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THE FORMATION OF SCHOOL COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES: A KEY FACTOR FOR EMPOWERING STAFF

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ABSTRACT

The paper with the title "The formation of school cooperative societies; A key factor for empowering staff and students, is a product of library research. It highlights the need for organizing school cooperatives as a means of helping members within the school system meet up with their needs. It also narrates the history of cooperatives in Nigeria and the contributory system practice in pre-colonial era. The paper further discusses the role of cooperatives in the school system and emphasize that school staff being part of an organization should form cooperatives to empower themselves in all sphere of life. More so, cooperatives as agent of economic empowerment was analyze bringing out the benefit members are expected to enjoy. In conclusion, The steps to be taken to set up cooperative society was identify and briefly explain. In addition, school personnel are however advice to set up cooperative societies for their own well-being and development of the society.

INTRODUCTION

Today, is an era when many people feel powerless to change their lives, cooperatives represent a strong, vibrant and viable economic alternative. Cooperatives are formed to meet people's mutual needs. According to International Cooperative Alliance "ICA" (1995) in its statement on the cooperate identity, defines cooperatives as 'an autonomous association of person united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically control enterprise. However, Oxford Advance Dictionary (2006) defined cooperatives as a group of persons acting, working together with another, or either for a common purpose. Cooperatives as an enterprise are aimed at empowering its members to meet the demand of life. For over 160years now, cooperatives have been an effective way for people to exert control over their economic livelihoods. As government around the world cut services and

withdraw from regulating markets, cooperatives are being considered useful mechanisms to manage risk of members. They provide a unique tool for achieving one or more economic goals in an increasingly cooperative global economy. Cooperative generally provide an economic boost to the community particularly the members (Brachall 1994)

In Nigeria, cooperative practice despite its old age is not too popular, despite all regulations made to improve effective cooperation in cooperatives. The first cooperative ordinance of 1935 allows the formation of cooperative societies was welcome mostly by mainly farmers According to Okonkwo (2001) after the report of Mr. Strickland in 1934 where he recommended for the introduction of cooperatives in Nigeria, the colonial government establish Cooperatives Division and appointed Mr.E.F Haig as first Register. It is on record that from 1935 till present, there exist about six known cooperatives laws in Nigeria with the latest being the 2004 cooperative Act of Nigeria which is a uniform of 1993 cooperative Decree. The problem is that many people do not know much about cooperatives, its mechanism and role in economic development, and how it is considered in the world as a third force, an alternative and countervailing power to both big business and big government (Ihimodu2008).

The school as an organization is a collection of people who, with consciously coordinated efforts, pursue and contribute to the attainment of common purpose. Organization can also mean collection of two or more people who work toward achieving common goals (Otu2006) According to Hick (1976) the reasons for the formation of organization is to meet the emotional, spiritual, intellectual and economic needs of individuals that need to be satisfied. It is worthy to note that cooperatives as an autonomous association of person united voluntarily to meet the economic social and cultural needs should have a place in the school system. The school as an institution should set up cooperatives for staff who are willing to participate and ready to bear the risk, such cooperatives should be guided by the cooperative's principles according to (ICA 1995 cooperative principles). The principal as the administrator should build good human relationship to get staff to join cooperatives. According to Mayo (1974) he believes that organization can only succeed if the leader is able to build good human relationship, this according to him is a precondition of organization success.

The school is not far from the society or community, it is the members of these communities that make up the school: more so, the benefits enjoy by members of cooperatives in the communities is still obtainable in school system. Therefore, school cooperatives will provide these benefits

i) Provide financial assistance,
ii) Fulfills various needs of members
iii) Increase saving habit
iv) Promote social life etc.

The Role of Cooperatives in the School System

Nigeria has been practicing cooperatives even before the advent of the early missionaries. According to Okonkwo (1999) there exist series of contributory services being performed by the indigenous people. In Igbo communities, the communal practices of helping one another in need is obtainable. Community members can help one another in farming practice, house building and social ceremonies among others. The early missionaries introduce saving scheme for church workers and teachers as a way of meeting their needs, members contribute money together and gave it in turns among themselves. Akinwume (2008) said that the purpose of these contributory societies is to raise a fixed amount of money which they give to their members in turns. Cooperatives or contributory societies are very popular to people, thereis no systematic way of practicing such societies; it is based on assume assumptions and believes of the people. In Igbo land it is called Isusu, the Yoruba called it "Isusu" while the Hausa people referred to it as Adash.

