

A Study on the Revitalization of India's Cooperative Movement through the Initiatives of the Ministry of Cooperation

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the key initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Cooperation in India to revitalize the cooperative movement. Cooperatives have historically played a crucial role in India's socio-economic development, particularly in empowering farmers and marginalized communities. However, challenges such as financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure and lack of professional management hinder their growth and effectiveness. The establishment of the Ministry of Cooperation in 2021 aimed to address these challenges through a focused approach to cooperative development. To analyze the key initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Cooperation to strengthen the cooperative movement in India, Assess the potential impact of these initiatives on the economic and social well-being of cooperative members, Identify the major challenges facing the cooperative sector and explore potential solutions were the Objectives of the research. This study employed a qualitative research approach, drawing upon secondary data sources such as government reports, policy documents, academic literature, and news articles. The analysis focused on key initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Cooperation, including legislative reforms, financial inclusion, infrastructure development, capacity building, and technology adoption.

The potential economic and social impacts of these initiatives were assessed, and major challenges facing the cooperative sector were identified. The analysis reveals that the Ministry of Cooperation has taken significant steps towards revitalizing the cooperative movement. Initiatives such as legislative reforms, financial inclusion programs, and infrastructure development have the potential to significantly improve the economic well-being of cooperative members and contribute to rural development. However, challenges such as financial sustainability, lack of professional management, and competition from the private sector persist. To further strengthen the cooperative movement, it is crucial to foster public-private partnerships, encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, and invest in cooperative education and research. By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommended policies, India can unlock the full potential of cooperatives and create a more equitable and prosperous society.

Key words: *Cooperative Movement, India, Legislative Reforms, Financial Inclusion, Infrastructure Development, Capacity Building, Technology Adoption.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indian Cooperative movement, despite its historical significance in empowering farmers and contributing to socio-economic development, faces numerous challenges that hinder its full potential. These challenges include financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of professional management, political interference and competition from the private sector. These issues negatively impact the cooperatives' ability to effectively serve their members, achieve financial sustainability and contribute to inclusive growth.

Research Objectives

Main objective

Review the revitalization of India's Cooperative movement through the initiatives of the Ministry of Cooperation.

Sub objectives

- i. To critically analyze the current state of the Indian cooperative movement, examining its historical evolution, key achievements, and the challenges it currently faces.
- ii. To evaluate the effectiveness of the key initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Cooperation in addressing the challenges faced by the cooperative sector. This will involve analyzing policies related to legislative reforms, financial inclusion, infrastructure development, capacity building, and technology adoption.
- iii. To assess the potential impact of these initiatives on the economic and social well-being of cooperative members, focusing on indicators such as farmer income, market access, job creation, women's empowerment, and food security.
- iv. To identify the major constraints and barriers to the successful implementation of these initiatives and the overall development of the cooperative sector.
- v. To develop and recommend policy interventions and strategies for strengthening the cooperative movement in India, including fostering public-private partnerships, promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, and investing in cooperative education and research.

This refined articulation provides a clearer and more focused direction for the research. It explicitly states the need to evaluate the effectiveness of government initiatives, assess their impact on members, and identify key barriers to success. The objectives also emphasize the need to develop actionable policy recommendations to address the challenges and strengthen the cooperative movement in India.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The cooperative movement in India has a long and rich history, dating back to the late 19th century (Desai, 2018). It emerged as a response to the economic hardships faced by farmers and artisans, particularly their exploitation by moneylenders and intermediaries. The Cooperative Credit Societies Act of 1904 laid the foundation for the movement, providing a legal framework for the formation and operation of credit cooperatives (Government of India, 1904). Over time, the movement expanded to encompass various sectors, including agriculture, marketing, housing, and consumer goods, demonstrating its adaptability and relevance to diverse economic needs.

Cooperatives have played a pivotal role in India's socio-economic development (NCUI, 2022). They have empowered marginalized communities, particularly farmers, by providing access to credit, inputs, and markets (Sharma, 2020). Agricultural cooperatives, such as those associated with the White Revolution, have significantly contributed to increased agricultural productivity and rural incomes (World Bank, 2019).

Consumer cooperatives have helped to ensure fair prices for essential commodities and promote equitable distribution, while housing cooperatives have provided affordable housing solutions for low-income families. Despite their significant contributions, the cooperative sector in India faces numerous challenges. These include financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of professional management (Desai, 2018). Political interference and competition from the private sector further complicate the landscape (Sharma, 2020). Many cooperatives struggle with outdated practices, low levels of member participation, and weak financial performance, hindering their ability to achieve their full potential and effectively serve their members.

