

The Role of Government in Fostering Cooperative Success: An Institutional Perspective

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Abstract

The cooperative sector is integral to fostering community ownership, mutual aid, and economic empowerment, operating under principles distinct from profit-driven enterprises. This paper investigates the effectiveness of government policies in nurturing the cooperative movement across different countries, with a focus on the interplay between institutional frameworks and cooperative success. Drawing on Institutional Theory, the study examines how government regulations, societal norms, and support mechanisms shape the development and sustainability of cooperatives. By analyzing the policy landscapes and outcomes in various countries, the paper identifies best practices and common challenges faced by cooperatives globally. The findings highlight the crucial role of government support in creating an enabling environment for cooperatives, while also emphasizing the need for adaptive policies that consider the unique socio-economic contexts of each country. The study offers recommendations for enhancing government effectiveness in promoting the cooperative sector, with implications for policymakers aiming to strengthen cooperative movements worldwide.

Keywords: Cooperatives, government effectiveness, regulatory frameworks, institutional theory

1.0 Introduction

While conventional businesses pursue profit maximization, cooperatives champion the well-being of their members through democratic governance and equitable distribution of benefits (Amoako, 2021). Governments often play a significant role in supporting cooperatives through policies and regulatory bodies. However, the success of cooperatives can vary significantly across different contexts. Despite the presence of supportive policies, the impact of these measures is often hindered by implementation gaps. These gaps prevent policies from achieving their desired outcomes and underscore the need for more nuanced analysis. Institutional Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how external forces, including government policies and societal norms, shape the operations of organizations such as cooperatives. This paper examines the effectiveness of government policies in supporting cooperatives, highlighting the interplay between institutional pressures and the challenges cooperatives face in adhering to these policies. By understanding these dynamics, we can gain valuable insights into how to foster a more vibrant and sustainable cooperative sector through effective government's governance.

2.0 Literature Review

The cooperative sector is a sort of socioeconomic organization that promotes community ownership, self-help, and mutual aid among its members. Cooperatives, sometimes known as "co-ops," are organizations or businesses that are owned and operated by its members, who may also be customers, employees, or suppliers. While traditional businesses seek to maximize profits for external shareholders, cooperatives prioritize member well-being through a strong emphasis on democratic decision-making, equitable benefit distribution, and a commitment to their members' needs and aspirations. It is a type of self-help in which individuals voluntarily band together to meet mutual economic, social, or cultural needs. Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity (Waring, Lange, & Chakraborty, 2022).

2.1 Cooperative Movement

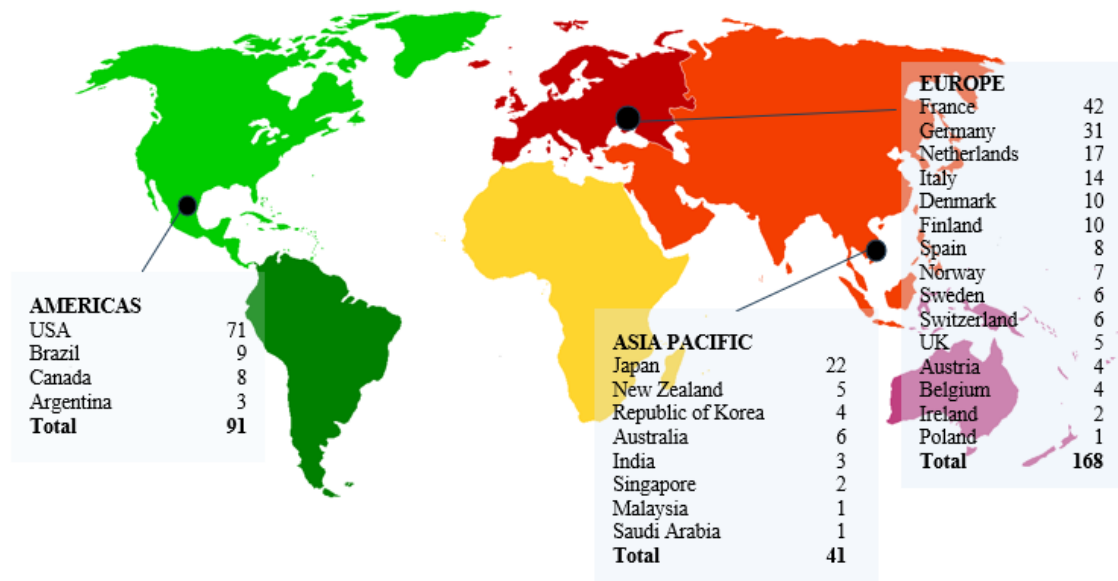
The International Cooperative Alliance published the 2022 World Co-operative Monitor which reported that in 2020, cooperatives provided jobs or work opportunities to 10% of the employed population and the top 300 cooperatives generate \$2,146 billion in turnover. The same report stated that producer and consumer/user type of cooperatives dominated the Top 10 cooperatives with Germany and France have the highest turnover followed by Japan and Republic of Korea. Cooperatives operating in wholesale and retail trade employed more people (nearly 800,000) than cooperatives operating in financial service, agricultural and food industries, and insurance combined. This shows that the co-operative sector has a direct impact on the country's economy in terms of annual turnover, Gross Domestic Product, and employment. Table 1 shows the *Top 300 Turnover: Top 10* by the ranking system.

