

**THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
OF ILORIN EMIRATE SINCE
THE 20TH CENTURY**

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Published by
CENTRE FOR ILORIN STUDIES (CILS)
UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, ILORIN
©2017CE/1438AH
2017

ISBN: 978-978-55480-3-7

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Printed by:
UNILORIN PRESS

CHAPTER 8

AL-BURHAN MULTIPURPOSE COOPERATIVE SOCIETY: ISLAMIC MICROFINANCE AND THE WELFARE OF MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of poverty occupies a central position in efforts being made by scholars, international development bodies and policy makers to understand the structure of economic and social relations (Green & Hulme, 2005). The deteriorating social and economic development problems faced by Muslims in different parts of the globe today raise new questions as well as expectations about cooperative societies for growth and development (Basant, 2007; Owojori & Oladejo, 2009; Patel, 2013; Peach, 2006). According to Sinclair (2001); Kempson, Whyley, Caskey, & Collard, 2000), one of the major reasons for social and economic inequality is financial exclusion. Consequently, there is a growing interest among Muslim economists about the potential of cooperative societies in economic development as well as in improving welfare (Dogarawa, 2005; ICA, 2010). While a cooperative society can be regarded as a business establishment that is owned and controlled by the people who use its services such as savings and credit facility for a shared benefit (Mustafa, 2015), welfare refers to a set of specialised programmes and services designed to meet income security, social services and related needs of persons who are unable to provide for their own basic needs (Estes, 2004).

The assumption of cooperative societies is that the intervention will change the welfare of members in terms of access to more income leading to overall socio-economic well-being. According to Human Development Report (2005), in order to assess improvement of welfare through microfinance loan acquisition which most cooperative societies often engage in, various variables such as household income, women

empowerment, improved education, healthcare, poverty reduction, the number of small business and consumption should be taken into consideration.

With cooperative societies, the middle-class and the less-privileged have an opportunity to change their lives with access to capital. Indeed, the microfinance found within cooperative societies is widely acclaimed as a novel approach to alleviate poverty and increase social solidarity (Dusuki, 2011). The emergence of Islamic model of cooperative society in many Muslim countries, on its part, has introduced Islamic products and finances to aid the welfare of their members (Mustafa, Abdulsalam, & Abdul, 2015).

The Cooperative Society sub-sector in some Muslim countries has grown over the past three decades by encouraging sustainable entrepreneurial development and economic empowerment as well as enhancing social security, social inclusion and community-building (ICA, 2010; D. A. Mustafa et al., 2015). Such Islamic cooperative societies in Nigeria including Al-Burhan Multipurpose Cooperative located in the University of Ilorin, a second generation Nigerian University which was established in 1975, are concerned with much more than just refraining from interest, they are enterprises that aim at making significant contributions to the socio-economic well-being of their members.

The present study on Al-Burhan Multipurpose Cooperative Society of the University of Ilorin is to examine the effect of that specific Islamic cooperative society on the welfare of its members within the University of Ilorin Muslim Community. This study attempts to answer the question: What is the influence of Al-Burhan Multipurpose Cooperative Society on the welfare of its members in the Muslim Community of the University of Ilorin?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have been undertaken on the role of cooperative societies in economic development. Sakai (2010) conducted a study on women's views of the business practices of Islamic saving and credit

cooperative in Central Java, Indonesia. Ebrahim (2009) conducted a study on whether Islamic model of housing finance cooperative can elevate the economic status of the underprivileged. Owojori & Oladejo (2009) carried out a study on re-engineering cooperative societies for sustainable small and medium business growth and development in Nigeria and Musafiri & Ganesan(2009) conducted a study on repayment behaviour in credit and savings cooperative societies in rural Rwanda. The study through an empirical and theoretical approach investigated evidence showing repayment behaviour of loans in rural Rwanda.

The idea that cooperative organisations play important roles in market economies as a consequent of their values and principles have also been identified. According to Novkovic (2008), some of the roles played by cooperative organisations are: to internalize market externalities, to serve as laboratories for social innovation, to espouse social entrepreneurship, to promote ethical business practices, and to aid in development. Whyman (2012) on the other hand, examined the evolution of economic thoughts on cooperatives since 1776. Whyman noted that the development of cooperatives has been affected and influenced by ideas and conceptions first developed by mainstream economics, yet it is usually claimed that there is a lack of engagement (or misconception) among economic analysts relating to the points of interest and difficulties posed by cooperative associations. However, Whyman observed that a more extensive point of view shows that whatever separation between the economic profession and the cooperative organization may exist today, there has surely been a close relationship all through the vast majority of their shared history.

