



Building Community Ownership and Institutional Development

Case of ARCOSNetwork



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About this publication

This is one of the series of brochures aimed at experience sharing on ARCOS NBCEs Programme. Other case studies produced include:

- *Community Managed Tree Nursery Centers for Water, Energy and Food Security*
- *Building Community Ownership and Institutional Development*
- *Nature Based Village as a model for transformation towards sustainable community development*
- *Nature Based Community Enterprises as means to create jobs for youth*
- *Using water hyacinth to improve livelihoods and restore freshwater ecosystems*
- *The benefits of market-oriented agriculture to women*
- *Sustainable Energy Access in Rwanda's Rural Areas*

About ARCOS Network

Established in 1995, the Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS Network) is an non-governemntal organisation working with NGOs, Governments, Community-Based Organisations and the Private Sector, established in 1995 with the Mission "To enhance biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of natural resources through the promotion of collaborative conservation action for nature and people". ARCOS has programmes extending in the Albertine Rift region, Africa Great Lakes and African Mountains.

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ARCOS Strategic Areas 2016-2020 at a glance



1. Introduction

We live in a changing world. As human populations place ever-increasing amounts of stress on natural systems, the very existence of global life-sustaining resources is threatened (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005). The pressures can come in many forms such as escalating atmospheric emissions, rapid population growth, and overconsumption of natural resources. These pressures result in environmental degradation, climate change, food and freshwater scarcity, and widespread poverty. This global sustainability challenge has an effect on the entire world, but has a greater significance in developing nations and particularly the rural populations who typically create subsistence from marginal agricultural or pastoral lands (UN 1995). Community-based organisations (CBOs) play an important and relevant role in providing services at the local level. Wise management of the organisation can contribute significantly to ensuring the effectiveness of the work that they do. One category of community organisations is the cooperative institutions which exist all over the world, providing essential services which would otherwise be unattainable. In

many developing countries, cooperatives have been very successful in helping people to provide for themselves where private and other corporate capitals do not see high profitability. In Rwanda, 3,816,591 individuals are members of 8,995 registered cooperative institutions in Cooperatives Agency (RCA, 2018). The majority of these cooperatives are in agricultural sector (27% of all cooperatives).

As an effort to approach development issues, community development programs have addressed the problem too narrowly and did not consider the broader context (Stiglitz 1998), mostly designed to react to the effects rather than the causes of the problems. This resulted in programs that were fragmented, project-based, donor controlled and focused on short-term results, demanding for additional projects with a cycle of dependency (Dobie 2002). This limited understanding has miscalculated the socio-ecological complexity that exists within a community and still leads to insufficient solutions regarding sustainable development at local level.

3. ARCOS' Response

a. ARCOS Network Approach and Goals:

ARCOS' community development programme adopts a holistic understanding of the socio-ecological system and helps the community to build vision of success based on sustainability principles and rooted in the cultural heritage. ARCOS works with Nature Based Community Enterprises (NBCEs) through a model structured around four but interrelated components that make the situation more approachable.

The BEST Approach (ARCOS 2015) focuses on four key areas:

B: Building leadership and sustainable institutions. Cooperative management, governance, setting targets and work plans, gender and youth inclusiveness.

E: Enhancing environmental resilience. Promoting Community Based Adaptation through sustainable agriculture, enhancement and protection of soil and water ecosystems and biodiversity, forest landscape restoration, ecosystem-based adaptation, promotion of green energy technologies.

S: Sustainable business solutions. Assisting NBCEs in business planning, value addition, private sector engagement, market linkages and quality certification.

T: Transforming and inspiring others. ARCOS and empowered NBCEs focus on Nature Based Villages (NBVs), demonstration sites in integrating sustainable environment and livelihoods practices. This is supported through a Nature Based Community Fund (NBCF) established to foster sustainability actions in each NBV through community loans, incentives and activities of common benefits. ARCOS also promotes community to community exchange through training workshops, exhibitions and exchange visits where communities share knowledge and experience and learn by doing.

ARCOS approach to community ownership and institutional development is based on building a solid and transparent system for cooperatives where as result they become member-driven, member controlled and member-responsive organisations. The following principles have been used in building community ownership and leadership:

1. **Step by step:** One of ARCOS principles is approaching communities with flexibility, allowing them time to identify priorities and consequently own the actions, instead of strictly adhering to pre- defined objectives and plans of action.
2. **Leadership through cooperation:** To change the myth of dictatorship often imposed by the presidents of cooperatives, a leader is the one who listens and cooperates with the followers. Where there is cooperation, there are good ideas and solutions to problems.
3. **Systems and Facts:** Cooperatives must have management systems in place, including files of meetings, financial transactions, etc. Cooperatives should make effort to be efficiently managed by experienced, trained and professionally- qualified staff

under the supervision and control of democratically-elected committee. Adherence to the “joint-use” concept e.g., joint marketing, joint purchasing, joint use of capital, joint use of facilities;

4. **Transparency:** it should be understood by co-operators that cooperatives, are capitalist institutions. The principles of “accountability” and “answerability”, “role model”, “ethical behavior” and “good governance” are employed.
5. **Self-resilience and conflict-resolution:** Investing in transparency and good governance leads to open discussion about internal issues and finding solution to emerging problems and conflict resolutions.
6. **Inclusiveness:** Inclusive cooperation is central to ARCOS’ NBCE Programme. As such, it is vital for cooperative efforts to incorporate women and youth in their activities and management. Cooperatives are encouraged to reduce structural gender barriers that inhibit women’s wealth creation and utilisation potential.