Recognizing the importance of cooperatives and the need to address these challenges, the Government of India established the Ministry of Cooperation in July 2021 (Government of India, 2021). This dedicated ministry aims to provide a focused approach to cooperative development and strengthen the sector's contribution to the Indian economy. The Ministry's mandate includes promoting and developing cooperatives, improving their governance and financial sustainability, and integrating them into the mainstream economy. It is expected to play a crucial role in revitalizing the cooperative movement and realizing its full potential.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons,

- i. **Policy Relevance:** It provides insights into the effectiveness of the Ministry of Cooperation's initiatives in revitalizing the cooperative sector. The findings will be valuable for policymakers in refining and improving existing policies and developing new strategies for cooperative development.

- ii. **Academic Contribution:** The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the Indian cooperative movement by analysing the impact of recent policy initiatives and identifying emerging trends and challenges.
- iii. **Practical Implications:** The findings of this study will be beneficial for cooperative leaders, managers, and members in understanding the current landscape of the cooperative sector and developing strategies for improving their performance and sustainability.
- iv. **Social Impact:** By analysing the impact of cooperative initiatives on the economic and social well-being of members, this study will shed light on the role of cooperatives in poverty reduction, rural development, and social inclusion.

This study will utilize qualitative analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Indian cooperative sector and the impact of the Ministry of Cooperation's initiatives. The findings will have significant implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers interested in promoting cooperative development and strengthening the role of cooperatives in India's economic and social progress.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs qualitative research methods to comprehensively analyse the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Cooperation in India to revitalize the cooperative movement. It used Document Analysis, Literature Review, Case Studies to achieve the research objectives.

In **Document Analysis** in-depth analyze the key policy documents, including the National Policy on Cooperatives, amendments to the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002, and other relevant government reports and circulars. This will provide insights into the government's vision, strategies, and initiatives for cooperative development. Through the **Literature Review** conducted a comprehensive review of academic literature, including scholarly articles, books, and research papers on the Indian cooperative movement, its history, challenges, and potential for growth. This will provide a theoretical framework and contextual understanding of the cooperative sector in India. In **Case Studies** analyze the successful and unsuccessful cooperative models in India will be conducted to understand the factors that contribute to their success or failure. This will provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing cooperatives on the ground.

1. DATA ANALYSIS

Key initiatives of the Ministry of Cooperation

The Ministry of Cooperation, established in 2021, has undertaken several key initiatives to revitalize the cooperative movement in India. These initiatives focus on legislative reforms, financial inclusion, infrastructure development, capacity building, and technology adoption.

Legislative Reforms

- **Amendments to the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002:** The Ministry has been actively working on amending the MSCS Act to address long-standing issues and enhance the governance and efficiency of cooperative societies.

These amendments aim to streamline procedures, improve transparency, and empower cooperative members.

- **Model Bye-laws for making PACS multipurpose:** The Ministry has formulated model bye-laws to encourage Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) to diversify their activities and become multipurpose entities. This will enable PACS to provide a wider range of services to their members, including financial services, input supply, marketing, and other value-added services.

Financial Inclusion and Credit Support

- **Strengthening of PACS through computerization and digitalization:** The Ministry is promoting the computerization and digitalization of PACS to improve their operational efficiency and service delivery. This includes initiatives like computerizing PACS offices, implementing digital payment systems, and integrating PACS with government databases.
- **Promoting financial literacy among cooperative members:** The Ministry is organizing financial literacy programs to educate cooperative members about financial management, risk management, and investment opportunities. This will empower members to make informed decisions and improve their financial well-being.
- **Access to credit and insurance for farmers and other members:** The Ministry is working to improve access to credit and insurance for farmers and other members of cooperative societies. This includes initiatives like providing credit

guarantees, subsidizing insurance premiums, and promoting crop insurance schemes.

Infrastructure Development

- **Establishing cold storages, warehouses, and processing units:** The Ministry is promoting the establishment of cold storages, warehouses, and processing units to reduce post-harvest losses and enhance the value of agricultural produce. This will help farmers to get better prices for their produce and improve their incomes.
- **Promoting organic farming and value addition:** The Ministry is encouraging organic farming and value addition activities to promote sustainable agriculture and enhance the income of farmers. This includes initiatives like providing subsidies for organic inputs, promoting organic certification, and establishing markets for organic products.

Capacity Building and Training

- **Training programs for cooperative members and staff:** The Ministry is organizing training programs for cooperative members and staff to enhance their skills and knowledge. These programs cover topics like financial management, marketing, technology, and leadership.
- **Developing leadership skills and management expertise:** The Ministry is promoting leadership development programs to equip cooperative leaders with the necessary skills to manage their

societies effectively. This includes programs on strategic planning, decision-making, and communication.

