

DISTANCE EDUCATION FOR RURAL COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS: CORRESPONDENCE COURSES FOR RURAL COOPERATIVES IN TANZANIA

By: L.N. DONGE
COOPERATIVE COLLEGE, MOSHI - TANZANIA

1. INTRODUCTION

Distance education as a method of teaching, can be very effective to people who are at a distance and those who can not afford to leave their work and join schools. It is very useful for adults who still look after their children while studying. It is a solution to those people who can not trade off their life style with training because one can learn while working and earning money. Distance education is very useful for rural community organizations whose people are farmers and survive only by cultivating/ farming or looking after their farms as a means of their livelihood.

Moreover, distance education helps to promote farming skills for farmers who study while farming. It is indeed a right choice for farmers because it is flexible and allows one to study and at the same time work thus practice.

In this paper we are going to discuss how distance education has been able to improve farmers and peasants education levels and literacy in Tanzania. Moreover, we are going to see how correspondence courses have contributed to improved member education in cooperatives, with better cooperative knowledge, management and organization skills for farmers and keeping of records of their activities and enhancing their contributions in decision making in cooperative activities.

2. BACKGROUND TO DISTANCE EDUCATION

“Distance Education is the practice of providing education and training through selective use of instructional medias both traditional and innovative which can promote self teaching and learning process to achieve specific educational objectives with greater geographical coverage than traditional face to face system of education”. (ME.URT, 1990:1). Through distance education, a learner can learn while he is at home, working and away from the teacher.

Selective media as a means of instruction enables the learner to study alone by reading printed materials, listening to radio, audio cassettes, taking instructions from recorded video cassettes and television. The current technological advancement of the Internet and E-mail transmissions allows learners to communicate with the instructor through electronic media system more easily. The electronic media demonstrate to viewers and learners what the instructor is expected of the learner, a more or less classroom situation at a distance.

In Tanzania, the Cooperative College is the sole institution which deals with education for cooperatives. In particular using both conventional and distance education method to training its target group.

Most of the cooperatives in Tanzania are rural based. This fact is historical, it has not changed to date. Recent statistics show that there were 8,970 cooperatives in 1990 of which 60% were rural based, particularly agricultural marketing cooperatives. The number of cooperatives has decreased since 1990 due to government policy to amalgamate the weak to form stronger units and now there are about 2,525 rural cooperatives. The trend since 1961 can be viewed as follows:

Year	1961	1971	1981	1990	1991	1996
Total Number of Cooperatives	857	1,737	1,976	8,978	5,000	4,337
Total Number of Rural Cooperatives	657	1,369	2,058	6,051	2,201	2,525

Source: United Republic of Tanzania - Cooperative Department 1996.

The above figures are the numbers of cooperatives from which the College drew its students of three categories. The members of the cooperatives who were a minimum of ten per society till 1991 when the provision of members was modified to establish special societies with four (4) members. The second categories are the committee members who formed management committees and third is the staff, the skilled people required to manage the societies. By 1994 the cooperative members were 526,475 having grown from 136,000 in the 1960s. (URT Cooperative Department 1996).

In Tanzania the Cooperative College has not been the only Distance Education institute. There are others including the Institute of Adult Education, the National Correspondence Institute and the Open University of Tanzania. The Institute of Adult Education which later extended its branch of Distance Education to be the National Correspondence Institute focused on the rural population and those who held little formal education thus “to serve literate but isolated persons throughout the country who wish to enlarge their knowledge and understanding of the subjects of importance in national development” (United Republic of Tanzania 1961, Vol. 1:158). It aimed at equipping Tanzanians to fill the jobs, help Tanzanians to understand national policy, and help bring about economic and social development. Originally the Institute of Adult Education focused teachers and students at large. Now teachers learn by distance in order to acquire higher certificates for promotion purposes. Also the Open University of Tanzania which was established in 1991 aims at expanding chances for graduate courses for the general public, employees, teachers and privately employed people.

However, now there are many privately sponsored radio and television education programmes, while the former group runs organized form of training and issue certificates the latter serves to educate the public on general knowledge and sponsored messages.

3. CORRESPONDENCE COURSES AT THE COOPERATIVE COLLEGE

Correspondence courses at the Cooperative College formerly the responsible organization was called Cooperative Education Centre, were introduced in 1964 as an element of mass education, to help raise the literacy level among cooperative members. Later, the national literacy campaign chipped in to expand its usefulness in 1972 - 1975 to help eradicate ignorance as a development strategy among all Tanzanians.

