



CO-OPERATIVES LEARNING SERIES



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Global Communities
Partners for Good



What are guidelines for development programs to follow when targeting youth-centered co-operatives?

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING YOUTH-CENTERED CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Youth development is an important objective for many development programs. A rapidly growing youth bulge translates into an increasingly larger proportion of young adults and a rapid rate of growth in the working-age population. There is still, however, a relatively unexplored area of trying to understand (i) the impact of co-operatives on youth and (ii) how to establish and support co-operatives that are directly aimed at furthering youth development outcomes.

GUIDELINES IN YOUTH-FOCUSED CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

Initial learning around youth-focused co-operative development includes the following:

Consider level of access to assets, financing and social capital:

Young people often do not have adequate foundations in place to support their success in or entry into co-operative membership or production and market activities. This includes access to basic assets, financing and social capital, or ways to protect any income or assets they may acquire. This could be owing to the support and services not being available in the community in general, or young people not having access to these services. Young people,

typically, have extremely low access to many tangible assets in order to produce or become a member of a co-operative. The most appealing opportunities, therefore, require few start-up assets, including land. In general, there is low access to financing and capital for young people because of the perceived high risk of dealing with youth. Opportunities within co-operatives or through market linkages to co-operatives that need extremely low or no start-up financing are, therefore, most appropriate.

Consider safety implications:

Target opportunities that are safe for youth to undertake. In recognition of child protection considerations, production and enterprise activities

that are safer for young people to be involved in are more appropriate. Recognize the importance of the safety of physical production and enterprise assets. Young people are particularly vulnerable to robbery. Co-operative's production strategies that require high-value stock or storage of stock could be at particularly high risk. Ensure that co-operatives are providing the right incentives and opportunities to young people by acquiring a good understanding of young people's economic vulnerability profiles and risk tolerance.

Consider complementary obligations (family, education and social): Young people often have competing responsibilities,

particularly related to education, family and income-earning commitments. In many circumstances, young people play important support functions in their households or are often head of households themselves. Co-operative membership responsibilities should, therefore, still allow enough time for youth to fulfill their other obligations beyond continuous production and work. Market opportunities should not be too demanding and time intensive. Young people do not have adequate time for training and should be encouraged to continue schooling rather than incentivized to stay away from school. Economic activities encouraged through co-operatives that require lower levels of training while providing immediate income generating opportunities are more appropriate.

Consider health considerations: Target opportunities that complement health considerations and physical ability. Where there are high incidences of various illnesses and infections amongst young people, it is helpful to focus on market opportunities for co-operatives that take this into consideration. This could translate into opportunities that are not as strenuous physically.

Consider gender implications: Young people are often regarded as one uniform group, without the recognition that there are significant differences between young people, particularly gender-related differences, that are key to the design and implementation of youth-focused co-operative development. Integrate different strategies for boys and girls. For example: girls are often restricted in their ability to move around freely within communities, have additional

health and safety risks, and have expectations of particular social responsibilities; boys often have their own expected social responsibilities, and male-oriented child protection and safety considerations; physical abilities differ between boys and girls; and different life skills support is often needed.

Consider overall well-being of young people: Youth-focused co-operative development approaches often focus on economic considerations without consideration of overall well-being. Integrate broader factors relating to well-being and protection into program design without focusing only on economic and financial impacts. Issues, such as the young people's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual development, should be taken into consideration, including areas of well-being around food and nutrition, shelter and care, protection, health, psychosocial, and education and skills.

Consider stage of life: Young people of all ages are often treated as a group with common needs and programming strategies. Consider stage of life and situation as more critical than actual age in determining production ability, co-operative membership potential and roles, issues, and opportunities for young people. The sociological, psychological, health issues and income needs that a 15-year old and a 24-year old may face are likely to be completely different. Program strategies should be designed around these different circumstances and needs.

Consider parental involvement: Programs or co-operatives themselves seldom connect with caregivers who are often the decision-makers,

restricting or allowing young people's participation. If caregivers are misinformed about the objectives of a co-operative, they may permit youth's involvement in production or training but not in actual income-generation or market-based activities. Target messaging and educating young people AND their caregivers about the credibility, trustworthiness and usefulness of their involvement in co-operatives, realistic expectations of outcomes, and the behavior change expected through participation.



The Global Communities' EMIRGE program began working in Kenya in January 2016. EMIRGE Kenya is an operational research program that focuses on how to leverage effectively the power of collective resource to improve the livelihoods of urban youth.

For more information, visit: <http://www.chfkenya.org/emirge.html>