

**RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS IN AFRICAN CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT:  
NEXUS TO ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS****Mayala, Nyanjige Mbembela<sup>1</sup>****Abstract**

*The role of research on Co-operatives among others is to come out with answers to the problems in co-operative movement to suffice the needs of society through the governments, the private sector, big industrialist and individual entities may contribute to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Even if the Co-operative form of organizations and their achievements is in different parts, the Co-operatives scenery in Africa is scattered with footprints of successful Co-operatives, beneath which, lies thousands of Co-operatives that have perished with hopes of people; several others are shuffling laterally amongst life and death limping on backings thought by their Governments, donors and NGOs. This paper utilized a desk research approach by analyzing different literatures to answer the question of how research is an important tool to the co-operative and how it complements to the SGDs achievements. It was found that, notwithstanding the many impediments encountered over time, Co-operatives continue to be organizations of choice in many African countries for the majority of people who want to fulfill their shared desires by taking full advantage of economies of scale and alliances that ascends from combined actions. Studies in co-operatives done by high learning institutions and other development partners continue to be an important tool for the rise and fueling the sustainable Co-operative organizations in Africa and around the World in achieving the SGDs. It is recommended that, more researches should be done especially on the emerging types of co-operatives and the new challenges to co-operative development.*

**Key words:** *Role of research, Co-operative Development, SDG, Africa.*

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Research involves inventive work done on a methodical basis in order to raise the standard of knowledge on individuals, culture and society, and the usage of this stock of knowledge to develop new presentations. It is used to create or confirm evidences, endorse the findings of preceding work, solve new or current difficulties, support theorems, or develops new theories (Brondizio, *et al.*, 2014). In order to bring co-operative opinions into the debate around the post-2015 development agenda, much research on co-operative development is required to join hand with the International organizations in the execution of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as indicated by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA, 2017).

Co-operative entities have been all over the world for over 160 years to date, have prepared and endured to make wonderful impact to social and economic development, but there is tiny research and knowledge about Co-operatives especially in Africa (Develtere, & Wanyama, 2017; Pollet, 2016). Notwithstanding the extensive existence, substantial role to the social and economic development around the world over the last 160 years and efforts to promote them from the uppermost levels of the international development arena, the co-operative world is not as well known as it should be especially in the developing economies (ICA, 2018). It is hard to pinpoint the exact reason, but part of the problem is that the movement is not able to sufficiently brand itself in the public mind (Cronan, 2017). This problem is more pronounced in developing countries, mainly in Africa.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Department of Management, Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU), Tanzania  
Corresponding Emails: [nyanjige.mayala@mocu.ac.tz](mailto:nyanjige.mayala@mocu.ac.tz); [nyanjigem@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:nyanjigem@yahoo.co.uk)

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals as it sounds, is geared towards sustenance of the development agenda in all aspects from gender inclusion, descent works and a no hunger world a few to mention (ICA, 2018). Co-operatives as value-based and principle driven organizations enterprises are by nature a sustainable and participatory form of business. They place emphasis on job security and improved working conditions, pay competitive wages, promote additional income through profit-sharing and distribution of dividends, and support community facilities and services such as health clinics and schools (ILO, 2018). Cooperatives foster democratic knowledge and practices and social inclusion, making them well-placed to support the achievement of sustainable development. Cooperatives have also shown resilience in the face of the economic crises. Hence, cooperatives are well-placed to contribute to sustainable development's triple bottom line of economic, social and environmental objectives plus the governance agenda, not least because they are enterprises that endeavour to meet the economic progress of members while satisfying their socio-cultural interests and protecting the environment (Bee & Anania, 2017). They offer an alternative model for enterprise, with contributions to sustainable development well beyond job creation. Since cooperatives' share in GDP and total enterprises is relatively small in most countries at present (ICA, 2018), the promotion and expansion of cooperatives could be an important instrument for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This study intended to examine the role of research in Co-operatives Development and Implementation of the SDGs in Africa. The study intended to look into how Co-operatives should position themselves to take advantage of the research gaps in order to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of their members. Specifically the study presents the challenges facing co-operatives in operationalizing their businesses but how research works can be utilized to fine-tune challenges into opportunities with a focus on contribution to achieving the SDGs hence member benefits.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