The front runners of cooperative movement in the world have stress the need for the formation of cooperatives by workers in an organization. Robert Owen (1771-1958) "the father of cooperative movement" advocated that workers should form cooperatives to help themselves, according to him, workers should drag themselves out of poverty by growing their food, making their own clothes and ultimately becoming self-governing. William King (1786-1865) urged the need for the establishment of cooperatives by worker. Kings advised people not to cut themselves off from the society but rather to form society within a society. Kings advocated for cooperatives store because he believes that people always visit shop every day to buy what they need. Also, in the contribution of Charles fourier (1772-1837) a French Philosopher, he declared that concern and cooperation were the secrets of social success. He believed that a society

that cooperated would see an immense improvement in the production level.

The importance of cooperatives in formal organization according Akahalu (2004) is that the economic and social benefits of cooperatives spray far beyond the continuous of the movement and its membership. Abrahamson (1976) stated that in addition to helping to improve the welfare of members it generally generates in the national interest by benefiting many segments of the general public. In his own contributions, Okeke (2001) said that cooperatives benefit the consumers by providing a steady, dependable source of good and fiber, developing new products, supplying the kind and quality of food derived and striving for low cost procurement and distribution system.

In the school, there is need for setting up of a formal cooperative society to meet the needs and aspirations of the staff. The school administrator should identify those with the talent and assign the task to them. A school head with good human relation can effectively identify with staff toward setting up of these cooperatives. Waston (1986) emphasize on the need of solving the problems of the employee in an organization. According to him, the employer should find a way of meeting to the needs of the workforce. Cooperatives are set up by members of the society to meet with their necessities of life. Okonkwo (1999) see cooperatives as an association of free independent persons for the betterment of their economic condition.

Therefore, teacher or school staff should come together to form cooperatives in order to improve their economic condition, Gibson (2005) in concluding on the role of cooperatives to the working class said that cooperatives helps in combating exploitation, reducing disparities, improving social conditions and gender sensitivity, and helping to create a more and just society with pronounced concern for environmental protection and sustainable process of development.

Cooperatives as Agent of Empowerment to Members

Rapport (1987) stated that empowerment conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power and legal rights (to individuals or groups). Commenting on Raport definition of empowerment, Regent (2013) points out that empowerment is based on the concept that the individual or group of individuals gain a voice in decisions that affect them and social structure that encourages or discourages that development.

The cooperative society has proven over the years to be a social structure that affords the groups with similar interest opportunity to empower themselves socio-economically and other wise through the provision of members education and training, improve income and bargaining power, credit facilities among other. The formation of school cooperatives will empower the members or the school staff who participates. It should be observed in the school system that the staff get themselves involved into contributory group where they contribute a specify amount of money and use them either to buy goods at a cheaper rate and share among themselves. They also engage in monthly contributions which are given to member in turns (Isusu) these practices are very popular among the working class as members depend on it to meet with their needs. According to Onuoha (1998) he stated that cooperative society has a fairly stable life and it continues to exist for a long period of time, its existence is not affected by the death insolvency, lunacy or resignation of any of its members. The formation of school cooperatives will economically empower the members (school staff) by giving them another means of livelihood apart of the salaries. Okojie et al (2004) stated that money yielding venture assist groups and organization to meet up with necessities of life if well manage and organized in a way that promote transparency (Cooperatives).

More so, cooperatives provide a platform for groups with similar interest to make investments and other form of decisions that affect their socio-economic wellbeing. School cooperatives if well-organized can provide the needs of the public at all times; a situation where most school seek the services of food vendors to open store inside the school and sell both food and other commodities should be discouraged, the school cooperatives should provide these needs to the public. The school cooperatives should look for profitable ventures and establish it inside the school e.g. Bakery industry, Block construction industry, plastics/Nylon industry to serve for the interest of staff and the public.

