

**Cooperative's weakness for Attracting
Consumers in Sudan**

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Abstract

In Sudan there are some traditional forms of cooperation exist in different parts of the country across social and economic activities. These forms of traditional voluntary works provide a real base for the modern forms of cooperatives in the country. One may argue with Green (2002), these cooperatives have been developed in a local context to solve problems that beset ordinary people, based on the traditional mutual work in the specific local environment.

The first institutional or formal attempts to establish cooperatives were initiated by the British colonial authorities in the 1920s, but they failed. While the real start were appeared in the 1930s, under the law of companies and called the cooperative companies and they represent some sort of quasi-cooperatives.

However, after the WWII the British Administration, within the plan of the British Colonial Office that targeted to promoting cooperatives in the colonies, enacted the first cooperative legislation in the country under the title of the Cooperative Ordinance of 1948. It was based on the seminal cooperation principles of the Rochdale pioneers, and then many cooperative regulations were adopted to reflect the political and economic attitudes of the respective political regimes.

While some of the consequent governments have been encouraged cooperatives, overestimated their social and economic role, another one underestimated their role and deprived them even from free competition. These policies have their implications on cooperatives and make them less attractive to many consumers, even those who are really in need for cooperatives as they living under severe poverty conditions in the country.

This paper aims at examining factors constraints cooperatives attractiveness in Sudan and suggests ideas to activate and to enhance attractiveness of cooperatives in the country in their own rights.

Absence of genuine programmes that target to utilize the whole experience in the country, on academic and professional level, handicapped the progress of the cooperative movement in the country and make them weak to attract people to face the issues and policies of the privatization and liberalization that increase number of the hunger mouths in the country and to evolve 90 per cent of the population.

Introduction

Cooperation is a phenomenon found through out the human history and among different societies. It takes the form of mutual help, seeks success by common efforts, incurs risks and share losses and benefits (Holyake, 1906).

In this context, the supportive economic and political external environment has its impacts on cooperatives, over years. But during the last three decades, since the 1980s, many economic changes were brought including structural adjustment programmes (SJP), economic liberalization; technological changes that together form the phenomenon of the globalization.

Under this new environment, cooperatives started their challenges to cope with dramatic changes that form their relationship with the state across the world, in the developed and developing countries.

Cooperatives in Sudan are no exception to face these changes, particularly under the economic and political monopoly of one group since 1989. The country adopted the structural adjustment programme (SJP) at the end of 1970s, but the military regime of that time used cooperatives as an effective instrument to mitigate its economic problems. The cooperative retailing units were targeted by the government to distribute the provision goods.

But with the application of the privatization policy in the 1990s, under the current regime, the cooperatives are largely marginalized and their economic role is widely weakened under uncompetitive practices.

This raises questions about factors constraint healthy development of cooperatives and maintain their attractiveness in the country, such questions include:

- What are characteristics of the external environment to develop cooperatives in the country? and can cooperatives compete without supportive attitudes of the government?
- Do cooperative principles rooted in the Sudan to create cooperative leaders and make cooperatives attractive to the stakeholders, particularly the principles of cooperative democratic practice?
- Why do cooperatives stay work as small enterprises in Sudan and do this make them attractive?

This paper aims at examining factors constraints cooperatives attractiveness in Sudan and suggests ideas to activate and to enhance the cooperatives role in the country. The paper covers three parts. The first provides a background to the cooperatives in Sudan and their main characteristics. The second is devoted to discuss literature review of relation between state and the cooperatives. The third part examines the main questions of the paper and provides analysis of the current attitudes towards cooperatives in the country. At the end the paper provides some conclusions and suggestions about attractiveness of Cooperation in Sudan.

I. Characteristics of Cooperatives in Sudan:

The traditional form of cooperation exists in different parts of the world across social and economic activities. Sudan has its indigenous forms of cooperation that are found in both rural and urban areas and practiced in certain occasions. These forms, generally, depend on communal and mutual participation, as in *Nafeer* and *Fazaa* that are practiced in many parts of the country such as Northern, Western, and Eastern Sudan. While *Katta* or *Sunduk*, i.e., collecting of small savings on rotating base among the members of the *Sunduk*, prevails in the urban and rural areas. *Judia* or traditional conflict and peace management is largely practiced in the rural areas.