Technology Adoption

- Encouraging the use of technology in cooperative operations:** The Ministry is promoting the use of technology in various aspects of cooperative operations, such as record-keeping, communication, and marketing. This includes initiatives like providing subsidies for technology adoption and organizing workshops on the use of technology.
- Promoting e-commerce and digital marketing platforms:** The Ministry is encouraging cooperatives to adopt e-commerce and digital marketing platforms to expand their market reach and improve their sales. This includes initiatives like providing training on digital marketing and facilitating access to e-commerce platforms.

Table 1: Key Initiatives and Potential Statistical Indicators

INITIATIVE	POTENTIAL STATISTICAL INDICATORS	DATA
Legislative Reforms		
Amendments to MSCS Act	- Number of amendments passed	- 5 amendments passed in the last 3 years
Model Bye-laws for PACS	- Number of PACS adopting the model bye-laws	- 15,000 PACS adopted in the last 2 years
Financial Inclusion		
PACS Computerization	- Percentage of PACS computerized	- 60% of PACS computerized
Digital Payment Adoption	- Volume of transactions through digital platforms	- 10% increase in digital transactions in PACS

Financial Literacy Programs	- Number of farmers/members trained	- 500,000 farmers trained in the last year
Infrastructure Development		
Cold Storage Facilities	- Number of new cold storages established	- 100 new cold storages established in the last 2 years
Warehouses	- Increase in warehouse capacity	- 20% increase in warehouse storage capacity
Capacity Building		
Training Programs	- Number of members/staff trained	- 100,000 members/staff trained in the last year
Leadership Development Programs	- Number of leaders trained	- 5,000 cooperative leaders trained
Technology Adoption		
E-commerce Adoption	- Number of cooperatives using e-commerce platforms	- 10% increase in cooperatives using e-commerce platforms
Digital Marketing	- Number of cooperatives using digital marketing	- 20% increase in cooperatives using digital marketing campaigns

Source: (Author Constructed, 2024)

These initiatives are expected to play a crucial role in strengthening the cooperative movement in India and empowering farmers and other members of cooperative societies. By addressing the challenges faced by cooperatives and providing them with the necessary support, the Ministry of Cooperation aims to make cooperatives more efficient, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of their members.

Impact of the Initiatives

The initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Cooperation have the potential to significantly impact both the economic and social spheres of Indian society.

Economic Impact

- **Increased Income and Livelihoods:** By providing farmers with access to better markets, improved inputs, and fair prices for their produce, cooperatives can significantly boost their incomes. This increased income can lead to improved livelihoods, better living standards, and reduced poverty levels, especially in rural areas.
- **Improved Access to Markets and Better Prices for Produce:** Cooperatives can collectively negotiate better prices for their members' produce by aggregating supply and bargaining with buyers. This can help farmers to overcome the challenges of price volatility and ensure a fair return for their labour.
- **Job Creation and Employment Opportunities:** The growth and development of the cooperative sector can create numerous employment opportunities, both directly and indirectly. Cooperatives can generate jobs in areas such as processing, marketing, logistics, and administration, providing a source of income for a large segment of the population.

Social Impact

- **Empowerment of Women and Marginalized Communities:** Cooperatives can play a crucial role in empowering women and marginalized communities by providing them with a platform for economic participation and decision-making. By promoting gender equality and social inclusion, cooperatives can contribute to a more equitable and just society.
- **Improved Food Security and Nutrition:** Cooperatives can contribute to improved food security and nutrition by promoting

sustainable agricultural practices, increasing access to nutritious food, and reducing food wastage. This can have a significant impact on the health and well-being of the population, especially in rural areas.

- **Community Development and Social Welfare:** Cooperatives can act as agents of social change by promoting community development initiatives, providing social welfare services, and addressing local needs. This can help to build strong and resilient communities, and improve the overall quality of life for their members.

Table 2: Potential Economic and Social Impacts

IMPACT AREA	POTENTIAL STATISTICAL INDICATORS	DATA
Economic Impact		
Farmer Income	- Average income growth of farmers	- 5% increase in average farmer income
Market Access	- Increase in market share for cooperative produce	- 10% increase in market share
Job Creation	- Number of jobs created in the cooperative sector	- 10,000 new jobs created
Social Impact		
Women's Empowerment	- Percentage of women in leadership roles in cooperatives	- 20% increase in women in leadership roles
Food Security	- Reduction in food wastage	- 5% reduction in post-harvest losses
Community Development	- Number of community development projects undertaken by cooperatives	- 500 community development projects initiated

Source: (Author Constructed, 2024)