Table 1: Top 300 Turnover: Top 10

Rank	Organization	Country	Economic Activity	Type	Turnover (billion USD)	Number of employees
1	Groupe Agricole Cr�dit	France	Financial Service	Consumer/ User	88.97	142,159
2	REWE Group	Germany	Wholesale and retail trade	Producer	77.93	256,162
3	Cooperative Financial Network Germany – BVR	Germany	Financial service	Consumer/ User	58.02	172,334
4	National Federation of Agricultural Co-operative Associations – ZEN-NOH	Japan	Agriculture and food industries	Producer	57.69	27,594
5	ACDLEC Leclerc	France	Wholesale and retail trade	Producer	54.83	140,000
6	Groupe BPCE	France	Financial service	Consumer/ User	54.53	100,344
7	Nippon Life	Japan	Insurance	Mutual	48.61	95,352
8	Talanx Group	Germany	Insurance	Mutual	46.95	23,527
9	Nonghyup (National Agricultural Cooperative Federation – NACF)	Republic of Korea	Agriculture and food industries	Producer	44.81	27,774

10	Edeka Zentrale	Germany	Wholesale and retail trade	Producer	44.27	402,000
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Source: International Co-operative Alliance (2022)



Source: International Co-operative Alliance (2022)

Fig. 1: Top 300 Cooperatives by Countries

According to Figure 1, 56% (168) of the top 300 cooperatives with the biggest turnover are headquartered in European countries. This means that the cooperatives sector in these countries is relatively successful, follows co-operative ideals, and is likely to receive considerable government support. In America, 78% (71) of the top cooperatives are situated in the United States of America, while Japan leads Asia Pacific with 54% (22) cooperatives. This suggests that the cooperatives sector in the United States and Japan is operating well, with a large number of successful cooperatives contributing significantly to total turnover. Overall, the findings indicate that cooperatives are a powerful and effective economic model in the aforementioned regions. They are among the top revenue-generating firms in Europe and the United States, while Japan tops the Asia-Pacific area in terms of successful cooperatives. The high concentration of cooperatives in certain places may imply efficient government policies and a favorable business environment for this form of firm.