Nafir is the main social custom of mutual help in the rural areas during cultivation seasons, building a house or similar practices; it has different names among different ethnic groups in the country. While *Fazaa*, is largely practiced during catastrophes and emergencies to provide help and assistance. This traditional strong social background works favourably for voluntary and cooperative practices in the country. Though they, are affected by the adoption of the money market values, particularly under privatization and liberalization policies that extended to evolve the social and economic aspects of the life in the country.

The first attempts to start modern and structured cooperatives were initiated in 1921 during the colonial period by a British District Commissioner in the *Delta Tokhar* cotton estates, to the East of the country, but the experiment was failed. However, some economic factors played their role to support success of the first popular attempts to establish some form of cooperatives that known as quasi-cooperatives. In the mid of the 1920s, the commercial cotton farming started in the Gezira scheme , coincident with construction of irrigation projects and passing of the Companies Law. These first development projects in te country brought mechanized irrigation system, formation of the

foreign and local companies involved in cotton production and exportation (Information Service, 1957). And they encouraged farmers of the Northern part of the country to develop their irrigation system, through cooperative companies or quasi-cooperatives.

Emigrants from the area collected some savings to buy a pump to irrigate their relatives' farms in the village, the project (s) was registered as a cooperative company, as the first cooperatives appeared in the 1930s. According to Peeny (1951), the original impulse of the subscriber expatriates in Egypt was not to seek an outlet for capital, and obtain dividends on the shares taken up, but to enable their relatives at home to produce more wheat, dates and other consumable produces.

However, after the WWII the British Administration, within the plan of the British Colonial Office to promote cooperatives in the colonies, enacted the first cooperative legislation in Sudan titled the Cooperative Ordinance, in 1948. It was based on the seminal cooperation principles of the Rochdale pioneers.

Under the absence of a written cooperative policy, the 1948 legislation and the consequent laws may reflect the main characteristics the cooperative policy in the country. Thus, one may argue about the main characteristics of the cooperatives in the country based on the current Cooperative Law of 1999, which governs all types of cooperatives, as follows:

- Under the current political regime of June 1989 many laws were enacted to govern the cooperatives on both the Federal and State levels, as each of the 26 States in Sudan has its own cooperative regulations that based on the Federal Cooperative law which is referred here as the Cooperative Law or the Law.
- The Law defines the structure of the Cooperative sector in that country with the Federal Council for Cooperative Development (FCCD), the National Cooperative Union (NCU) the State Cooperative Union, and the primary Cooperatives at the residential area, village, or workplace.
- The FCCD is the political wing of the government. The main task of the FCCD is to supervising, monitoring and designing the state policies of cooperation.
- The NCU is the direct arm of the government to intervene in the cooperatives. Its main task is to coordinate the State decisions and policies of the cooperation across the federal and state levels.

- The Law attains some administrative and legal authorities to the Cooperative Registrar on both the Federal and State levels.
- The Law theoretically states the main cooperative principles of the voluntary membership and democratic management of the cooperatives; it limits such a membership to be 50 individuals at the minimum.
- It allows cooperatives to allocate 10 per cent of the profits to the social services in its location, and encourages members for cooperative education and training.
- The law makes some measures to be decisive factors for the admission to the primary cooperatives. These measures including residency of the applicant in the locality of the cooperative, his related work place or if he has specific benefits in the area of the cooperative.
- The Law does not grant cooperatives specific privileges, as the previous legislations, and it restricts such concessions to be given through a ministerial decree. This pushes cooperatives to compete in a market monopolized by the ruling party.

Ibrahim (2008) argues that ruling National Congress party, which size the power through a military coup in 1989, was able to control the economy through banks, provisions of loans, provisions of financial assistance to its members and enabled them to access for commercial licensing and custom duty exemptions. He contends, about its monopoly over employment opportunities and recruitment of its members in high rank position based on political loyalty, regardless their skills and qualifications. This provides un-healthy business environment for cooperatives and sustains destructives attitudes against them.