Carruthers, Crowell, & Novkovic(2008)discussed about the tradeoffs between co-operative principles and pressures of global competition on cooperative associations. Theyidentified a typology of international cooperative firms and clarified the conditions under which co-operative forms of organization may have a competitive advantage over capital-owned global firms. In the same work, Carruthers, Crowell, & Novkovic also re-examine the co-operative principles and values and argue that these principles can provide guidance, or be a hindrance to growth and success of cooperative organisations, based on the type of global cooperative and type of international linkages these organisations wish to

establish. They concluded that depending on the paths of expansion of a cooperative organisation, abiding by the principles may be a very good strategy for entry into the global markets.

Van Oorschot, de Hoog, van der Steen, & van Twist (2013) added an important angle to the discourse on cooperative associations by proposing an analytical model for co-operatives that takes into consideration the unique position cooperatives play between the public, private and civic sphere. They went further to suggest that the economic capacity, the organizing capacity and aiming for change are the necessary foundational pillars of co-operative organizations. Van Oorschot, de Hoog, van der Steen, & van Twist noted that these three pillars can offer a common foundation for all the different types of co-operatives.

Mustafa et al. (2015) conducted a study on cooperatives in Muslim countries and proposed ways in which cooperative societies in the Muslim world can explore Islamic finance in order to ensure sustainable development. Oladosu (2012) researched into the formation, philosophy and growth of Al-Muminat Cooperative Society in the University of Ilorin which can be regarded as the model cooperative society to Al-Burhan Cooperative Society within the University community.

PURPOSE

The objectives of the study are to (1) determine the influence of Al-Burhan Multipurpose Cooperative Society on the welfare of Muslim Community in University of Ilorin, Nigeria; (2) provide insight into the relevance of Islamic Cooperative Society to the Community Muslims; and how it could lead to poverty alleviation; (3) help Islamic cooperative societies with Sharia-compliant goals to understand their role in the welfare of their members; (4) enhance their service towards improving members' well-being by re-evaluating their Islamic finance facilities; (5) enable government to assess the extent to which loans and other financial services are accessible to the people and make appropriate policies that can encourage the establishment of cooperatives in the country; (6) contribute to a deeper understanding of the Islamic finance trends in the Nigerian economy; (7) and add value to non-profit organisations such as the NGOs working with Muslim communities in

order to reduce inequality. (8) Add to the wealth of knowledge that exists within the academic community, thereby, stimulate further research with regard to Islamic financial practices in other sectors of the economy.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

The study is premised on four theories which explain the concept of cooperative microfinance. The first is the Neoclassical Economic Growth model developed by Robert Solow and Trevor Swan which emphasizes the importance of saving and investing in order for an economy to grow faster (Wesson, 2007). It states that poor nations have a small capital stock per capital while a high saving rate substantially increases investment and growth (Schlefer, 2012).

The second theory is the Welfarist Theory which explains credit as an instrument that can be used to reduce poverty. It promotes reaching out to the poor who are often seen as less accessible and riskier and attempt to improve their wellbeing in terms of skills training and teaching of literacy and numeracy, health, nutrition and family planning (Omeje, 2014). This theory allows credit for poor borrowers most times below market interest rates. The main focus of the theory is to get to the poor with credit in order for them to overcome poverty and gain empowerment (Robinson, 2001). This also accounts for why microfinance institutions performance are measured through studies on the living conditions of the individuals; a number of saving accounts, number of loans, productivity improvement, incomes, capital accumulation, social services such as education and health as well as food security (Zeller & Sharma, 2000).

The third theory that describes the importance and need of microfinance is the Uniting Theory of microfinance. It explains the importance of joint liability. The idea of joint liability has been noted to be very helpful in alleviating the major issues faced by lenders. If a borrower, for instance, is unable to repay a loan, other members are contractually required to repay instead. This can be done through the threat of common punishment such as the denial of future credit or by drawing from the group savings funds that serve as collateral (Ghatak & Guinnane, 1999).