2.2 Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory posits that the behavior of organizations is influenced by the institutional environment in which they operate. This includes formal rules, regulations, and informal norms that shape the interactions between government, businesses, and society. Aydiner, Tatoglu, Bayraktar, Zaim, and Delen (2019) contended that firms that fail to appropriately respond to important external pressures and environmental demand cannot achieve the required level of performance. All cooperatives must follow Malaysian government laws and regulations, notably the Cooperatives Societies Act of 1993. As a result, Meyer and Rowan's (1970) institutional theory, which focuses on how organizations fit into, relate to, and are shaped by their local, regional, national, and international environments, was deemed best suited to explain the involvement of government as external forces shaping the operation of cooperatives. Institutional theory focuses on the external variables that shape and restrict organizations or societies. This encompasses rules, regulations, norms, and values that influence organizational

behavior and shape the larger sociocultural context within which organizations operate (Heino & Tuominen, 2008). Institutional environments are defined as those that have established rules and guidelines that organizations must follow in order to receive support and legitimacy for their actions (Heino & Tuominen, 2008). The institutional framework includes established standards, regulations, and benchmarks that serve as the foundation for an organization's plans, stances, and resources (Lawrence 1999). These rules generate institutional pressures, which include regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive aspects of institutions (Scott, 2001). Laws, rules, social norms, and societal expectations all contribute to and influence these institutional pressures (Goodstein, 1994), which are frequently initiated by varied interest groups and stakeholders within the organizational sphere (Riviera, 2004). Adaptation to these external requirements and expectations is critical for organizations' survival (Meyer & Rowan 1977). These institutional pressures eventually lead to isomorphism (organizations adapting or adopting government or professional body standards or benchmarking from others), which is classified into three processes: coercive, normative, and mimetic mechanisms (Struckell, Ojha, Patel, & Dhir, 2022). Coercive mechanisms are laws and regulations that organizations must obey, as well as codes of conduct and responsible accounting reporting that are suggested practice (Struckell et al., 2022; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). For example, all cooperatives in Malaysia are governed by the Akta Koperasi 1993 and the Peraturan-peraturan Koperasi 2010 (Malaysia Cooperative Societies Commission, 2023). The mimetic mechanism, on the other hand, relates to environmental uncertainty, which causes an organization to copy success methods from its leaders or successful companies (Struckell, Ojha, Patel, & Dhir, 2022; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This is demonstrated by the implementation of comprehensive quality management practices (Maina, 2022), lean management practices (Caldera, Desha, & Dawes, 2019), and modern management accounting procedures (Januddin, 2022). Normative mechanisms are related with professionalization through societal normative expectations, such as public opinion about environmental sustainability standards (Struckell, Ojha, Patel, & Dhir, 2022; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

2.3 Government Effectiveness

According to management literature, effectiveness includes the capacity to produce desired results despite resource constraints (Duho, Amankwa & Musah-Surugu, 2020). Recent literature defines government effectiveness as the quality of public services, the capacity of the civil service, and the credibility of the government's commitment to policies (Dubey et al., 2023). Kaufmann, Kraay, and Zoido-Lobaton (1999) used survey-based data on the "perceptions of the quality of public service provision, the quality of the bureaucracy, the competence of civil servants, the independence of the civil service from political pressures, and the credibility of the government's commitment to policies" (Kaufmann et al., 1999, p. 8). The result of a highly effective government is high economic growth, foreign direct investment, social infrastructure, public investment, a quality procurement system, decreased corruption, and decreased infant mortality (Garcia-Sanchez, Cuadrado-Ballesteros & Frias-Aceituno, 2013). Successful government policies that have supported cooperatives in various countries demonstrate the importance of targeted interventions, financial assistance, and regulatory frameworks that foster cooperative development. Here are some notable examples:

2.3.1. China: Rural Development Policies (Chen & Scott, 2014)

Since 2002, the Chinese government has implemented a series of rural development policies aimed at bridging the income gap between urban and rural residents. These policies prioritize

the establishment of farmers' cooperatives as a means to connect small-scale producers with agro-food supply chains. The government provides substantial support through:

- **Financial Assistance:** Grants and subsidies to cooperatives to enhance their operational capabilities.
- **Training Programs:** Initiatives to educate cooperative members on best practices in management and marketing, thereby increasing their competitiveness in the market.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Investments in rural infrastructure to facilitate better access to markets and resources for cooperatives.