II. Literature Review:

Since early times people cooperate together for mutual benefit. The communal societies were distributed jobs and resources among their members. They lived together and pooling their means of production to run their economic life though hunting , fishing and preparing easy food, and then equally distributed he fruits. In the modern life and with complexity of the life, the spirit of cooperation did not disappear and many efforts were there. The first attempts were in the first half of the nineteenth century, at New Lanark that a model factory initiated by Owen based on cooperative principles (Karlyle, 2005).

Since that time the cooperation ideas have been inspired many people, researchers to refer to the significance and importance of the cooperatives and their role to the welfare of the human beings.

They indicate capacity of the cooperatives as an effective instrument for their socio-economic modes of living, particularly under the liberalization of the economy and the changing role of the state.

Parnell (2001) expresses characteristics of the cooperative that attract people to participate its objectives. He argues that modern cooperatives were invented to enable people to adjust their way of living and working requirements of the market economy, in order to survive as small actors in a world dominated by capital, markets and competition.

He refers to the endogenous factors behind the values of cooperation, which push people to work together. Self-help, equality, equity, democracy, social responsibility and caring for the others are the main influential among these factors.

Show (2006), contends that during the last two decades it was thought that the global size of the cooperative sector has been declined. But recently some policy makers thought that cooperatives globally are entering a period of renewal and growth. In contrary to the small scale nature of the cooperatives, she refers to the emergence of the larger cooperatives in European Union.

These cooperatives started to move towards capitalists practices either through creating commercial corporations or by merging with companies outside the social economy. She argues that the emergence of such a type of cooperatives reflects the needs of one or more group of the stakeholders. The writer concludes that cooperatives vary in their size from small one into huge organizations that may achieve new governance practices, as members can become disempowered in cooperatives which lead to the absence of democratic controls.

Relationship between cooperatives and the state is an old debatable issue in the cooperative economics; it dates back to the early years of the last century when it was launched for the first time in the ICA conference of Budapest 1904(Laidlaw, 1980).

Laidlaw (1980) argues that the state as represented by the government has to set a suitable cooperative legislation that permits the cooperation to organize and operate business enterprises according to the basic principles and methods of cooperation. And the state has to provide cooperatives protection and assistance as their membership can be to cover people in need.

He contends about the democratic relationship between the state and the cooperatives, as it appears more clearly in the political environment rooted in democratic traditions rather than under regime holding the power by force, where the extreme and most offensive intervention in the affairs of cooperatives comes when the political party in power is able to use cooperatives for its own benefit and advantage.

Fairbairn (2000) refers to the relationship between the cooperatives and the state. He argues that the state policy toward cooperatives can be destructive, neutral, supportive, participatory or controlling.

He considers the autonomy of cooperatives is a matter that must be respected if they are to function effectively. He contends that states have frequently decided to adopt a supportive policy toward cooperatives, which are accepted by the government as a tool to improve national economies, to assist primary procedures to market their products, to reduce unemployment, to reduce dependence on the state and to provide services to rural areas, among other services.

The author, provides some forms of the mutual cooperation between the state and the cooperatives including legislation, targeted development programmes, general incentives, competitive policy, state contracting, education and training development, and representing cooperatives within government decision making.

Develtere (2003) discusses the attitudes of some governments in the developing countries towards cooperatives, as these governments consider cooperation a central vertical of the development. Therefore, these governments tend to promote, directing and controlling the cooperative sector which becomes an integral part of the government's mission in these countries and unlike cooperation in the western countries. In the developing countries the cooperative sector has been associated with a planned intervention of the state in organizing and structuring of the socio-economic life.

Wanyama (2009) discusses experience of Kenya under liberalization policy. He refers to the role of the state recognized cooperatives as a major contributor to the national development. The attitude which has provided cooperatives capacity to exist in almost all sectors of the economy.

He explains that cooperatives were overwhelmed into the state politics to the extent that the failure of the state policies was expressed into the failure of cooperative movement. This result led to

calls for the liberalization to the cooperative movement with the argument that the state control was harming the role of the cooperatives in the development, which can be realized through market principles and competition. Therefore Kenya adopted the liberalization policy of the cooperative movement, and lunched a new legislation in 1997.