The fourth theory is the Empowerment Theory. It is an attempt to link mental health to communal help and the struggle to create a responsive community. It is also viewed as "an intentional ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources" (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment theory in relation to microfinance is a way in which people are supported to grow and start a business. It gives people control over their lives and opportunity of democratic participation in their community through a critical understanding of their environment (Rappaport, 1987; Zimmerman, M. A., Israel, B. A., Schulz, A., & Checkoway, 1992).

THE CONCEPT OF COOPERATIVE SOCIETY

The cooperative society as we know it today emerged in the nineteenth century, with self-help businesses set up by people so that they could secure access to goods and services which they could not afford individually (Birchall, 1997; Ridley-Duff & Bull, 2011). It is an autonomous association of persons who are united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise (ICA, 1995). Members of these early cooperative societies thus gained control over their lives through collective self-help (Woodin, Crook, & Carpentier, 2010).

There is growing contemporary interest in how enterprises based on cooperative values and principles can help to meet needs relating to the welfare of members and in addressing the issue of poverty particularly in Africa (Develtere, Pollet, & Wanyama, 2008; Gicheru & M'Imanyara, 2012; Pollet, 2009). The first successful modern type of cooperative was set up by the Rochdale Pioneers in 1844 and became the basis for cooperatives globally (Birchall, 1997; International Co-operative Alliance, 2003). Cooperative business dealings are driven by specific values and principles set at an international level and overseen by the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). This article is concerned with cooperative tradition operating within the context of Islamic values and principles in

relation to the welfare of public civil servants who are its members. We examine Al-Burhan Multipurpose Cooperative Society which was established in the year 2004 in respect to the welfare of its members in the University of Ilorin by looking at how the welfare of those members has been taken into consideration through the provision of Islamic microfinance facilities.

THE CONCEPT OF WELFARE

The concept of welfare can be related to ideas derived from a number of disciplines and fields of study such as management studies, environmental studies, social sciences, public finance, and philosophy. This shows that the idea of welfare cannot be strictly based on just one discipline (Greve, 2008; Walker, 2005). Furthermore, welfare is also seen as an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of experiences, policies, and situations. It also refers to the idea of the well-being of people in a civil society (Hanmer & Hearn, 1999). Welfare in neo-classical economics refers to the utilities or pleasure generated by market-based exchanges. In philosophy, it is regarded as an ethical principle. In political science, welfare is believed to be the focus of the political organisation. In the field of social work and policy arena, welfare refers to social problems and the effectiveness of social institutions and other organised responses to need (Daly, 2013).

MICROFINANCE, ISLAMIC MICROFINANCE & PRODUCTS

Microfinance aims at improving the living standard of people and fight against poverty. The proponents of microfinance movement are of the opinion that it is a way of reducing poverty, boosting schooling levels and creating millions of small businesses (Gibbons & Kasim, 1990). Microfinance is a kind of financial service of a considerable amount provided by financial institutions to the poor (Sarkar & Dhar, 2011). Such services may include saving, credit, insurance, equity transaction, leasing, among others. These services are often provided in order for the customers to meet their financial obligations in terms of economic opportunity and emergency (Dasgupta & Rao, 2003). The financial services

and products provided by microfinance institutions are often found in rural and semi-urban areas.

Islamic microfinance is based on the operational format of conventional microfinance, however, the orientation in Islamic microfinance is towards Islamic principles and values. Islamic microfinance institutions may generate funds from Waqf and Zakat and may also go further by generating funds through non-interest-bearing financial instruments such as *qard al-hassan* (benevolence loan), *murabaha* (cost plus sale), *musharaka* (partnership), *Salam* financing (Al-Harran & Se, 2008). Islamic microfinance relies more on the spirit of brotherhood, cooperation and mutual help in dealing with defaulters. Through the Islamic microfinance system, Islam offers mechanisms for redistribution of income and wealth and enhancement of social inclusion, so that every Muslim is guaranteed a fair standard of living (Metwally, 1997).