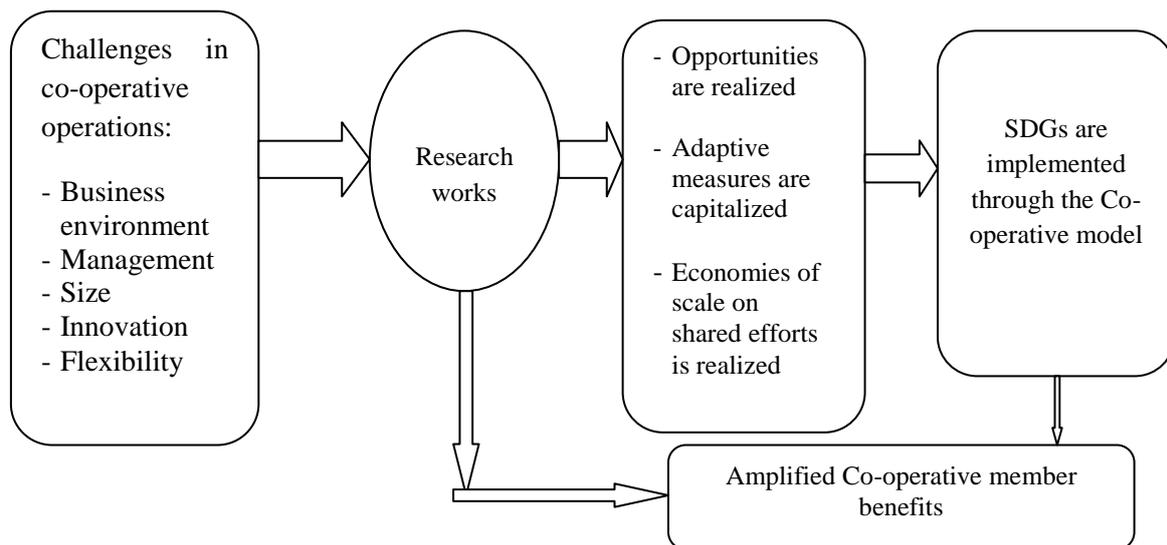
### **2.1 Research Design and Data Collection**

This study involves time series literature, descriptive in nature and qualitative in its approach. The author have used a desk review method where review of various literatures concerning challenges and the role of research in African Co-operatives in relation to the SDGs development agenda stands. The study has been organized into four parts, namely the Introduction providing the background information, the methodology where the design and data collection methods are presented; conceptual framework, findings and discussion; conclusion and recommendations. The study involved a review of literature from the year 2008 to year 2019.

### **2.2 Conceptual Framework**

As narrated by Grant and Osanloo (2014), a conceptual framework is blueprint or guide for a research. It is a framework based on an existing theory in a field of inquiry that is related and/or reflects the hypothesis of a study. It is a blueprint that is often borrowed by the researcher to build his/her own house or research inquiry. The conceptual framework serves as the foundation upon which research is constructed, and narrated to make a reflection of the research. Sinclair (2007) as well as Fulton and Krainovich-Miller (2010) compare the role of the conceptual frameworks to that of a map or travel plan. Likewise, the theoretical framework guides the researcher so that s/he would not deviate from the confines of the accepted theories to make his/her final contribution scholarly and academically. Thus, Brondizio, *et al.* (2014) agrees that the conceptual framework is a route map about aspects of human endeavor that can be useful to the study of events. The conceptual framework consists of theoretical principles, constructs, concepts, and tenants of a theory (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

In this particular study, the emerging challenges affecting operations of co-operative societies mentioned in the literature are many. However in this study, only five challenges that in the African co-operative context are examined. These are; challenge of environment, size, management, innovation and flexibility of which in the processes creating opportunities out of research findings. As such, through different research works, challenges when researched coming out with scientific findings, it becomes easy for specialists and practitioners in co-operatives to come out with scientific solutions. As a result, these challenges are turned into opportunities where co-operatives create strategies (adaptive measures) to cope with challenges and utilizing available opportunities through the economies of scale obtained in the shared efforts. As the nature of co-operatives is to satisfy members' economic and social need, the output will be improved co-operative member benefits (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

