of success, we have what is called the "Mgalelo" or "Stokvel" system, where the natural communal tendency in the African culture has leant itself toward this phenomenal development in economic terms. These "mgalelos" are trust groups that save and support one another as co-operatives, with the exception that money pooled goes to one individual on a rotational basis. There are various other benefits built into the system, eg. borrowing of money against projected income, social get togethers, funeral expenses, etc. The system depends on one's good name in the community and hence is very rarely violated through breaking trust, as word gets around very quickly and survival depends on one's good name.

### Trade Unions

The fact that Trade Unions are beginning to look at viable economic alternatives is a healthy sign, albeit very early days yet. Organizations like the Unemployed Workers Union and the Unemployed Workers Movement represent a growth in exploring economic alternatives for the unemployed.

### The churches

There is a healthy move in church aid circles to move away from the hand-out system in practice, even though in policy the intention has often been as "self-help". Training has assumed a greater level of importance in projects that have been supported. The identification of a need to develop strong back up systems, as represented by the BCC Resource Development Centre, is an important step toward more effective support and evaluation of grassroot effort, ie. it brings expertise closer to the people in the remote and poverty-stricken areas.

### The Business Community

We have seen how valuable business expertise being introduced to a situation can be responsible for the transformation of an ailing enterprise; cf. the Khula Home Industries case study. In short, business has a role to play other than simply funding of projects. In most projects it is ultimately the knowledge of how to implement, rather than the availability of capital, that determines the success of the enterprise.

A healthy development of the concept of holistic business suggests a deeper realization of the social responsibility and gradual humanization of the face of the business community. This is an area of great potential, but to a large extent is being carried out, distressingly, like a P.R. exercise and consequently lacks the effectiveness and efficiency the formal sector is noted for. Somehow the normal business disciplines are not so stringently being applied, ie. building into an enterprise all the necessary support systems to ensure success. This bears some thought.

In general with a healthy system of communication and "glasnost", the opportunities for development are vast, and could prove to be vital contributing factors for a real and meaningful future, as we in South Africa prepare for a post apartheid era when demands will be high. How we prepare and co-operate now will determine and increase or decrease a diffusing of frustration and conflict.

# APPENDICES

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Producer Co-operatives" - Murray McCartney

"WORKTEAM": issues 1,2,3,4

- CORDE, Gaborone Botswana.

"Unemployment and Plenty", Swarthmore Lectures 1933

- Shipley N. Braynston

"Sink or Swim" - P.H.N.Thornton Econ. Inst. of Africa, Bulawayo

"Quaker Testimonies and Economic Alternatives" - S.T. Bruyn

- Pendle-Hill pamphlets 231

"Co-operatives" - R.Roberts (paper) 1988 Quaker Peace Centre

"Co-operatives as an Instrument for Socio-economic

Development of Marginal Base Groups" (paper)

- Fr.Joseph Segers, CEPAS, Kinshasa, Zaire

"Church within a National Development Strategy"

- Fr Supa Severini, 1980, Tanzania

"Lentswe la Oodi Weavers - A Gift That Lives"

- Sarah and John Foster, Church World Service, Botswana

"Resource Development Programme"

- AGM Report of the BCC - Director Smuts Ngonyama 1988"

"BCC Border Council of Churches, Workshop Report" - August 1988

"Concept of Co-operation" - Noni Mosala, June 1986

(A SHADE document)

"The Family and Rural Development Projects in Africa"

- Catherine Buyoya, DELTA programme, Kenya

"Integrated Rural Development" - Teresia Ivita, Kenya, 1980"

"The Education For Development Programme in Kenya" - Mr Joseph Ikalur, 1980

"Isinamva Projects Report, 1988" - Nokuzola Magida, Isinamva Director, Mount Frere

"Multi-purpose Co-operatives in Practise : The Case of

Chekereni Village" - J. Mwabeki, University of Dar es Salaam, 1985



## **WORKSHOPS/CONFERENCES**

CEBEMO Third World Development Conference - September 1980

UNEWU (Unemployed Workers Union), East London, Workshop - May 1988

BCC Workshop - August 1988

BCC AGM - October 1988

PRODCOM Workshop - July 1988

Elethu Workshop - October 1988

Maryland WORKTEAM workshop - June 1988

Labour and Economic Research Centre Workshop - September 1988

Transformation Centre Workshop - Lesotho July 1988

Training workshop for the alternative sector - workshop

organised by the Stellenbosch Business School

Consumer Co-operative workshop - LAMLA Mowbray Oct. 1988

Note: The writer acted as facilitator at some of the above workshops, from which many learnings were drawn.

