

## Cooperative Farming Can Deal with Dwindling Cultivable Land

Tuesday, June 06, 2023



*Some members of Mwendi Kurima Cooperative Society at one of their potato farms at Mutamaiyu village, Kinangop Constituency.  
waikwa Maina | Nation Media Group*



By [Isaac K. Nyamongo](#)

Deputy Vice-Chancellor

The Co-operative University of Kenya

Kenya's population has increased tremendously since Independence, from 8.93 million in 1963 to over 53 million. Yet the average agricultural production has fallen due to subdivision. In some places in Gusiiland, the average 'farm' is 0.8 hectares, ranging from 0.5 to two hectares. Landholding gets smaller closer to urban centres with increased rural-urban migration putting inordinate pressure on agricultural land for housing development.

Partly due to reduced acreage, there has been a reduction in the per capita agricultural production. Lower yields lead to food insecurity, overuse of cultivable land and environmental degradation. Smaller land sizes also dissuade farmers from mechanised farming and, therefore, households must rely on sweat and hoe to produce for their consumption!

Cooperative farming, or land consolidation, refers to farming practices in which farm operations are conducted through pooling of labour and other resources. It allows small farms to amalgamate into more economically productive units. That increases land use efficiency, productivity and management. The process creates large farms where none exist.

For this to happen, regulations, including appropriate use of technology such as GPS to create e-beacons, are required. Due to large tracts of land and lack of mechanised farming, people used to consolidate their labour rather than land. This was through pooling together in groups to create a force akin to a worker cooperative in order to cultivate a bigger portion within a short time.

### **Allows for mechanisation**

Cooperative farming has five basic elements. First, no farmer is compelled to join the system. Secondly, it solves the problem of sub-division and fragmentation of land holdings while allowing farmers to pool their land into larger pieces while retaining ownership. Thirdly, it allows for mechanisation and/or more hands on the deck, material and financial resources to increase productivity at farm level.

Fourth, the pooled farms are managed as a single unit with management elected by all the members. Lastly, every member owns a share of the total production proportionate to their land, spreading out the risks, hence a form of insurance in times of failure. Data show the per acre yield increases.

Smallholder farmers working alone often have limited access to high-quality seeds and other inputs, lack access to critical financing to expand and often have limited training. Pooling contributes to efforts to overcome these barriers.

### **Better prices**

For smallholders, cooperative farming restores the advantages linked to economies of scale lost to sub-division. Management can purchase in bulk farm inputs, allowing better prices. Big machinery can be accessed, saving on the overall operations. And since produce is in relatively larger quantities, it allows for bulk transportation and marketing. Lastly, it enhances creditworthiness as groups can attract more funding to invest in scale-up.

With dwindling arable land in high-potential areas, communities must initiate approaches to improve productivity at farm level. There is an even bigger responsibility on the farming community and government to anticipate this future shock and take proactive steps to counter it.

Consolidation through cooperative farming is one such solution. But we must, first, overcome our decades-old cultural practices relating to land ownership. Secondly, build our trust in the new system, review our land policies and address problems encountered due to poor leadership or inadequate experience to run cooperative enterprises.

*Prof Nyamongo, an anthropologist and Fulbright Scholar, is a deputy vice-chancellor at The Cooperative University of Kenya. [inyamongo@cuk.ac.ke](mailto:inyamongo@cuk.ac.ke). @Prof\_IKNyamongo*

**Article available at:** [Cooperative farming can deal with dwindling cultivable land | Nation](#)