

Workers Co-operatives — Some Prospects

Approaches to Training

II BOTSWANA, INDONESIA — AND BRITAIN?

by

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In days past our editor often prefaced his remarks with a text. It is a good discipline and serves my purpose well. The source for my text is Archie Mackintosh, who reported after a visit to Botswana in 1973:—

“I feel it is so important and valuable a revision of thinking on Co-operative development with its stress on an intensive educational programme, specialisation, detailed supervision and constant consultation that every aspect of its possibilities for expansion elsewhere should be considered.”

My brief is to deal with education and training — the possible nature of provisions and their organisation, content and method — drawing particularly on my experience in Botswana and Indonesia and relating it to the British situation. But my text reveals that I have long since lost patience with training in isolation — it has to be an integral part of the management or development process. Teaching courses and subjects unrelated to actual management practices has little value. Long courses followed by long silences depreciate in time, and long or short courses without follow-up fail to cope with both the needs of students and of development.

No Registration without Training

If I might improve, make more clear, the first element in our text I would stress that an “intensive educational programme” is a continuous programme — for the student, and for the administrators of the programme. It is a surprisingly simple approach and easy to organise. Let us start with the pre-registration days of our Co-operative. What do our members need to know — where and when shall they meet — who will guide the discussions (no lectures please!)? The participants will decide where and when and with help they may find those who can guide the discussions — local Co-operative staff — CDA officials — University and WEA lecturers.

What do they need to know? Let them draw upon this list.

- What is a Co-operative Society?
- Is a Co-operative the best solution to our problems?
- What would be the trading activities?
- Who can be members — and their duties and responsibilities?

- What are the duties and responsibilities of directors and officials?
- The role of different types of meetings.
- How will the society be financed?
- Can we prepare a statement of income and expenses — prepare a feasibility study?
- Can the society find the staff it needs? What are those needs? Are there career opportunities and prospects of good employment?
- What arrangements should be made for accounting?
- Who is responsible for audit?
- How will the surplus be distributed?
- What is the role of the local CDA — and relationships with other Co-operatives?
- Can we learn from the experience and problems of other Co-operatives?
- What are the factors making for successful Co-operatives?
- What are byelaws — do we understand them and accept them?

This training covers 18 to 24 hours. No Co-operative should be registered until there is evidence that the members have submitted to such training experience. Co-operatives don't fail — some of them never get properly started.

Supervision and Counselling

In the first phase we asked "What do they need to know?" and the answer was found in the immediate needs of the students. We applied the same simple question to every training programme and found that it had to go hand in hand with the design of sound working rules and good simple management practices. For example a bookkeeping system was designed to meet the needs of the Co-operatives and was applied in all of them. (I can think of no better system for small workers Co-operatives — the ICA can provide guide lines).

Detailed and regular supervision and management counselling provided a feed-back of training needs. A well run Co-operative might be visited once a quarter; a weak society once or twice a month. In a disciplined fashion the visiting officer would spend up to two days studying the business and trading affairs of the society and checking adherence to Co-operative principles and practice. Before he left the society he discussed his findings with management and later sent them his official report.

The findings in the reports were analysed and the weaknesses revealed provided the basis for the next short course (3 to 5 days) for staff and committees. Teaching material prepared for these courses strengthened

and improved management systems. In early days they helped to design the systems. The people who had done the management counselling were the teachers in the short courses — and the authors of the teaching materials. Eventually after three years experience this material was brought together in manuals/handbooks. Never start with a Handbook — start with “handouts”. And the staff who wrote the training material were the same people who on their next management counselling visit to the Co-operatives found the committees and their staff had still learned very little and made very small improvements! This is why the programme was open ended — it went on for ever!

Today there is much valuable help for Co-operative educators available from the MATCOM services of the International Labour Office and CEMAS of the International Co-operative Alliance. They do not remove the need to design practices and training for local circumstances but they offer valuable help.

The Content of the Courses

Using this approach, what kind of content of courses emerged? The following is typical:

The Manager and the Society

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| — Model byelaws | — Committee meetings: agenda, conduct and minutes |
| — The Annual General Meeting | — Reports to Committee — reporting forms |
| — Committee's Annual Report | — Development proposals and feasibility studies |

The Trade

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| — Stock control | — Leakage and its control |
| — Storage of goods | — Pricing |
| — Purchasing | — Receipt of goods and produce |
| — Guidelines to security | — Working/operational practices |

Sales Development

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| — Sales Planning | — Conduct of sales campaigns |
| — Reporting | |

The Staff

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|--------------------------|---------------|
| — Contract of Employment | — Staff rules |
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- Job descriptions and allocation of duties
- Apprenticeship
- Wages and Conditions

Accounting and Administrative Procedures

- Bookkeeping system from receipts and payments to final accounts
- Disposal of net surplus

Records and Cash

- Budgeting
- Stock taking
- Monthly Trial Balance
- Cash control
- Key figures for management
- Preparation for Audit
- Office Management

Buildings and Equipment

- Construction and Care
- Fixtures and equipment
- Insurance
- Layout and arrangement
- Weights and measures

Time was also spent relating Co-operative trading to other forms of trade — government and private — and to the work of secondary Co-operatives. In addition there were the special technical training needs of special type Co-operatives e.g. Co-operative banking, credit and cattle marketing. Co-operative officers specialised and in time became well skilled in these special techniques, but I had learned from earlier experience in Sri Lanka that specialists are best employed for particular industries e.g. fisheries techniques. There was never any problem in working happily with them in development and training programmes — the same was true of cattle marketing in Botswana and post-harvest technology (rice) in Java.

Short or Long Courses?

One night per week, or a series of related weekend courses most probably provide a better learning situation than the five or six day residential course. And less expensive. My long experience with the education committees of local societies in Britain, led me never to recommend the system elsewhere. It is easier to achieve a better professional delivery if societies in the same area select a district committee and appoint an education officer or secretary. With workers Co-operatives it may be a part time appointment, but the CDA must supervise and see that a thorough professional job is done.

Applications in the United Kingdom

It may be that workers Co-operatives will find that their teachers and management counsellors are the same persons in the same way as we did in Botswana and Indonesia. Those responsible for guiding workers Co-operatives may find help in established Co-operatives and appropriate trade unions -- in the British Institute of Management -- in the technical colleges and the universities. Perhaps an enterprising CDA will follow the example of Fiji where the newly emerging land lease Co-operatives found they lacked management skills and proceeded to register a Co-operative to offer management consultancy services -- at a fee -- to Co-operative societies. It would be worth testing how much help is available for nominal fees and expenses. Such consultants could share with CDA staff in the management counselling visits to Co-operatives. And if education is a pre-requisite of registration, a post-requisite should be the willingness to submit to regular supervision and management counselling. Hopefully the same consultants could be persuaded to share in training programmes.

These were the approaches and techniques which served their purpose well in Botswana and Indonesia and which led Archie MacIntosh to say "that every aspect of its possibilities for expansion elsewhere should be considered". And "elsewhere", I believe, includes the United Kingdom.

Note of the Author

BASIL LOVERIDGE in the last year or two has been engaged in Co-operative consultancy assignments abroad and with institutions in the U.K.; his previous career, following two years at the British Co-operative College, has included education work in the British consumer Movement and a wide range of appointments for Co-operative service in various countries overseas and with various international agencies.