### 3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Importance of Co-operatives to SDGs

According to the literature (ILO, 2014; UN, 2016; ICA, 2017), there is a generally held agreement amongst many actors, including the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and the International Co-operative Alliance, that the co-operative organization is the type of an entity that is best matched to addressing all magnitudes of decreasing poverty and marginalization. The model that co-operatives use to shrink poverty is significant by identifying economic prospects for their members; empower the deprived to protect their interests; provide security to the unfortunate by permitting them to adapt separable risks into shared risks; and facilitate member access to assets that they exploit to earn a living (ILO, 2014; UN, 2016; ICA, 2017). For instance, while Savings and Credit Co-operative Societies (SACCOS) enable their members' access to monetary investment, agricultural and marketing cooperatives (AMCOS) support farmers to inputs needed to grow crops and keep livestock, and help them produce, transport and market their harvest (Chambo, 2016). Likewise, consumer co-operatives make it promising for their members and the society at large to get good quality family purchases like food, clothing, and other goods at reasonable prices. Such facilities help pull members out of difficult lives (Cronan, 2017).

Agricultural cooperatives are well known for their deficiency reduction efforts: In Tanzania for example, it was found that enhanced co-operative marketing of agricultural yields like milk and coffee has meant that co-operative members can afford fees for education of their children (Bee and Anania, 2017); in Egypt, 4 million farmers stem income from marketing agricultural

harvest through agricultural marketing co-operatives (ILO 2014; ICA 2015; Chambo 2016); and in Ethiopia, 900,000 individuals in the agricultural sector are projected to produce greatest of their income through their co-operatives (UN, 2017). Co-operatives societies are indispensable for socio-economic expansion as through co-operatives members can be able to discourse numerous evolving problems and use the existing opportunities. Furthermore, co-operatives generate jobs for the public. Findings in Table 1 indicate data on global employments created by co-operatives.

**Table 1: Co-operative employment numbers worldwide by continent and category**

Continent	Category 1 Employees	Category 2 Worker-members	Category 3 Producer-members (including their employees when data was available)	Total
Europe	4,627, 853	1,231,102	10,132,252	15,99,207
Africa	1,467,914	237	5,715,212	7,183,363
Asia	7,734,113	8,200,505	204,749,940	220,684,558
Americas	1,762,797	1,409,609	3,038,249	6,220,654
Oceania	26,038	No data	34,592	60,630
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,618,715</b>	<b>10,841,452</b>	<b>223,680,245</b>	<b>250,140,412</b>

**Source:** Roelants *et al.*, (2014)

The prevalence of unemployment problems amongst youth for example especially in the rural and urban areas is not only affecting specific lives, but also the society as a whole. Development encounters can be answered effectively only by forming non-agricultural employment potentials through the creation of modest businesses not only farming built but also non-farming industries and services. This measure can be termed as co-operative mechanization which supports to reduce the degree of population involved in farming through generating new employment opportunities both in non-farming businesses, and service sectors, with prominence on the role and segment of the processing, marketing and supply co-operatives (ILO, 2014). This is only conceivable through concrete research findings on the feasibility in different production settings.

It has been documented that since 2000, the East African block has executed numerous local, national, regional and global improvement plans, among them national development visions, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to help overcome regional and individual Partner State operational challenges and emphasis being on sustainable development (ICA, 2017; Cronan, 2017; Chambo, 2016). The accumulated familiarity and knowledge gained under the MDGs and other initiatives has situated the EAC well for creating motivated, yet attainable, descendant agenda. The level of determination echoed in and evolving agenda need to be harmonized by its resources of execution. This is only likely if lessons learnt and experiences gained are well documented whereas answers to the encounters are researched and being used in the sustainable agenda accordingly.

### 3.2. The Co-operative Development Challenges in Africa

The literature acknowledge that, formal Co-operatives arose transversely in Europe during the first part of 1800s after people looking for substitutes for the punitive capitalist realisms of the Industrial Revolution in rappings of unemployment, shortage of goods and services, high prices, low admittance to credit, sale of impure goods and general poverty (Chambo 2016; Bee, 2014). Greatest of these circumstances continue in many countries today. In South Africa for example, the post-apartheid Government embraced Co-operatives as one of its approaches to craft decent jobs, create viable livelihoods and also reallocate economic welfares to the wider population to push back the boundaries of poverty and distribution of wealth in a country confronted with extraordinary levels of unemployment, poverty and discrimination touching millions of people

particularly Africans, women, youth, the disabled and rural populations (ICA 2018; Cronan, 2017; ILO, 2014). It has been contended that the ancient growth of Co-operatives in most developing countries particularly in Africa is knotted to the colonization course for the accomplishment of three main goals, namely to: (i) output growth of the target enterprise, essentially export crops; (ii) escalation of proceeds of the members of Co-operatives and their ability to pay taxes to the colonial state; and, (iii) upsurge the creation and pool of raw materials to energize industrialization of the colonizing countries. Co-operatives were consequently, from the very foundation, used as tools to attend the cosmopolitan centers in the North instead of their individual members within the cultural and economic world order in which the North controls and exploits the South (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

