

Education, Training are Important, Make Cooperatives More Vibrant



Kenya Deaf Society members sign a celebratory clap at the closing ceremony of a financial literacy workshop by Stanbic Bank Kenya and Kenya Bankers Association on October 26.

Picture by Diana Ngila | Nation Media Group

According to Cooperative Principle #5, “Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives.

They inform the public, particularly young people and opinion leaders, about the nature and benefits of cooperation.”

Education and training improve accountability and participation.

Due to its centrality, education was on the original list of the seven Rochdale principles.

Then, cooperators lived in societies in which education was the preserve of the privileged class. So, to transform their lives, it was necessary to educate cooperative members.

Cooperatives allocated part of their trading surplus to educate members and their families. That has remained the norm ever since.

Member education and training are important. First, they help members to appreciate their rights and obligations, including to exercise their democratic duty in their cooperative’s governance.

Education helps to align member vision and aspirations to the cooperative's, building vibrant member participation.

It should go beyond informing members about their cooperative business's performance and encourage them to learn about identity and values and their place in the global cooperative family.

Secondly, they lay the foundation of good governance at the cooperative level and within the local, regional and national political processes.

Good governance, the basic ingredient of a responsive and democratic structure, is premised upon, inter alia, participation, equity and inclusiveness and on accountability, responsiveness, transparency and consensus building.

Education and training informs election of quality leaders, who serve on various committees and bodies.

Leaders acquire skills, knowledge and understanding to enable them make decisions beneficial to the interests of the cooperative and its members.

Training helps leaders to provide a constructive and enabling environment for good governance to thrive.

Unique nature

Thirdly, they offer opportunities for managers and employees to understand the unique nature of the cooperative business and the needs of members.

This is important for those joining the cooperative sector from a business culture where the shareholders' needs are different.

Unlike in the traditional shareholding business, every member has an equal vote irrespective of their share capital.

Fourth, cooperative principle #5 is an avenue for recruiting youth into cooperatives.

For example, in schools, this can be done by encouraging students to form school-based cooperatives through which they can learn about the cooperative principles and philosophy.

New generation

This way, a new generation is inspired to join the movement. Interactions with students and other youth could help in adapting the needs and demands of the young people and prepare them to take over as new cooperative leaders.

Furthermore, raising awareness among the youth opens opportunities for innovation. The cooperative movement has helped to develop the relevant education through the formal system.

In Malaysia, formation of cooperatives in schools encouraged youth involvement at an early age.

Fifth, education bequeaths the cooperative heritage to successive generations. Accounts and knowledge of how cooperators have previously faced up to disruptions and overcome them are great educational resources.

Cooperatives must, therefore, protect and safeguard their heritage and use it effectively in their learning programmes and to build and cement resilience during crises.

Lastly, cooperative education creates space for dissemination of research. That provides an empirical basis for making decisions and policies.

It stimulates debate to generate ideas and opportunities for further cooperative development and research.

Given its importance, members must demand that their leaders actualise Cooperative Principle #5. They must create demand, bottom-up. The performance, success or failure of a cooperative rests upon this principle.

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