The cooperatives conducted the education campaign as part of the principles of cooperation. Thus the form of education offered focused on improving cooperative education among members, their rights and obligation, agricultural extension skills health and general understanding of the changing environment. (Kassam 1970). Cooperative education formed part literacy process and supplemented the national literacy campaign launched in 1972 to 1975. According to former President J.K. Nyerere (1970) education is intended to improve peoples understanding about plans for development and enable them to participate in making changes, reject bad tradition, disease and improve lives by producing more and getting rich.

4. THE TANZANIA RURAL SETTING 1961 - 1995

At the time of independence, Tanzania population was about 9 million people. It was divided unequally between the urban and the rural population. While the rural population was more than 85% of the total urban population was less than 15%. Almost the same ratio still exists today. Secondly, in 1960s 85% of the population were peasants and depended on land and agriculture for their livelihood. The same rural population accounted for 80% of national income. In the 1970s agriculture contributed the GDP as follows: 1976 - 60%, 1980 - 52%, 1982 - 48%. (URT National Economic Review, 1990).

The cooperative sector 1976 in this respect accounted for 60% of the total agricultural output from cotton, coffee, pyrethrum and other cash crops. The rural population produced most of its food.

The literacy level was very low, 20 - 30% of the rural people were literate (67% illiterate). It was required that through mass education cooperative member education, the concentrated free/universal primary education to raise literacy to 85% in 1975 and 100% 1980. This was not achieved. To date the literacy level 85% and has been fluctuating due to government policy to reduce the education budget. It is required that members of cooperatives especially leaders to be literate. Today only literate people are eligible to contest for leadership in cooperatives.

5. ADVANTAGES OF CORRESPONDENCE COURSES FOR RURAL COOPERATIVES

“A Cooperative Society is an association of persons who have voluntarily joined together for the purpose of achieving a common need through formation of a democratically controlled organization and who make equitable contributions to the capital required for the formation of such an organization, and who accept the risks and the benefits of the undertaking in which they actively participate”. (URT Cooperative Law 1991:166).

Cooperative Societies in Tanzania can be divided into two categories, urban and rural. Rural cooperatives exist in rural areas and are engaged in agriculture and related activities, urban cooperatives are urban based and do non agricultural activities, i.e. don't work on land to produce products.

Rural cooperatives are sparsely located, are served with limited infrastructures, have limited investment opportunities, can not easily access financial institutions and their economic activities are seasonal. They depend on natural resources for production. Yet when they produce, their products are perishable and of low value per unit and don't have a good market.

In order to fight against the above deficiencies, like ignorance (inability of persons to adjust to conditions and lack of knowledge and skills) exploitation of the ignorant by those having more knowledge and skills, domination of peasants in the marketing process and unrestricted competition by which the powerful and the rich could drive the small, weak and poor out of business into dependency and poverty, (Münkner 1995) member education had to be stepped up especially in the rural areas.

This was done through improving the cooperators, the rural communities through education. The most effective way of imparting this education chosen was distance education in particular by correspondence courses and radio.

Distance education was a method of choice because:

- (a) It is flexible. It provides a chance for choosing from a number of programmes available and not only a limited choice provided at certain Colleges.
- (b) It is cost effective. It caters for a wider group of population while using same fixed costs. While attending to a bigger population the cost of operation falls.
- (c) It is practical and handy. Experiences have shown that while students learn at work place they practice what they have learned.

Basing on the situation which existed between year 1961 - 1967 the cooperative members required a fast cheap and convenient method of raising their education level. Besides, the cooperative organizations stood to gain because the members had to study and work. Distance education helped to provide such work oriented training.

The background of cooperative institutions all over the world require promotion of member participation. Member participation among cooperatives is embedded in the formation of cooperatives and on cooperative principles of voluntarism, democratic, open membership and the need for the members to patronize their organization. Cooperative members must show that they own, support and patronize the cooperatives. This is consumated when members can participate fully in decision making. Good decisions are made by members who are literate and have skills to make decisions. That is why member education in cooperatives is fundamental and is one of the basic cooperative principles.

6. CORRESPONDENCE COURSE OBJECTIVES

In Tanzania correspondences courses were initiated by Cooperative Centre for cooperative members, staff and leaders in order to:

- (i) raise the members' awareness and consciousness in cooperative work.
- (ii) enable the members to participate constructively in management and promotion of their cooperative undertaking. Members were supposed to learn about cooperation and their rights and obligations.
- (iii) equip the employees of cooperatives with knowledge and skills they required to perform their duties.

