

The Demographic Determinants of “Successful” Village Cooperatives

SOFIA MUMTAZ

Worsley and his colleagues (1971) have drawn attention to the tendency in all traditional societies, to assume communal relations as ‘solidary’ in nature. The structure of village cooperatives is presumed to reinforce the solidarity of those relations. Anthropological analyses, however, have illustrated that communal relations range from those that could be termed ‘solidary’ to relations that are in direct conflict. The response of the local population to the changes introduced within the co-operative framework is therefore likely to be cross-culturally varied.

Moreover, the demographic features of historically common conditions of a geographical area, it is argued, are also pertinent to the “success” that may be expected of village cooperatives with reference to their stated objectives. The strength and identity of the socio-economic groups inhabiting a given geographical region play a role in defining local response to the changes introduced and their likely outcome.

The case of an NGO in the Frontier province of Pakistan, enables us to illustrate the disparity between the nature of communal relations and the composition and function of modern cooperatives, on the one hand; and the diversity in the ecological and physical conditions, as well as the strength and identity of the populations inhabiting different villages, which determine the dynamics of the interaction between the different sections of the population, on the other hand. The need is thus emphasised to provide for diversity in the “guiding principles” of development models to allow for pertinent differences (even within the same geographical area) in order to achieve the stated objectives.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FEATURES OF THE PROJECT AREA

The project area is inhabited by two main ethnic groups: the Pathans; and several tribes of Punjabi origin. The groups differ in terms of their kinship structure, behaviour patterns, and languages. Interaction between the ethnic groups (which in the given instances overlaps with the interaction among some members of the intra-ethnic kin and non-kin group) is defined by activities involving the extra-domestic

contribution of labour and services towards productive patterns, certain social ceremonies; and the acquisition of and engagement in extra-domestic employment for monetary income.

The village economy is primarily agro-pastoral. The produce of the natural resources to which this population has access is variable and uncertain in the given ecological conditions. 33 percent is simultaneously involved in petty commerce, transport operations, and monetary income (periodic or occasional wage labour/salaried jobs). Six percent of the total population has migrated out of the district for purposes of extra-domestic monetary employment.

The size of the villages varies from clusters (which are the nucleus or offshoots of the larger village) of 80 households to as many as 600 households per village. The average size of the household (which may contain a nuclear, joint, or extended family) is about 8.7 persons [Government of Pakistan (1981)].

The spatial organisation of the villages is related to whether the village has access to some source of irrigation or is completely rainfed. Households in the partially irrigated villages are clustered together, with the fields lying on the outskirts of the main residential boundary. On the contrary, in villages which are essentially dependent on rain,¹ clusters of a few households are spaced throughout the village, around the fields cultivated by those households.

There is a tendency towards spatial segregation between the two main ethnic groups of the area. Either the entire population of a given village may be ethnically homogeneous, or in cases where the two groups are present in the same village, the households of the group in minority are often clustered away from the rest of the village inhabited by the other group.

THE THRUST OF THE NGO

Table 1 shows the components of the women's programme of the NGO, within the cooperative framework. The content of the cooperative is left by and large to the dynamics of the interaction between the different social and economic groups of the community. The NGO merely encourages a membership of 30 persons per group and identifies the posts of two office-bearers from among its members, namely, the President and the Secretary. Table 2 gives some comparative figures of four women's cooperatives in one of the four districts of the project area. The village in which these cooperatives have been formed differ in terms of size, spatial organisation, and the availability of government-sponsored facilities, such as electricity, service roads, clinics, veterinaries, school teachers, etc.

¹According to the 1981 Census report of Kohat, 70 percent of the land in the district is *barani* or rainfed. As a result, only 27 percent of the total area of Kohat district is under cultivation. Among the sample villages (which were all towards the North and Northeast of the sub-district or *tehsil*), was entirely rainfed. Despite the irrigated tracts, the general character of the area is *barani*, and most of the sources of water are dependant on rain.