Basing on the presented development challenges, the governments, change partners, private sector and civil society are called upon to fast-track their support towards the advancement of Co-operatives as viable enterprises (ICA, 2016). A difference is made amongst the notions of enterprise development *per se* and development of sustainable entities. Customary standpoints describe enterprises as trade organizations with “direct input-output relationships concentrated exclusively on maximizing short term economic value” (ILO, 2010). Sustainable enterprises are defined as social and economic entities that balance their development on social, economic and environmental pillars based on thoughtful that business succeeds best in the long term where society and the environment prospers as a result of accountable use of resources to meet the requirements of the current without conceding the ability of forthcoming generations to meet their needs (ILO, 2010). The majority of societies in Africa depend on commercial organizations that could be categorized as small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs) that function in the private sector, including Co-operatives which are quickly escalating (ILO, 2016).

Furthermore, the capability of co-operatives in Africa and particularly in Tanzania to successfully contribute to the realization of the SDGs is limited by a number of factors. The challenge of business atmosphere for example with respects to co-operative policies, co-operative laws and co-operative support institutions are still not entirely favourable to the occurrence and appropriate operational function of sincere, legitimately controlled and economically feasible cooperatives. Considerable development has been made in the areas since the mid-1990s, but in particular cases, liberalization may have gone too far, and expose members and cooperative leaders to deceptions (UN, 2017; ILO. 2017). In SACCOS for example members have continually be seeing their societies as a place of last resort when they have problems instead of building coop societies as their own financial institutions (Chambo, 2016). As a result, in some cases members are colluding with leaders to jeopardize the essence of coops existence which in turn could have pushed the implementation of the SDGs.

**Management:** in settings where co-operative members are consumers, farmers, workers, fishers, casual economy operators and artisans who are not essentially managers of their own organization. Smaller co-operatives cannot afford to employ qualified managers and need thus depend on the abilities of elected leaders, who may surpass in their trade but have never seen a balance sheet. This is the opposite of the award of democratic management, which needs to be addressed through training, education, and suitable advisory and support services (ILO, 2017).

**Size:** where rationally cooperatives must be large enough to grasp the economic break-even point, and small adequate to permit different members to profoundly participate. The ideal size of a cooperative is consequently dictated by economic factors (financial coops may reach the break-even point earlier than, for instance, marketing coops) and social and societal factors; the latter also clarify why co-operatives are extra effective in certain African communities than in others. Appropriately and democratically controlled perpendicular structures may resolve the predicament of the “optimal size” (Schwettmann, 2014).

Flexibility: The SDG implementation necessitates collaboration, but not automatically formal, listed, well-developed cooperatives. In the current state, numerous fascinating instances of applying cooperative principles can be used in labour contracting, establishment of business services, electricity supply, software design; waste management, crop processing and exporting and micro-insurance which might be supported out by establishments that are not essentially called cooperatives. Cooperatives must stay true to their values while regulating to realisms of a fluctuating world (McKinsey & Company 2012).

Innovation: cooperatives are further predominant in traditional sectors of national economies, such as marketable farming, retail supply and finance. The contemporary economy, which is mainly online-based, necessitates novel methods of cooperatives. Alternatively, cooperative-type open source undertakings such as Wikipedia, Mozilla and Linux, have been very effective; new form of cooperatives have arose in the ecological sphere, such as green energy production or waste reprocessing cooperatives. More is necessary to revolutionize new products so that coops can move with the science and technological advancement (UN, 2017).