Distance education could be used to reach the sparsely distribute population, and was used as a strategy to penetrate rural communities at that time, through radio and correspondences. Radio is powerful method because it reaches the illiterate too (those who can not read and write).

7. ORGANIZATION OF CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

The correspondence courses were introduced as a measure to solve the problems of delivery education to the rural, poor who organized themselves in cooperatives but had little skills and well not were equipped with management skills and how to monitor the world markets.

- (i) Correspondence course were introduced as an alternative to conventional courses which were by that time organized at special areas like Cooperative College Moshi and Mzumbe in Morogoro region. Correspondence courses were organized by Cooperative Education Centre. This institute was born as a result of collaboration between the Government of Tanzania and Nordic consortium under cooperatives support.

Correspondence courses are/were produced at Moshi and sent out to prospective cooperative students through their cooperative societies. The CEC used postal services to administer these courses extensively.

Students were registered after sending request for training to the CEC by mail. Those who organized themselves through cooperatives, used to send applications through their societies and unions. When operation started in 1965 there were 1,518 societies mainly rural based and CEC enrolled 663 students.

In 1969 there were 1,737 societies and enrollment was 1,1882. The number of students increased fast because after 1965 it was decided that enrolling by correspondence only was not adequate because of the physical problems which existed. Hence, the CEC began to establish centres in various regions. There were established centres to start with, Northern, Northwestern, southern and eastern. Later the zones were taken over by each region having its own wing centre. By 1972 there were 12 wings out of 20 regions, in 1979 to

1995 there are 22 wings in 22 regions of Tanzania with the headquarters still operating purely by correspondence. It was confirmed that distance education must be supplemented by residential programmes to enhance discussions. The wing operations were administered by the wing tutors.

Duties of the wing tutors were:

- (a) To enrol students at a closer place.
 - (b) To guide students and counsel them.
 - (c) To make follow-up of students and make elaborations of subjects not clearly understood.
 - (d) To advise students on what courses to take.
- (ii) It was later realized that the students need more support during learning from the CEC. The management introduced Radio Programme in order to back up correspondence course. The Radio Programme used to broadcast materials sent out to students by mails. A timetable was made to make the students aware about what subject would be in the air. This method was intended to supplement the print materials, also provide guidance to the learners who were not able to contact a tutor from the CEC.

The programme began by airing a 30 minutes programme with a repeat. This method was able to sensitize many people even those who were not literate. And there were more responses from the learners. A study by I. Chingege in 1987 revealed that the Radio was an effective training tool in rural areas as it made learners learn in a relaxed mood, and they could listen to the radio while they were in the farms. Portable radio sets were encouraged and these helped farmers to listen to the radio oftenly.

- (iii) The organization of farmers in learning to be specific illiterate farmers was a difficult issue. They were not readily cooperating to take up organized courses. The Centre improvised the method by introducing Radio study groups. Farmers/cooperators intending to study by correspondence were encouraged to form Radio listening groups where they could listen together and exchange ideas. This method was very useful because it could use other members to elaborate on issues discussed. These groups were registered by CEC Tutor and when possible he would visit them and guide or study with them.

For literate students the Centre introduced study circles where students undertaking correspondence courses were encouraged to study together, listen to a radio programme and later each should do his own assignment. This method strengthened group work and was popular among committee members/management committees.

The study groups were encouraged to elect an acceptable leader on voluntary basis among themselves who could call the group and assign individuals to do certain assignments or preparations before the following meetings. It is advisable to hold group meeting 10 - 12 times a year. The rest of the days one must study on his own.

A group was required to have a Secretary who would be recording all what they have studied/discussed and would send answers to questions to the CEC headquarters for marking.

We can say the system evolved from a purely correspondence system to a mass education system/distance education where the Centre used field visits, correspondence materials, study group and radio to educate peasant farmers.

After studies by correspondence, successful students were allowed to pursue further studies at the College. The College had and still runs advanced residential courses. The fee is a little bit high. It is considering introduction of long courses by distance soon.

It has been established that better studies required such programmes be supplemented by residential support programmes to support distance learning.

In 1987 the College launched a special programme to strengthen management skills for cooperative members and staff. The programme started by residential courses, after which students had to study by correspondence before they were

eligible for a further residential programme. The programme enabled higher management standards, but did not increase the number of correspondence students.