It is expected that an Islamic cooperative society like Al-Burhan should make use of the existing model of Islamic microfinance practices, with activities carried out in such a way that it does not conflict with the principles of Islam since Islamic cooperative society has the same purpose as conventional cooperative societies except that it operates in accordance with Islamic rules on business dealings.

UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The University of Ilorin was established in 1975 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Ever since its establishment, the University has had a vibrant Muslim Community comprising both staff and students. According to R.A. Raji, a Professor of Arabic and former Chief Imam of the University Muslim Community, the University of Ilorin Muslim Community is the first community in Ilorin to establish a regular Jumat Prayer outside the Emir's Palace (Oladosu, 2009). The University of Ilorin Muslim Community also promotes the message of Islam at the University and beyond.

The Community provides many socio-spiritual services to its members and other Muslims such as conducting marriages and naming of newborns in accordance with established principles and practices of Islam. The staff

and student wings of the Muslim Community have over the years, introduced much more programmes such as varieties of public lectures, Arabic and fiqh classes, jihad week, Quran Recitation Competition and Children Party among many others.

The University of Ilorin Muslim Community provides worship services and religious support for the University's Muslim population as well as educational programs about Islam. The University encourages and fosters a strong and growing Muslim community. It is part and parcel of the Islamic tradition that imbues the Muslim Community to learn and live in an environment committed to intellectual freedom, religious pluralism and cultural diversity. The Community was founded to serve the spiritual and academic needs of Muslim students and staff, and, most importantly, to foster feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood amongst each other. The result is a vibrant and inclusive society which is based on our mutual beliefs and strengthened by friendship.

As one of the city's oldest and most renowned university, the University is dedicated to supporting and encouraging Muslim students and staff on campus through counseling and programming to benefit the community at large. It fosters a welcoming environment for all those who call themselves Muslim without distinction. The University of Ilorin Muslim Community can be regarded as a valuable asset to the university's community.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at the University of Ilorin for a period of four (4) months from January 2016 to April 2016. The research was conducted by selecting members of the Muslim community working in the University and who are also members of Al-Burhan Multipurpose Cooperative Society. The study stages comprised the planning of the study, preliminary study, field study, and writing of the research report. Since it is a qualitative study and for efficiency, the participants of the study were five (5) members (2 officials and 3 ordinary members). The criteria for selecting the participants were: All participants must be the staff of the university, they must have been members of Al-Burhan for average five years; and the

selected members must have used at least two financial services of Al-Burhan well as still remain active members of the cooperative.

The researchers were participant-observers at a general meeting of Al-Burhan and interviewed members on why they joined the cooperative, the financial products they are aware of, a financial product of Al-Burhan they have participated in, how has the financial products and services impacted on their economic, health, education and social status. On the side of officials of Al-Burhan, they were interviewed on when and why Al-Burhan was established, the cooperative financial products, products most patronized, challenges faced by the cooperative and the Islamic microfinance facilities provided.

The data collected were analysed using the descriptive qualitative method. The description is meant to explain the whole process of gathering the data. The qualitative method was meant to help make it clear what the researchers had wanted to establish as regards Al-Burhan services and welfare of members of the Cooperative based on observation and direct interaction with the participants of the study rather than using statistical measurements.

The instruments for the structured interviews were designed and developed strictly to elicit reactions in connection to Al-Burhan services and welfare of members of the Cooperative. The researchers believe that one of the drawbacks of self revealing (especially by officials) of Al-Burhan activities is the danger of advertising (i.e. blowing one's trumpet), as such, inquiries were open-ended to avoid biasing the responses. Likewise, the inquiries were phrased to give respondents the leeway to discuss their welfare in relation to their being a member of the Cooperative. The questions were also concise and straight to the point.

FINDINGS

The result of the interviews with the respondents indicated that the services provided by Al-Burhan have affected their welfare positively. They have been able to use the funds given to them to purchase things they need. For instance, a respondent stated *I used it to buy a car*. Most

respondents were able to use the funds provided to them for improving their standard of living. According to one of the respondents, *beneficiaries sign loan bond with which they promise to use the loan for what they declared as the purpose of the loan*. In addition, annual loans are provided during Muslim festive periods and commodity loan which is available throughout the year.