Table 1
Activities of the WID Programme

Sr. No.	Activities	Achievement	Beneficiaries	Objective
1	WCS Formed in Kohat	20	-	Local Participation
2	Membership	680		Outreach
3	Cumulative Savings	Rs 292,670		Capital formation
4	Productive Investment	04	Direct 132 Indirect 860	Reduce workload & provide safe water
5	Credit * Loans			
	a. Calf/Lambs Enterprises	Rs 48,000	50	Income generation
	b. Milk Animals	Rs 174,000	16	Milk production/income generation
6	Credit Enterprises	Rs 20,000	6	Income generation
7	Human Resource Development (HRD)	-	-	-
	a. Vocational Training Poultry	9 Courses	86	Upgrade Skill & Income generation
	b. Vaccination	12	16	Prevention of Losses
	c. Food Processing	6	224	Transfer of technology, preservation of surpluses
8	Research and Demonstration (RD)			
	a. Poultry Package	6	510	Introduce & improve breed (Increase poultry production)
	b. Kitchen Gardening	17	185	Develop vegetable production Income generation.
9	Linkages			
	a. Health Department (Provincial Govt.)	*		Immunisation and Health Education
	b. G.T.Z.	*		Transfer of Technology

Table 2
Sample Villages at Glance

No.	Name of Village	No. of HHS in the Village	Size of the WC	Age of the WC in Years	PF of the WC	Nature of Loan	Purpose of Loan	Status of WC as per NGO (Financial Criteria)
1	A	250	18	3.5	Potable water (wells)	Kind	Lambs for Raising	Successful
2	B	600	41	3.6	Piped water	Kind	Lambs for Raising	Successful
3	C	127	21	3.6	-	Kind	Cash for Small Enterprises	Un-successful
4	D	200	46	3.1	Piped water	Cash	Milk Package	Successful

PF = Physical Facility.

The cooperatives in turn differ with respect to their composition, i.e., the number and the identity of its members. A and C have only 18 and 21 registered members respectively; whereas cooperatives B and C have 41 and 46 members. Members in A and C are ethnically homogeneous; while B and D contain a few members from the other ethnic group. The proximity of the village to the town (and therefore the possibility to avail of urban facilities) depends on the peri-urban nature of B, C, and D, in contrast to the remoteness, and lack of those facilities in A.

THE PERTINENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC FEATURES

Cooperative activities require close collaboration among members. The spatial distance between member households, therefore, has a direct bearing on such collaboration. Despite kinship relations between members, and the fact that they belong to the traditionally recognised group of active social interaction (as in villages A and C for instance), participation in cooperative activities was slack. In village B, although members did not belong to the group of active social interaction (which is a sub-section of the kin group), yet the large and loose structure of the village prevented active participation. On the contrary, the cooperative in village D was able to sustain active participation of a cooperative with a large membership primarily on account of the physical proximity of member households.

Traditionally sanctioned social interaction does not contradict the formation of a cooperative on the basis of physical proximity. Cohesiveness and participation in cooperative activities can hence be enhanced if members are recruited from households adjacent to each other. This enables information sharing and mobility (in a sexually segregated society) of even younger women, the control over whose mobility is more stringent.

The content of the cooperative (in terms of the strength and identity of its members, and their relationship with the village at large) also determines relative "success". Ethnic identity of the two main groups has been maintained primarily by endogamy. Active social interaction is also concentrated among members of one's own ethnic group. Distinct identity of the ethnic groups was further reinforced by the physical segregation between the households of the two groups, if they inhabit the same village. Hence, having separate cooperatives for the two groups is conducive to encouraging extensive participation. However, neighbourly relations with the other ethnic group are maintained; and incidental inter-ethnic marriages also take place. The incorporation of individual members from the other ethnic group, therefore, does not upset the collaborative potential of the cooperative. However, only women past the reproductive ages are able to become members. Restriction on the mobility of senior women is less intolerable. They may, therefore, commute to the other end of the village for cooperative activities. Often women heading their households take the initiative of joining a cooperative (the bulk of whose members belong to the other ethnic group), if no cooperative has been formed (or if the one formed has been disbanded) in their section of the village. The responsibility of keeping themselves informed of the cooperative activities and meetings, however, lies with the members themselves. Participation, however, tends to be slack if activities are arranged when most women are working in the fields, or if they belong to two different ethnic groups and their households are physically segregated.