b. Implementation and Process

Training of Trainers (TOT) Model: A farmer cooperative is a business organization owned and controlled by its members for their mutual benefit. Members finance their cooperative through equity investments. Control comes via membership rights to vote for and become directors. A study conducted by ARCOS (2015) showed that most cooperatives in Rwanda are faced with a number of challenges including poor infrastructure, lack of quality management, dormant membership, non-conduct of elections, lack of strong human resources policy, absence of professionalism, etc. ARCOS's NBCE Capacity Building Programme uses the ToT model to ensure that knowledge and skills are transmitted from cooperative leaders to all the members. Trainees are provided with a Training Manual to use for training the members. Follow-up trainings and meetings are also organized by ARCOS to check if the Trainees have implemented the plan accordingly.

Self-assessment and planning: Every institution is faced with internal and external issues. We facilitate cooperatives to conduct a simple identification of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) to help them in understanding where they are. They can then draw a plan of activities and financial projection based on this analysis.

Cooperative Management: The cooperatives are exposed to various unpredicted factors. Training in institutional management helps cooperatives to undertake an analysis of the situation and develop strategy for improvement and managing the interlinkages with customers and other stakeholders. This is translated into concrete intervention plan and such plan will require to identify how different relationships would be affected and how managed to get desired results.

Communication and learning: Communication is important for a cooperative as it helps to disseminate information to the members and customers and external audience. Communication is important to build a shared vision among members. It also helps in cross-learning.

NBCEs Strategic Plan: At the end of the training, NBCEs consolidate all these elements in the NBCE Strategic plan.

4. Achievements and Impact



Sholi coffee farmers and ARCOS staff posing after a training in sustainable agriculture



Self-evaluation with a reference to the planned activities against what was achieved



There is a need to keep documenting and disseminating NBCES success stories to inspire others

1. Governance and strategy of NBCES significantly improved:

- When we start with NBCEs, most of them don't have legal documents or are registered at local level. In Rwanda for example where we support 20 NBCEs, 18 of them are legally registered either at district or at national level with RCA.
- All NBCEs have governance structures, leadership, transparency, documents, plans and reports in place;

2. The membership of almost all NBCES significantly increased and diversified to include men, women and youth: For example

- KOAAMI from 63 to 126, KABAMU from 182 to 268,
- CITMK from 14 to 67; KABONYA from 65 to 105

3. All NBCE members trained on BEST practices:

- 254 (183 males, 36 females, 35 youth) through ToT;
- Over 3,000 through awareness raising campaigns

4. Lessons Learned

- The quality of leadership is the most important aspect for a cooperative to succeed in hard times
- Investing in goodwill is the best tangible asset a cooperative can invest in for a cooperative to be sustainable
- Unethical business practices are a sure way to self-destruction and should be discouraged
- There is a need for a cooperative to invest in insurance for unforeseen future

5. The Challenges Ahead

NBCE capacity building constitutes a corner stone for transforming and inspiring others (component T of BEST). Trained cooperative members are active ingredients for disseminating good practices within communities and serving as model for other cooperatives. ARCOS signed a 13-year MOU (from 2016) with the cooperatives to accompany them in this journey.

The Cooperatives supported by ARCOS have shown tremendous transformation in terms of institutional development and management. The systems are in place and working, members feel empowered and happy to contribute to change. However, the following challenges and

actions need to be tackled:

- Institutional development and capacity building is a continuing process.
- Continued Monitoring and Evaluation of NBCE performance is needed to track the changes in long-term
- More resources are needed to support the cooperatives in long-term.



Agnes, a lead farmer in restoration initiative in Mukura, posing next to a tree planted last planting season (2017)

6. Concluding Remarks

Cooperatives should be considered an important plank of development. The cooperatives have inherent advantages in tackling the problems of poverty alleviation, food security and employment generation. ARCOS' Nature Based Community Enterprise (NBCE) Programme includes an innovative community development approach focused on empowerment and capacity building toward sustainability through a new holistic approach (BEST Approach). The innovative approach also realizes the importance of functional governance structures in leading communities toward a

prosperous future and proposes social governance mechanisms aimed at creating transparent and participatory decision-making processes.

Through partnership with community, we establish a holistic understanding of the socio-ecological system in which a community exists and looks to integrate a deeper awareness and consciousness into communities and partner government institutions. Socio-ecological success is also defined in the approach by providing a principle-based definition of sustainability.



Sustainability Agreement is signed between ARCOS, Co-operative and local government representative before any initiative



NBCEs members on the field at Akagera wetland for practice after a theoretical part of Training of Trainers (ToT) on BEST process



Semusambi, member of KOIMIZANYA, farmers' coop in Nyagihunika Cell of Bugesera Sector, proud of the trees planted for erosion control in his farmland



Dativa, Jyambere Munyarwanda Coop member happy about the size of Grevillea trees she planted in Kabisasa Nature Based Village, Mukura Sector of Rutsiro District, Rwanda



Gaudelive, a farmer from Rusebeya Sector of Rutsiro District and member of Twigiremuhunzi Rusebeye, ARCOS' partner, witnesses increase in harvest since she started applying sustainable agriculture practices

7. References

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information.

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