2.3.2. *Nepal: Agricultural Cooperatives Support (Dhakal, O'Brien & Mueser, 2021)*

In Nepal, the government has recognized the role of agricultural cooperatives in poverty alleviation and rural development. Key policies include:

- **Economic Investment:** The government has invested in cooperative development as part of its strategy for poverty reduction, providing financial resources to enhance cooperative capacities.
- **Access to Markets:** Policies aimed at improving farmers' access to markets through cooperative networks, which help smallholder farmers achieve better prices for their products.
- **Legal Framework:** Establishing a legal framework that supports the formation and operation of cooperatives, ensuring they can function effectively and sustainably.

2.3.3. *Ethiopia: Participatory Forest Management (Walle & Nayak, 2020)*

In Ethiopia, the government has facilitated participatory forest management (PFM) cooperatives, which involve local communities in forest conservation efforts. Successful government policies include:

- **Community Engagement:** Policies that encourage local communities to participate in decision-making processes regarding forest management.
- **Capacity Building:** Training programs for cooperative members to enhance their skills in sustainable forest management practices.
- **Resource Allocation:** Providing resources and support for cooperatives to implement conservation initiatives effectively, which has led to improved forest conservation outcomes.

2.3.4. *India: Cooperative Banking Sector (Dhakal, O'Brien & Mueser, 2021)*

The cooperative banking sector in India has received significant government support through:

- **Regulatory Framework:** The Banking Regulation Act and the Banking Laws (Cooperative Societies) Act have established a robust regulatory environment that supports the functioning of cooperative banks.
- **Financial Support:** Government initiatives to provide financial assistance and credit facilities to cooperative banks, enabling them to lend to small farmers and entrepreneurs.
- **Capacity Building:** Programs aimed at enhancing the operational efficiency and governance of cooperative banks, ensuring they can effectively serve their communities.

These examples illustrate that successful government policies supporting cooperatives often involve a combination of financial assistance, regulatory frameworks, capacity building, and community engagement. By adopting such comprehensive approaches, governments can significantly enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of cooperatives, ultimately contributing to economic development and social equity.

3.0 Government Effectiveness in Different Countries

Several studies have examined the impact of government effectiveness on entrepreneurship and business outcomes across various countries. Here, we summarize findings from selected research that illustrate these dynamics.

Authors	Research Setting	Findings
Ajide (2021)	17 African Countries (Longitudinal study, from 2006-2017)	Government effectiveness, regulatory quality, and control of corruption are vital for promoting productivity in the region.
Vyrostková & Kádárová (2023)	European (longitudinal study, from 2006-2020)	There was a positive relationship between entrepreneurship and government effectiveness. Macroeconomic variables, including the regulatory quality index and market capitalization, significantly impact new business density, suggesting that effective governance fosters a more vibrant entrepreneurial landscape.
Sipakoly (2024)	Developed vs Developing countries (Comparative Analysis)	Effective government interventions vary significantly between developed and developing economies. While developed nations benefit from stable regulatory environments, developing countries often face challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption, which impede entrepreneurial growth.
Ritahi, & Echaoui (2024)	Morocco (Longitudinal study, from 1996- 2021)	Corruption negatively influences economic growth, emphasizing the need for effective governance to foster entrepreneurship. Political stability was also identified as a critical driver of economic growth, suggesting that stable governance can enhance entrepreneurial activities.
Huang, Li, X., & Zhang (2021)	Farmer cooperatives in Liaoning, China	Government support significantly impacts e-commerce sales behavior among cooperatives.
Hemantha Kumara, & Bhat (2022)	Cooperative banking sector in India	The regulatory framework governing these banks, including the Banking Regulation Act and the Banking Laws (Cooperative Societies) Act, has facilitated their growth and effectiveness in providing financial services to underserved populations. The cooperative banking sector in India illustrates the role of effective governance in promoting entrepreneurship.
Tashtamirov, 2023	Not Available	Countries with strong institutional frameworks tend to exhibit higher rates of entrepreneurship and better business performance. In nations where regulatory quality and the rule of law are prioritized, businesses report higher growth rates and innovation levels.