The size of the cooperative is similarly important. Members of the group of active social interaction tend to be recruited in a cooperative by preference. If the size of the cooperative is too small (as in the case of villages A and C), it tends to be restricted to the kin-group of active social interaction alone, to the exclusion of others. These individuals are able to retain membership despite the spatial distance, and negligent participation in cooperative activities. The personalised nature of membership enables the bypassing of rules. A small size and close kinship ties between the members also enable induction and eviction on personal grounds. A large membership, on the other hand, reduces the chances of a conflict-free or cohesive relationship among members. Altercations with an office-bearers for personal or other social reasons tend to affect the degree of member participation in cooperative activities. If the cooperative is formed on the basis of members living in close proximity (who are not close kins), the personalised functioning of the cooperative can be checked.

Whereas the network of traditional relations is pertinent to cooperative formation, the obligation to form women's cooperatives subsequent to men's cooperatives, and to solicit the assistance and consent of men to reach the women, affects the goal of increasing the outreach and empowerment of women. Since the mobility of women is subject to control by men of the household, the dependence of

women on men for interaction outside the village is perpetuated. If institutional linkages of women's cooperatives with women's organisations working at the regional and national level were established by the NGO, the dependence on men could be reduced.

The strategy of approaching the influential and affluent households in order to gain entry to a village tends to encourage members of those households (who invariably have acquired some formal education on account of their privileged status) to become office-bearers of both the men's cooperative as well as the women's cooperative (as in the case of village A). Members of these households are approached to resolve conflicts pertaining to cooperative activities (as they have traditionally been asked to do in case of interpersonal conflicts). Granting these households the privilege of resolving conflicts tends to perpetuate their dominant status. If members of influential and affluent households are members but not office-bearers of the co-operatives (as in the case of village B), their assistance becomes collaborative rather than exploitative.

The identification of a bare minimum of requirements for cooperative formation seeks to enable the local group to express traditionally pertinent criteria in determining cooperative composition. The NGO strategy of minimal intervention, however, also permits the perpetuation of relations which have been transformed as a consequence of altered material conditions, and these are perceived by the less privileged strata of the community as redundant in the present context. The dynamics of transformed relations, hence, becomes instrumental in preventing the least privileged strata of the community from joining the cooperatives.

The location of the village and the availability of facilities that enable participation in the proposed activities also have a bearing on the "success" of the cooperative. A village that lacks primary schooling facilities for girls is not likely to produce eligible office-bearers, or enable women of the less privileged households to eventually bear office. The remoteness of the village (as in the case of village A) is also likely to discourage interest in the credit or the vocational training component of the programme. Since the local context is important for the feasibility of the programme components, these factors need to be accounted for in the interest of an efficiency expectation.

Any given universe, however, is not uniform in content. Provision for pertinent differences in structure, size, and monitoring of co-operatives is, therefore, to be anticipated. In addition to adjustments in the general parameters of the "development" model, the role of the NGO activists in this connection is also significant. The extent and nature of monitoring needs to vary according to given conditions. Assistance of the NGO activists, such as rudimentary training of cooperative members (particularly office-bearers) in book-keeping (as in village A, and the Pathan section of village B, for instance), is likely to enable women

incompetent in such work to join and participate in operating the cooperative, rather than permitting the cooperative to disband or to be hijacked by men of the household.

Not all cooperatives are likely to have devoted office-bearers (as in village D, or to some extent in B). In such instances, the onus of providing the necessary incentives at the initial stages of programme implementation is on the activists'. The latter in turn would be able to meet their commitments more efficiently if they were better trained, monitored a small number of cooperatives, and were provided with the necessary logistics to do so.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we may reiterate the distinction between the cooperative structure and the nature of traditional communal relations. To confuse the former with the latter (because cooperative formation involves participation of the local population) is to misunderstand the structure and rationale of two separate forms, and hence the dynamics of their interaction. In addition to cultural differences that bear on the "success" of the cooperative, we have highlighted the importance of demographic features. The relevance of cooperative formation to the local context, and the changes introduced within the cooperative framework, therefore, can have only limited value with reference to the earlier social conditions of traditional societies.