Agu (2012) emphasize the need of people working together or living together to have the tendency and ability to come together to think, plan and act as a unit through organization and affect change for the good of the public. The school as a formal organization need the services of the informal organisatives for its survival and growth. According to Ayanniyi (2002) stated that if the informal organization in school "cooperatives" are encouraged, it can result to better team-work and can assist

in achieving the better cooperation and motivation of workers, thus allowing the system to adapt and survive.

There are many benefits cooperatives can provide if well organized in the school, such benefits according toLawal (2008) are as follows:

- Encouragement of saving; The credit and thrift co-operative society encourages its members to save their money.
- Democratic in Nature; Member are encouraged and supported, the policy of one man one voice is a principle of cooperatives. Members learn about the practice of Democracy in reality.
- Results in low prices of goods; This is because, they buy goods directly from the producers and distributed to its members.
- Prevention of price fluctuation; This is as a result of the fact that their main motive is not to make profit but to promote the welfare of their members.
- Fighting inflation and Deflation: They do these through activities of price stabilization, regulation of the quantity of good needed.
- Saving in Advertisement Cost; This is because majority of goods purchase come from the manufacturers
- Education of their members; this is done in areas of production, buying and selling of goods and services.

Starting a School Cooperatives Society

In starting a school cooperative society, cooperative act (2004), section 22, sub section (1a) states that the person should have attained the age of sixteen years except in the case of a school co-operative society, the age limit shall not apply. Based of statement above, staff and students with the consent of their parents are qualified for membership. Cote (2002) identifies nine steps that should be followed in formation of school cooperatives, such are

1. **Hold an organizing meeting;** establish steering committee: A core group of interested individual should hold an informational meeting of potential cooperatives members. The primary purpose of the meeting is to explain the identified need and how a cooperative would address it. A steering committee should be set up to look into their proposal and report back.
2. **Survey on Potential Members:** Through the steering committee, potential cooperative members are surveyed. Topics includes: needs for services, volumes to be purchased or marketed, willingness to join,

finance and familiarity with other cooperatives.

3. **Feasibility study of the Business;**Thcommittee will examine critical opportunities and obstacles that might make a break to the proposed cooperative business.
4. **Develop a Business Plan:** If the feasibility study result is favorable, the steering committee carries out or hires a consultant firm to develop detailed business plan. The business plan serves two primary purposes: to provide a blueprint for the development and initial operation of the cooperative and to provide supporting documentation for potential members, financial institution and other investors.
5. **Develop Legal Document:** The steering committee should draft legal documents for approval by prospective members. Those documents are, Article of in-cooperation; bye laws and legal documents.
6. **Secure financing for the cooperative:** The capital needed for the take up of the business should be considered by the steering committee and how such money can be obtained.
7. **Recruit Members for the Cooperative:** The detail of members should be collected and new members should be sought, getting the minimum and maximum number of members will help start up a cooperative society.
8. **Hold cooperatives First Membership Meeting:** After getting the required finance for a startup and after members have signed up for the cooperative. A meeting is to be held to select interim leaders and adopting the bye laws.
9. **Start cooperatives:** The cooperatives should start in full; the cooperative society should be registered to enjoy cooperate status.

In the school system, starting of a cooperative will be seen as easy, because of the level of literacy among the people. According to cooperative Act 2004, section 3(1) A primary society may be registered if it consists at least ten persons and industrial society if it consists of minimum of six persons.

Cooperative society of whatever type or standard should at least be registered through the office of Director of cooperatives in the state. The Director has the right to register the society or declined based on his opinion on which after 90 days the cooperative can appeal to Minister or commissioner at the state level for consideration (Okechukwu 2016). It should be noted, there is many

cooperatives that are not registered, they operate according to the cooperative principles but lack legal status. According Amah (2004) registration of cooperatives is important because it grant them corporate status- according to the law.

Conclusion

There is need for school staff to organize themselves into cooperatives in order to be economically empowered to meet with the demand of life. These days when salaries are not paid often, the need for cooperatives can never be overemphasized. Cooperatives should be forming according the laid down rules (Cooperatives Act 2004). It should imbibe the ICA principles for productivity and efficiency (ICA 1995) Cooperatives as a business organization should be partly private, party public, but essentially different from both private enterprise and public enterprise. They are a "middle way" an economic sector in their own right.

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