8. PROBLEMS OF THE COOPERATIVE COLLEGE DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAMME

The Tanzania economic environment is changing. The contribution of agriculture is being reduced by industrialization. While agriculture used to contribute 60% of GDP, now its contribution is about 41%. The total range of contribution since 1976 has been between 41% - 60%.

Secondly the overall performance of the College is enrolling students has been falling since 1979 due to change in cooperative policies, lack of funds, and decreasing volume of cooperative sector. In 1976 the government dissolved all agricultural cooperatives and mandated villages as sole dealers in agricultural produce and supply of inputs. As these villages were not member based, not voluntary, the participation was very low and production fell. However, the reorganization of cooperatives affected cooperators and students enrolment fell. In 1975 students enrolled were 2,665, in 1979 only 1,240 students enrolled. Besides, in 1975 there were 864 graduates, in 1979 only 466 graduated in 1986 - 250, 1996 - 150 graduates.

Due to frequent cooperative policy changes, the College found itself unable to change training materials promptly. The College can not improve materials to accommodate new policy requirement and legislation, this failure renders existing materials useless and obsolete. As a result the College is increasingly losing students and prospective students find the materials inadequate.

Since the government stopped funding the College, the students enrollment has decreased. Funds from the government used to be for Tutors counselling services and follow-up and production of materials. Since 1989 no materials has been updated, produced and no new materials has been developed. In 1998 the College has stopped to air radio programmes because the cost is very high. A 15 minutes programme costs T.Shs. 130,000/= to 160,000/= (about US \$ 200 - 250). The income per capital of Tanzania is US \$ 120.

Due to the above, correspondence courses at the Cooperative College need intensive rehabilitation. Apart from incorporating new messages and skills, the College must be able to use advanced technology in Distance Education. Also, to open up courses for not only cooperators but also students who want to pursue further studies.

9. CONCLUSION

Correspondence courses administered by the Cooperative College has helped much to improve the management skills of the cooperative member based in the rural areas. The rural population is at a disadvantage, it is not served well by communication, infrastructure, the population is sparsely populated and generally it is poor. Hence use of correspondence makes them spend less of their income on education, they can learn while attending to their farms. However, policy changes have affected correspondence course performance due to changes in cooperative set up, legislations which necessitate the materials to be rewritten. However, the success made can not be under-estimated because the literacy level rose from 20 - 30% (1960s) to 55 - 90% (1980/90s) among the rural people. This was not a result of CEC only but also efforts by the government through mass education and literacy campaigns. To date things may be better if technologically advanced tool can be installed in the rural areas to preempt the need for costly infrastructure. The use of television and Internet and also mobile phones can accelerate training by distance education in the rural areas. Also courses should be opened up for non cooperative sector in order to raise its target and market and also intergrate skills required.

REFERENCES

1. Ministry of Education, United Republic of Tanzania 1990: Report of the Committee on the Establishment of Open University of Tanzania, 1990.
2. Donge, L.N.: Development of Distance Education: A Case of Cooperative College Moshi, Directorate of Field

- Education. A paper presented to the UNESCO Subregional Conference in Distance Education in 1994.
3. Cooperative Education Centre, 1970: A Handbook for Cooperative Education, Pub. CEC 1970.
 4. United Republic of Tanzania (URT): Cooperative Department, 1996: Towards Self-help in Cooperatives in Tanzania Mainland, Report presented to the
 5. URT 1961 - Vol. I.
 6. Kassam, Y.: The Adult Education Revolution in Tanzania. Nairobi Shangwaya Publishers 1978.
 7. Towards Ujamaa: Twenty Years of TANU. Ed. Gabriel Rukumbika, EALB 1974.
 6. URT: Development Plans, Pub. Government Printers, 1964 - 1990.
 9. URT 1967, 1978 Census (Statistics).
 10. J.K. Nyerere: Education for Self Reliance, EALB 1970.
 11. Donge, L.N.: Distance Education: A Strategic Training Method in Tanzanian Liberalized Environment (a research paper published by Cooperative College 1998).
 12. URT 1991: URT Cooperative Legislation No. 15 of 1991, URT - Government Printers.
 13. Münkner, H.: Cooperative Principles, Pub. Magbeburg 1995.
 14. Chingege, I.: Effective of Radio Programme in Cooperative Training, Pub. Tanzania School of Journalism (1987).