### 3.4 Need for Research in Co-operative Development

Researches indicate that Co-operatives scenery in Africa is spotted with highlands of prosperous co-operatives beneath which lie thousands of Co-operatives that have perished with expectations of people with several others staggering laterally between life and death hanging on supports held by their Governments, donors and NGOs (Goran, 2013, Ignace, 2009, COPAC, 2008). Furthermore, the literature acknowledge that no much precise research occurred on the co-operative segment in Africa before 2004 when ILO, ICA, DfID and the World Bank assisted a series of studies relatively as part of the Global Co-operative Movement counter to Poverty (ILO, 2014; ICA, 2015; DfID, 2015). The Co-operative sector in Africa was branded as being data-deficient since scholars have to continuously search for extra guarantee on the existing data and citations, knowing that several of the listed Co-operatives are inactive and recognizing that many do not pursue registration or look for refuge in other legal or *de factor* forms of officialdoms (Develtere, & Wanyama, 2017; Rwekaza, 2018). It is however remarkable that the mission was on the involvement of Co-operatives to macro development issues such as employment formation, poverty lessening, social security, giving voice to the poor, and representation, leaving out environmental protection, gender and health for concrete explanations (Develtere & Pollet, 2016).

Studies on co-operatives also note that it is unexpected that very minute works on African Co-operatives has been produced since the early 1990s notwithstanding the ongoing discussion in favour of Co-operatives as the most appropriate form of institutions for alleviating most socio-economic problems on the continent (Wanyama, *et al.*, 2009). While there are current research studies on Co-operatives and socio-economic change that are relatively part of the Global Co-operative Movement against economic development, it is established that these readings are far from being comprehensive and recommend additional research on the ground as research data in this area is particularly difficult to obtain (Pollet, 2018). The undertaking of these preceding studies was on the impact of Co-operatives to macro development issues (Chambo, 2016).

It is also acknowledged that, notwithstanding numerous obstacles that challenged over time, Co-operatives endure to be the business entities of choice in numerous African countries for many people who want to fulfill their collective wishes by maximizing on economies of scale and the collaborations that ascends from shared deeds (ILO, 2017; Grant & Osanloo, 2014). An imperative dimension of the influence of cooperative enterprises to sustainable development has been recognized in the global discussions on sector growth and employment and on the role of cooperatives in increasing social security to the informal. Stimulating cooperatives, it is noted, could empower farmers to exchange for superior agricultural inputs and yield prices. Certainly,

co-operatives have all along brought to sustainable development, and this support should be more underscored and recognized. Nevertheless, continuous studies are a pre-requisite for the advancement and provision of sustainable Co-operative enterprises around the world and particularly in Africa.

### **3.5 Co-operatives in Achievement of the SDGs**

Whereas the detailed content of the SDGs is being discussed and debated by a wide range of stakeholders, including international organizations, states and civil society organizations, the voices of the co-operative movement are not being heard clearly. Consequently, their involvement in the process of developing SDGs has yet to reach its full potential (UNGA, 2012). The invisibility of co-operatives is most probably due to a lack of understanding of the actual and empirical evidence documented on the potential contribution of co-operatives to sustainable development, partly due to the disparate nature of the literature on this subject (Develtere, *et al.*, 2007).

Furthermore, as organizations that are value-based and principle driven, co-operative are by origin supposed to be viable and participatory forms of business. They domicile prominence on job security and better-quality work settings, pay reasonable wages, encourage surplus income through profit-sharing and sharing of dividends, and provision of public services such as health clinics and schools (Birchall, 2013). Cooperatives nurture autonomous, knowledge and practices; and social enclosure, making them well-placed to support the attainment of sustainable development.

Henceforth, cooperatives are better-placed to contribute to sustainable development's threefold directed to economic, social and environmental purposes and above the governance agenda, not least since they are organizations that attempt to help members by sustaining their socio-cultural welfares and caring the environment. They offer a substitute prototypical kind of enterprise, with assistances to sustainable development well further than job creation (ILO, 2017; Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Since cooperatives' share in Gross Domestic product (GDP) and full entities is reasonably small in almost all African countries currently, the spread and development of cooperatives could be an imperative device for realizing the SDGs. Sustainability is acknowledged as one of the five stakes of the International Co-operative Alliance's (ICA) Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade, which aims to place cooperatives as producers of economic, social and environmental sustainability by 2020 (ICA, 2014). This is only possible if more and more researches are done in the different aspects of co-operative enterprises that exist but also fastening those that has not been focused upon.