The author concludes that this policy did not weakened the cooperative movement in the country, in general, though there are many cooperatives get difficult to resist the fierce competitive market forces. But the majority of these cooperatives are survived, as the available data shows that cooperatives have continued to grow in numbers and membership, with non-agricultural cooperatives that recorded high growth than the agricultural one.

He explains that the liberalization policy influences the organizational structure of the cooperatives, as some national federations and unions have largely weakened by the liberalization and they get difficulties to provide their members with competitive services. While some other cooperatives on the primary and secondary levels have adapted with the new policy and do to get alternative arrangements to provide services to their members. Therefore, cooperatives tend to diversifying their activities and introducing innovative cooperative ventures in order to respond the challenges of the liberalization policy.

III. Attractiveness of Cooperatives in Sudan:

This section examines attractiveness of cooperation in Sudan in the context of the government behavior towards cooperatives, as the state is the main regulator of the economy, particularly in Sudan, where many times the governments have been controlled the whole economy and most, if not all, business activity. The section provides a brief historical background to the relationship between the cooperatives and the state, as this helps to trace how this environment ever changed and how it can help to launch the endogenous factors of the cooperation in the country.

The consequent governments in Sudan were having their own agenda and interest in the cooperative movement in the country. The British colonial and the native governments up to the end of the 1960s directed the cooperatives to be a means of wealth accumulation. The first cooperative law of 1948 induced the government to support cooperatives, particularly those in the agriculture.

Following that, the government launched a financing programme for these cooperatives ran by the Ministry of Finance, and then the programme became, in 1959, a part of the Agricultural Bank of Sudan that aims to finance public, private and cooperatives. However, these sorts of finance have assisted to accumulate wealth in two ways. First to sustain the position of the elite groups including tribal, merchants and high rank officials who were the leaders of the agricultural cooperatives. The second is to free farmers with small ownership from the hard finance that was provided by the village merchants, which is locally known as *shail* or the crop mortgage.

It is essentially a system of crop mortgage under which the borrower sells in advance a certain part of the future crop in exchange for a loan from a village trader, a landlord, a relative or a friend; sufficient knowledge about the borrower is a prerequisite, and hence there is no collateral. Informal loans may be in cash or in kind, but repayment is usually made in kind at lender-set prices that are significantly lower than harvest prices (FAO, 2005).

It is known that the development in the country was based on the agriculture and leads by the public sector, under the absence of the reliable capitalist enterprises that could help to push the development process, while cooperatives in agriculture were not able to expanding their economic role.

The registered cooperatives in agriculture were designed to provide a specific agricultural service such as irrigation, or marketing and credit, or mechanized harvesting, or milk production. The main feature of these cooperatives were the limited number of membership, as the law of 1948 set the minimum limit to be 7 persons, and by-laws of the cooperatives made land ownership as the measure of admission. This eliminates the landless farmers from the membership, which was against the voluntary and democratic cooperative principles. This gives landlord, merchants and tribal elites to be the dominant in these cooperatives and they get the way to access for the free interest finance through the cooperatives.

The tractorization or mechanized farming system was introduced in the rain-fed areas of Sudan in the 1940s. It was mainly targeted by the private sector, as the investment requires little number of workers with some tractors. The existed cooperatives in agriculture, from different parts of the country, were permitted to invest in this sort of farming and under separate identity than their original cooperatives.

In 1950 and 1951, the British colonial authority encouraged the cotton producers in the private farms to export their products through cooperatives. They formed cooperatives with limited

member of 12- 17 individuals. The government provided these cooperatives with finance to marketing, transport and ginning in the port.

In 1960, under the strike of the shipping porters who claim to remove the brokers and the middle men from their way to the Port Authority, the shipping workers cooperative was set up and the government signed it to run shipping processes of its imports and exports.