The review of government effectiveness through the Institutional Theory perspective underscores its critical role in shaping business and entrepreneurial outcomes. Effective governance creates a stable and predictable business environment, encouraging both domestic and foreign investments. The cooperative business model has been recognized as a resilient structure in economic recovery strategies, especially post-COVID-19. Effective governance

can enhance the performance of cooperatives by providing a supportive regulatory environment that fosters collaboration and resource sharing among members (Langi Osumba, & Oboka, 2022). To improve government effectiveness, policymakers should focus on enhancing regulatory frameworks, ensuring the rule of law, and combating corruption. Such measures can create a more favorable environment for entrepreneurship, ultimately driving economic growth and development.

3.1 Notable Issue: Corruption

Corruption plays a significant role in undermining the effectiveness of government policies aimed at promoting entrepreneurship, particularly in developing countries. Several studies have examined this relationship:

- A study analyzing 48 developing countries from 2008 to 2016 found that an increase in corruption promotes more new business start-ups, as entrepreneurs view engaging in corrupt activities like bribery as the only way to start a business in a highly corrupt environment (Rashid, Masron & Malim, 2020).
- Research on the relationship between tax policy and entrepreneurship found that corruption can undermine formal regulatory institutions and negatively moderate the effects of governance and tax policy on entrepreneurship (Chowdhury, Belitski, & Desai, 2015).
- A study in Ecuador showed that regulations targeting NGOs, which were intended to increase government control, actually decreased municipalities' ability to secure international cooperation due to the added uncertainty and turbulence caused by regulatory burden. This negative effect was amplified in municipalities with a higher presence of foreign donors (Zambrano-Gutiérrez, & Avellaneda, 2022).
- Findings from Morocco demonstrate that corruption has a significant negative influence on economic growth, highlighting the importance of anti-corruption measures for driving sustainable and inclusive development.

These studies emphasize that corruption severely undermines the effectiveness of government policies and institutions in fostering a favorable entrepreneurial ecosystem. Policymakers must prioritize anti-corruption efforts and ensure the rule of law to create an environment conducive to entrepreneurial success. Improving regulatory quality, government effectiveness, and control of corruption are critical for promoting productivity and economic growth through entrepreneurship.

4.0 Implications

This study addresses significant gaps in the literature by applying Institutional Theory to the performance and development of cooperatives, highlighting the influence of external pressures such as regulatory frameworks and social norms. The research provides a contextual adaptation of Institutional Theory, offering comparative insights and expanding its application in a developing country context. Practically, the findings suggest that policymakers should create supportive regulatory environments, while cooperative leaders can use these insights to align their strategies with institutional expectations for enhanced sustainability. The study also underscores the need for capacity-building initiatives within cooperatives and lays the groundwork for future research to explore internal dynamics, longitudinal impacts, and cross-national comparisons. Overall, this research contributes to the body of knowledge by bridging

gaps in the literature, offering practical solutions, and setting the stage for further exploration of the interplay between institutional factors and cooperative performance.

5.0 Conclusions

The cooperative movement, characterized by community ownership, democratic decision-making, and mutual aid, represents a powerful model for economic and social development. Institutional Theory provides a useful lens to understand how these external pressures shape the operations and effectiveness of cooperatives. The analysis underscores the importance of a supportive and adaptive institutional environment, where government effectiveness, regulatory quality, and responsiveness to cooperative needs are crucial for fostering cooperative growth and sustainability. Comparative analysis across different countries further highlights the critical role of effective governance in promoting cooperative success. Countries like China, Nepal, Ethiopia, and India have demonstrated that well-crafted government interventions—ranging from financial assistance and regulatory frameworks to capacity-building and infrastructure development—can significantly enhance cooperative performance and contribute to broader economic development. However, challenges such as corruption, inadequate targeting of policies, and limited financial support remain significant barriers in many developing countries. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach, including anti-corruption measures, tailored policy interventions, and a commitment to continuous engagement with cooperatives to understand and address their evolving needs. By aligning policy frameworks with the practical realities of cooperatives, governments can better support these organizations in driving sustainable and inclusive growth.

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