It was also discovered that many of the members joined Al-Burhan because it is a non-interest cooperative and because they try to abide by the dos and don'ts based on Islamic principles. A respondent stated *they don't add interest to what you pay back*, and according to another respondent who is also an officer of Al-Burhan, the cooperative society was able to *bring back Muslim brothers and sisters from their membership of the predominant conventional interest-based cooperative societies on the University of Ilorin campus*. The practices of the conventional cooperative, the respondent noted, are *in strong opposition to the commandments of Allah*. Even though the predominant members of Al-Burhan are Muslims there are close to two percent non-Muslim members. The cooperative is able to run its activities and secretariat by charging members a flat rate of two hundred naira monthly.

The study also found that majority of Al-Burhan members make use of only the savings and interest-free loan facilities (*qardulhasan*) of the cooperative. A slightly higher number of members make use of the *murabaha* (cost plus markup pricing). According to the respondent, *the Cooperative sponsor project with ten percent profit*. The *Murabaha* facility is provided throughout the year but it has more variety of commodities during the eid celebrations. It often serves as an opportunity for Al-Burhan to gain more funds into its purse and also for members to meet their immediate welfare need during the celebration period. However, the majority of the members are not aware of other Islamic microfinance facilities that can be provided by Al-Burhan. A respondent mentioned that *no documents are given to members to introduce them to Islamic microfinance products*. It was also discovered that this may be due to the fact that there are few Islamic cooperatives around to compare notes with. Also, another major reason is that there is still room

for improvement in terms of records keeping and computerisation of the financial transaction of the cooperative.

In terms of the strength of Al-Burhan, responses from the interviews show that positive impacts have been made in the areas of welfare of members. Some of the respondents have been able to accomplish capital projects such as buying personal cars, acquiring lands, building their personal residence among others. Also membership of the Cooperative is also growing because conscious Muslims see it as an alternative to many interest-based cooperatives found in the University. Also many members have had the opportunity to acquire additional degrees as a result of the loan provided by Al-Burhan. In addition, the Cooperative have strengthened the bond among members from different departments both academic and non-academic staff. In other words, Al-Burhan have succeeded in promoting the Islamic spirit and brotherhood among members from different backgrounds and departments within the University.

When asked of issues they would want addressed by Al-Burhan the respondents identified lack of awareness about Islamic microfinance products and low level of concerns about the activities of the Cooperative by some members. There are areas pointed out by respondents that Al-Burhan can improve upon such as devoting more time to create awareness about Islamic microfinance products and services which can help improve the welfare of members. Also, more openness should be shown in the operations and activities of the Cooperative. While these come across as reasonable expectations, it will be worthwhile to note the dangers of not providing them. Among the dangers is that Al-Burhan may lose patronage and supports of members. In addition, inadequate service delivery will affect the welfare and satisfaction of members of the Cooperative.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Al-Burhan Multipurpose Cooperative Society has a profound influence on the welfare of its members in the Muslim Community of the University of Ilorin and the influence extends to non-

Muslim members of the University Community. The services provided by Al-Burhan constitute critical interventions in areas of basic survival needs which are as varied as transportation needs to nutritional needs thereby alleviating and indeed erasing aspects of poverty.

In the light of these revelations, Islamic cooperative societies can draw lessons from this study which can be used to critically evaluate their Islamic finance facilities and better understand their responsibility of catering for the welfare of their members as micro-finance entities. Similarly, all levels of government in Nigeria and deprived communities in Africa can benefit from this modest effort to redirect micro-finance funds to those in critical need by providing loans and other micro-financial services through cooperative societies. Such services, if strengthened with policies, could expand the provision of capital-intensive yet critical basic needs of the citizenry such as shelter. Non-profit organisations such as the NGOs working with Muslim communities can also benefit from this study in their effort to strategise on the reduction of poverty and inequality.

This study has shown that members of Al-Burhan Cooperative Society constitute a significant community within Ilorin city, as it has given a direction on what the trend should be in terms of availability and usage of Islamic microfinance facilities. This effect of taking a cue from Al-Burhan will be enhancement of the services of other Islamic Cooperative societies toward improving the welfare of their members. This study has presented the Islamic microfinance trends in the University of Ilorin and attempted to stimulate further research on Islamic microfinance practices in other sectors within Ilorin in particular and Sub-Saharan communities in general.

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