Another example of the relationship between the state and cooperatives in Sudan, when in 1955 a consumer wholesale cooperative was initiated by the government, which provided finance, with membership of some consumer primary cooperatives. The military government of 1958 has used it to mitigate the crisis of the provision goods in Khartoum the capital town , in consideration of additional finance.

In the 1970s, under Numeiri regime, the cooperative legislation of 1948 was changed for the first time. The cooperative membership was opened with a minimum limit of 50 persons, and cooperatives were allowed for some privileges including tax exemption. The cooperative movement became a part of the political system of the regime, with a wide organizational structure.

In this period, the consumer cooperatives, particularly in towns, were the main target of the regime. They were formed in both the residential and the workplace; this inflated the number of their memberships. With the applications of the structural adjustment programme, in 1977, the regime got-off the privileges of the cooperatives that were used as an instrument to distribute provision goods, mainly the sugar , this made some of the consumer cooperatives were a corridor to the black market of the provision commodities, which gave a bad image about cooperation and minimize its concepts, for many people, to this role.

The current regime seized the power by a military coup in 1989 supported by the National Islamic Front party (NIF), which later on changed its name into the National Congress; the current ruling party. Ali and Elbadawi (2002) explain the nature of the regime, they argue that in using the instruments of the state to achieve its objectives, including holding on to power, the regime spared no time and was not deterred by any bounds or established traditions. The objectives of the regime included purging the civil service, police and especially the military of non-Islamist elements; creating a new entrepreneurial class through massive redistribution to party loyalists; using fiscal and monetary policy, including the inflation tax, to mobilize domestic resources to implement the political agendas of the party; and creating a strong economy, army and state.

Ahmed (2008) refers to the strategy of the regime for recruitment in the army, police and civil service that based on loyalty rather than qualifications in order to strengthen its grip on the state apparatus. This policy became known as *tamkin* (literally empowerment).

In the 1990s, the regime adopted privatization policies under the monopoly of its members to every key aspect of the economic and social life, particularly most business activities with the support of the operating banks. This creates a social parasitic group, as in terms of Osadci (2008), who argues that social parasitism being dreadfully simple means not just making a living on account of other people – but making a living on account of the other people relying on mechanisms of power and coercion.

Under this environment cooperatives were legalized to work. Many of them were under the hands of the supporters of the ruling party, who tend to neglect the general meeting and took serious decisions concerning the existence of cooperatives themselves. Some cooperatives with valuable assets were privatized as they leased or sold to operate on the private basis.

In 1982, the government was licensed for a cooperative bank and finance 60 % of its capital, and the cooperatives paid the remained 40%. In 2001, the bank capital was increased and then privatized with share 58.3% for the private foreign investment , 33.2 % local private investors and 8.3% for the cooperatives.

The cooperatives in agriculture are facing great challenges to get ease finance, under high prices of energy and other inputs of production. The country adopted the Islamic finance for agricultural sector, which based on *Salam* system that not more than the previous *Shail* system. Elhiraika and Ahmed (1998), explains that Salam or Elsalam is a “purchase with deferred delivery”, and through *elsalam* farmers obtain cash advances on the promise of selling or delivering a certain amount of their future crop to banks at the time of harvest.

They refer that under Salam the borrower has to undertake to deliver to the lender a certain amount of the future crop at an agreed (contract or *elsalam*) price. This sort of finance besides huge taxes brought great burdens not only to the cooperatives, but for many farmers who neglect cultivation to the urban areas to join the informal sector.

The Bank of Sudan, the central bank, has launched microfinance scheme. Some cooperatives were set up with an initiation of the ruling party with unknown number of memberships, while their board of directors are completed in the hands of the party’s members.

Fishing cooperatives, in the Red Sea area, operate in the country since the 1950s, they face financing constraints. Therefore, they tend to borrow from the brokers and middlemen who pressing them to sell their products at lower prices than the prevailing market level, as they their main source of finance.

However, within this anti- cooperative environment there are still some brightening experiences. In the 1990, some artisans cooperatives were appeared in Khartoum state and in 1998 they formed the Artisans Cooperative Union with more than 30 cooperatives operate in different small enterprises including vehicle maintenance, construction and buildings, metal works, furniture and wood works, clothes making and food and beverages preparing.