## **VISITS\DISCUSSIONS**

**This includes in-depth visits to the following co-operatives:**

Mandragon Co-operative - Mandragon, Spain

SAWCO workers co-op - Howick, Natal

Isinamva - Mount Frere

Khula Home Industries - Dimbaza

Siseko Trade School - Nyanga

Sheridan farm - Fouriesburg, OFS

Khayelitsha Consumer and Gardening Co-op

Elethu Co-op - Rondebosch

OCCZIM - Zimbabwe (including visits of co-ops)

Oodi Weavers - Botswana

Masibambane - Peddie

ZIMFEP - Harare, Zimbabwe

Masifundise Consumer Co-operative - Langa

Masibambisane Co-op - East London

St.Lukes project - Mdanstane, East London

## INTERVIEWS/DISCUSSIONS

Dr. Peter Maurer, Swiss Consul.

Peter Brislin, Sheridan Farm Co-op.

Susan Conjwa, Siseko.

Andre Lincoln, Siseko.

Father Des Curran, Western Province Council of Churches, Catholic Church, Khayelitsha

Danile Landingwe, community worker.

Rob Berold, Grahamstown Co-ops.

Ray Magida, Masibambane, Peddie.

Mr. R. Mawirii, Bulawayo Supermarket Co-op.

Paul Temba Nyati, Director ZimProject, Harare.

Andrew Nyati, Simukai Co-op

Members of Chitsva Chirri Murotsuka Co-op, Harare.

Members of Isinamva Co-op Villages.

Mrs Mabuntana, fieldworker, Rietvlei Hospital.

Members of the SAWCO Co-op, Howick, Natal.

Father Augustine, Red Acres, Howick, Natal.

Father Allan Moss, St. Josephs, Cedara.

Georgina Jaffe, LERC, Johannesburg.

Smuts Ngonyama, Director BCC Resource Centre.

Rev. R. Jolobe, Chairman BCC ICA.

Members of Masifundise Co-ops.

Hazel Gogela, Masibambane.



Nokuzola Magida, Isinamva, Mount Frere.

Father Paul Fahy, Catholic Church, King Williams Town.

Father J. Fitzsimmons, Catholic Church, Dimbaza and Keiskammerhoek.

Prof. Aart de Lange, Institute for Futures Research, Stellenbosch.

Jenny Herman, Stellenbosch Business School.

Sheila Coltham, Lamla.

Celeste Santos, Lamla.

Dyke Vermilye.

Graham Holt, Warner-Lambert Company.

Roy Langley, Warner-Lambert Company.

Gavin Anderson, CORDE, Botswana.

I wish to express thanks to the many participants of workshops I have facilitated or attended, whose useful contributions have helped to shape this document.

## FOOTNOTES

Page 5 - 1. - Swarthmore Lectures, 1933, "Unemployment and Plenty, pg 16 cf. "Das Kapital", 3rd edition, pp 107, 316.

- 2. - Basil Davidson, BBC Series on Africa, "The Bible and the Gun"

Page 6 - 3. - Swarthmore Lectures, 1933, "Unemployment and Plenty"

- 4. - Ibid, pg. 23

- 5. - Ibid, pg. 24

Page 7 - 6. - Ibid. pg. 24

- 7. - Ibid, pg. 25

- 8. - Ibid. pg. 25

- 9. - Ibid. pg. 25

Page 8 - 10. - Ibid. pg. 26.

- 11. - Pendle Hill pamphlet, "Quaker Testimonies and Economic Alternatives", pg 10 and 11 (summarized by Dorothy Farrant)

Page 9 - 12. - Ibid. pg. 12

- 13. - Interview with Dr. Peter Maurer

- 14. - Ibid.

Page 10 - 15. - Fr. Supa Severini, "Role of the Church in National Development", pg. 1.

- 16. - Julius Nyerere, "Ujamaa - Essays on Socialism", pg 77.

- 17. - Fr. Supa Severini, Ibid. pg 1.

Page 11 - 18. - Ibid. pg. 1.

- 19. - Ibid. pg 2.

- 20. - Paper prepared by J. Mwabuki, University of Dar-es-Salaam, 1985: "Multi Purpose Co-operatives in Practice - the Case of Chekereni Village".

Page 14 - 21. - Gorbachev's movement toward a new Russian economic system.

Page 16 - 22. - Interview with Paul Temba Nyati, ZimProject.

Page 22 - 23. - Fr. Joseph Segers, CEPAS, "Co-operatives as an Instrument for Socio-economic Development of Marginal Basic Groups", pg. 1.

- 24. - Ibid, pg 1.

Page 24 - 25. - Ibid, pg 3.

- 26. - Ibid, pg 3.

- 27. - Ibid, pg 3.

- 28. - Ibid, pg 3.

Page 25 - 29. - Ibid, pg 3.

- 30. - Ibid, pg 3.

Page 26 - 31. - Ibid, pg 3.

Page 47 - 32. - "Lentswe la Oodi Weavers - Gift That Lives", Sarah and John Foster, Church World Service, Botswana.