### **4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the reviewed literature it can be concluded that, the numerous illustrations enumerated and opinions established in this paper undoubtedly validate that research have a pronounced role to play in co-operative improvement and can make significant, if not exclusive contributions to the achievement of the economic magnitudes of the Sustainable Development Goals. It would be a mistake not to connect the potential of such an influential, extensive and comprehensive movement. Additionally, it would be similarly incorrect to praise cooperatives as a dream solution to every problem in the world. Co-operatives are, in most cases, not the merely answer, and not in every situation are they the best. Sustainable development requires a well-governed state, a resilient and accountable private sector, a persuasive and inclusive civil society, a compassionate global corporation, and an energetic social economy, as well as cooperatives. All these should contribute its distinct relative benefit to collectively work towards the implementation of the SDGs. It is recommended that, co-operatives should concentrate their efforts towards those ends and targets for which they are superlatively appropriate. In so doing they should fetch to the stall their major relative benefits, i.e. their dualism as associations and businesses, and the complimentarily of their threefold role: the

economic role, the social role, and the societal role. All these are possible through sound research to realize the implementation of SDGs.

## REFERENCES

- Bee, F. K & Anania, P. (2017). Emerging and future global trends and the position of African Co-operatives in improving members' wellbeing. *Journal of Co-operative Management*, 3(2):75-91.
- Birchall, J. (2003). *Rediscovering the Co-operative Advantage: Poverty Reduction through Self-help*, ILO, Geneva.39pp.
- Birchall, J. (2004). Co-operatives and the Millennium Development Goals. ILO, Geneva.
- Birchall, J. (2008). *Co-operative principles Ten Years On*. In Review of International Co-operation, Volume 98 No. 2 of 2008. 76pp.
- Brondizo, E., Leemans, R., & Solecki, W. (2014). Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability. Texas, U.S.A.: Elsevier Press Inc. [http:// dx.doi.org/ 10.1016/j.cosust.2014.11.002](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2014.11.002) CC BY-NC-SALicense (accessed 2016 January 26)
- Chambo, S. Mwangi, M. & Oloo, O. (2016). "An Analysis of the Socio-economic Impact of Cooperatives in Africa and Their Institutional Context, ICA Regional Office for Africa, Nairobi, 33pp.
- Develtere, P. & Pollet, I. (2017). "Renaissance of African cooperatives in the Reinventing the wheel?: African cooperatives in a liberalized economic environment in the 21st century: lessons from the field", in Develtere *et al.*, eds, Cooperating out of Poverty:
- Develtere, P. (2014). "Cooperative development in Africa up to the 1990s", in P. Develtere, I. Pollet F. Wanyama, eds., Cooperating Out of Poverty: The Renaissance of the African Cooperative Movement, ILO, Geneva, 23pp.
- Develtere, P., Pollet, I. & Wanyama, F. (eds). (2017). *Cooperating out of Poverty: the Renaissance of the African Cooperative Movement*. ILO & The World Bank Institute, Geneva.18 pp.
- Grant, C. & Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, Selecting, and Integrating a Theoretical Framework in Dissertation Research: Creating the Blueprint for 'House'. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice and Research*, Pp. 12-22 DOI: 10.5929/2014.4.2.9.
- Krainovich, M. (2010). Understanding Research Findings. IN LoBiondo-Wood, G. & Haber, J. (Eds). *Nursing Research: Methods and Critical Appraisal for Evidence Based Practice* (7th Edition). St. Louis MO: Mosby Elsevier.
- McKinsey & Company. (2012). *Mc Kinsey on Cooperatives*. Montreal: McKinsey & Company, 12pp.
- Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, Selecting, and Integrating A Theoretical Framework In Dissertation Research: Creating The Blueprint For Your "House". *Urban Review*, 13(2), 65-71.
- Schwettmann, Jürgen. "Youth Cooperatives in Serbia." In *Youth Reinventing Cooperatives*, by Ian, *et.al. MacPherson*, 115-118. Victoria, Canada: BCICS, University of Victoria, 2005, 22pp.
- Schwettmann, Jürgen. *Cooperatives and Structural Adjustment in Africa*. Geneva: ILO, 1996. 15pp
- Schwettmann, Jürgen. *Cooperatives in Africa - Success and Challenges*. Geneva: ILO, 2014. 47pp.
- Sinclair M. (2007). Editorial: A Guide to Understanding Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks. *Evidence Based Midwifery* 5(2): 39.