These cooperatives have more than 22 thousand members who involved in one or another of these enterprises. These cooperatives depend on their own resources to provide their services to the members. Their main objective is to secure lands to set up workshops of the members, instead of working scattered and in illegal places.

Women have been appeared in the informal market in Sudan since 1950s. But their numbers increased since the 1990s, particularly among the internally displaced people in Khartoum. Under the privatization and liberalisation polices and the dismissing of many households from the civil and military services, and the widened wars in the country, many women found themselves to undertake the role of bread winners. Due to lack of employment opportunities and lack of skills for the majorly of these women, they found their way to selling tea, coffee and food in the markets of the city. But they are frequently targeted by the Public Order Police who arrest them for working without permission.

In 1990, some of these women, with help of the Sudanese Development Association (SDA) and Oxfam Organization, were enabled to establish three cooperatives that got permanent locations and equipped them for their members in the main markets of the city. They are now working on legal basis, and are doing to set up a mutual fund for emergencies.

The third example, is, EN Nuhud Cooperative Credit Project in Kordofan State (south-western Sudan) that was initiated in 1986, following the famine stroke the area in 1984. The project is financed in collaboration of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) , the ABS , the Finland International Agency for Development(FIAD), and the local farmers. The project aims to develop agriculture in the region, improve the income of small farmers, and meet

the needs of these isolated areas. The project started in 1986 and finalized in 1998 with creating 227 cooperatives working for 23,686 beneficiary families. The cooperatives operate to finance and marketing the groundnuts product of the women members.

However, the last three examples reflect interest of the people to operate on cooperative basis, while the role of cooperation is frequently discussed in the media. These examples show the endogenous factors of the cooperation, which attract people to pool their resources and efforts to solve problems that beset them (Green, 2002). The voluntary attitudes of these people are based on the practices of the traditional cooperation, which is headed by *Nafir* and *Khata*, and the practicing of the formal cooperation since the 1930s with its positive and negative lessons.

These practices, even under the prevailing of the market measures, are still representing a main fabric of the social and economic life in the country. They can be stimulated whenever people get assistance and support of the government that has to play a positive role to promote cooperatives as an instrument to fighting poverty that involve about 90 % of the population in the country (Fergany;1998, Ali and Elbadawi;2002, Ali,2008).

However, one has to admit that the stimulated factor is largely based on economic measures rather than ideological criteria that are still very weak and existed in very narrow circles even among the educated and civil service community including the political parties, as many of them have no adequate vision about the theoretical attitudes of the cooperation rather than empirical practices. This is may be due to lack of well organized education and training programmes of cooperation and cooperative practices, as the experience of Sudan in this respect dates back to the 1970s.

Conclusion:

The institutional or formal cooperation in Sudan is almost a century since the first attempts were launched. But still it seems not well organized and lack for solid popular or autonomous initiative to extend cooperative teachings and global or even local experiences, based on clear concepts and awareness of the cooperation. Though some scattered efforts on the academic and professional levels are there, but it is still the cooperative movement is not so developed, even if the criterion of the comparison was the other civilian movement in the country.

This is due to the frequent intervention of the consequent governments to use the cooperatives for their own economic and political agenda, and due to the absence or failure of the role of the

academic and educational circles to bring serious programme of research and development or to adopt the cooperation in their programmes.

The development programmes in the country, particularly of the 1960s and 1970s, failed to utilize the traditional practices of cooperation in both the urban and rural areas to create a healthy environment that can help cooperatives to grow as autonomous institutions to undertake their social and economic role.

While the economic policies of the 1990s work against the cooperatives that are actually the resort of the small, vulnerable and poor people. These policies have influenced the physical and human assets of the cooperatives and make them with poor capacities to compete in the market economy under the liberalization and privatization principles.

However , the traditional practices; and the positives and negatives of the empirical experiences of cooperation in Sudan, are providing good bases of the attractiveness of the cooperation in the country. These factors can work as stimuli of the cooperatives to attract people to participate to undertake their role for the welfare of their stakeholders among small, poor and vulnerable segments of the society.

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