We would recommend variation in the strategies seeking to implement the programme within the general parameters of the model. Their uniformity for the entire region cannot be accepted on the basis of a presumed similarity of the socio-economic conditions of that region. The response of a given configuration to the thrust of the particular intervention depends on the content of that configuration, rather than on its geographical location alone, or the contextual similarities thereof.

The "guiding principles" developed by policy-makers for a given geographical region, hence, must include the consideration whether the "principles" arrived at account for the relevant differences in question, or whether they serve to obscure diverse forms that may be fundamentally different, under the garb of a generalised terminology. The abstraction from reality runs the risk of homogenising diversity into a "principle" that does not necessarily subscribe to the parameters, nor to the implications of the construct thereby developed.

REFERENCES

- Pakistan, Government of (1983) *1981 District Census Report of Kohat*. Islamabad: Population Census Organisation, Statistics Division.
- Worsley, Peter (ed) (1971) *Two Blades of Grass: Rural Cooperatives in Agricultural Modernisation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Comments

While Soofia Mumtaz's paper has focused on establishing the relationship between the response of village females to the intervention of a cooperative organisation and the demographic configuration of the village, it has left the nature of the intervention itself unexamined. My contention is that it is the nature of intervention and not the demographic configuration which can satisfactorily explain the level of response by the sample population to the cooperative effort in the villages under study.

As the responses of the target population are measured in terms of the participation of females in the village organisation activities, it has not been demonstrated that the form of organisation created in the specific communities being studied is the most suitable for carrying out the tasks set by the organisation leaders. In this respect, a comparison of the organisational forms developed by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in the sparsely populated Northern Areas of Pakistan and the Orangi Pilot Projects in the densely populated urban areas of Karachi is revealing. According to the conclusion drawn by Soofia Mumtaz, the level of response to cooperative efforts in Orangi should be higher as compared to the response of the beneficiary population in the Northern Areas. What happened in reality was quite the opposite. In the Northern Areas, the participation of villagers in village organisation (VO) meetings has been much higher and more frequent as compared to Orangi, where no such organisation could even be created.

Akhtar Hamid Khan, who conceived both these programmes, had a very simple explanation. According to him, cooperative organisation needs to have an appropriate form, keeping in view the development activities being undertaken. In the Northern Areas, most of the activities undertaken at the village level were for the construction of infrastructure. Since the construction of infrastructure is the priority of the majority of village organisations, VO is an appropriate form for undertaking this activity, and regular participation in a meeting is a suitable indicator of success. In Orangi, most of the programmes like enterprise development and health-care focus on individuals; therefore, a collective organisation is not necessary and individual beneficiaries are considered as self-sufficient units. Even in the infrastructure-type programmes, like those for the construction of sewerage line, the scale is so small that neither the formation of an organisation nor frequent meetings of members are at all necessary. For laying sewerage lines in 4,000 lanes of Orangi, only 4,000 lane managers were selected, whereas in the Northern Areas 2,000 VOs were created. Both programmes were successful. Using identical criteria for evaluating the success of both programmes would lead us to the conclusion that cooperative efforts were

more successful in the Northern Areas (sparsely populated) than in Orangi (densely populated).

My second point relates to the use of participation in meetings as an indicator of success. Here, again, the nature of the activity and the nature of the participation are more relevant than the frequency of participation in meetings. Making use of this insight, Sindh Graduates Association has done very effective work in Sindh during the past 23 years. SGA recognised very early that different members of an organisational unit have different professional backgrounds and different time constraints; therefore, the worth and usefulness of their time varies according to its use. An eye surgeon's block allocation of two days' time for an eye camp is worth many times more than participating in a meeting for 30 minutes every week. Therefore, SGA plans and evaluates its activities not on the basis of the frequency of participation of members in SGA meetings but how best the time allocated by an individual member meets the needs expressed by the community members.

Fayyaz Baqir

National Coordinator,
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),
Islamabad.