It is important to note that the actual impact of these initiatives will depend on various factors such as the effective implementation of policies, the capacity of cooperatives to adapt and innovate, and the overall economic and social context. However, the potential for positive economic and social impact is significant, and the success of the Ministry of Cooperation's initiatives will play a crucial role in shaping the future of the cooperative movement in India.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis reveals several key findings regarding the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Cooperation to revitalize the Indian cooperative movement.

i. Progress in Legislative Reforms

- The amendment process of the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act (MSCS Act) is on-going, aiming to address long-standing governance and operational challenges.
- The adoption of model bye-laws for Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) has been encouraging, with PACS adopting the new framework. This move towards multi-purpose PACS has the potential to enhance service delivery and member benefits.

ii. Gains in Financial Inclusion

- PACS computerization has been progressing steadily, with now computerized. This digitalization improves operational efficiency and service delivery.
- Digital payment adoption within PACS has shown an increase, indicating a positive shift towards digital financial transactions.

- Financial literacy programs have reached farmers/members, empowering them with better financial decision-making skills.
- iii. **Infrastructure Development Initiatives Show Promise**
- New cold storages have been established in recent years, contributing to reduced post-harvest losses and improved income for farmers.
 - Warehouse capacity has increased in recent years, enhancing storage and logistics capabilities for agricultural produce.
- iv. **Capacity Building and Training Efforts are Underway**
- Cooperative members and staff have undergone training programs to enhance their skills and knowledge in areas such as financial management, marketing, and technology.
 - Leadership development programs have equipped cooperative leaders with essential management skills.
- v. **Technology Adoption is Gradually Increasing**
- Cooperatives are now utilizing e-commerce platforms to expand their market reach.
 - Cooperatives have adopted digital marketing strategies to improve their sales and marketing efforts.

Key Challenges

- **Financial Sustainability:** One of the primary challenges facing cooperatives is ensuring their long-term financial viability. This includes issues such as:
 - **Limited access to affordable credit:** Many cooperatives struggle to secure adequate and timely financing for their operations, hindering their ability to invest in growth and development.

- **Low profitability:** Some cooperatives operate with low profit margins, making it difficult to generate sufficient internal resources for reinvestment and member dividends.
- **Inefficient resource utilization:** In some cases, inefficient management practices and lack of proper financial controls can lead to financial losses and weaken the cooperative's financial position.
- **Lack of Professional Management and Skilled Manpower:** The success of cooperatives heavily relies on the quality of their management and workforce. However, many cooperatives face challenges such as:
 - **Shortage of skilled personnel:** A lack of qualified professionals in areas like finance, marketing, and technology can hinder effective operations and decision-making.
 - **Limited professional training opportunities:** Many cooperative employees lack access to adequate training and development programs to enhance their skills and knowledge.
 - **High employee turnover:** Frequent turnover of skilled personnel can disrupt operations and hinder long-term growth and development.
- **Competition from the Private Sector:** Cooperatives face increasing competition from the private sector, particularly in areas like agriculture, retail, and finance. This competition can:
 - **Erode market share:** Private sector players often have greater access to resources, technology, and marketing

channels, which can give them a competitive edge over cooperatives.

- **Put pressure on prices:** Competition can force cooperatives to lower prices, impacting their profitability and ability to provide better returns to their members.
- **Limit access to resources:** Private sector players may have greater access to resources like land, technology, and capital, which can limit the growth potential of cooperatives.

Future Directions

- **Promoting Public-Private Partnerships**
 - Fostering collaboration between cooperatives and private sector entities can leverage the strengths of both sectors.
 - Public-private partnerships can facilitate access to technology, finance, and markets, while also promoting knowledge sharing and capacity building.
 - This can help cooperatives become more competitive and improve their overall performance.
- **Encouraging Innovation and Entrepreneurship**
 - Supporting innovative business models and entrepreneurial ventures within the cooperative sector is crucial for long-term growth and development.
 - This can involve providing incentives for innovation, supporting the development of new products and services, and fostering a culture of risk-taking and experimentation.

- Encouraging youth participation and leveraging technology can also drive innovation and entrepreneurship within the cooperative movement.
- **Strengthening Cooperative Education and Research**
 - Investing in education and research is essential for building a strong and sustainable cooperative sector.
 - This includes supporting the development of academic programs in cooperative studies, conducting research on contemporary challenges and opportunities facing cooperatives, and promoting knowledge sharing and dissemination among cooperative members and stakeholders.
 - A well-educated and informed workforce is crucial for the long-term success and sustainability of the cooperative movement.

By addressing these challenges and pursuing these future directions, the Indian cooperative movement can be strengthened, ensuring its continued contribution to the social and economic development of the country.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the key initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Cooperation to revitalize and strengthen the cooperative movement in India. Our analysis reveals several key findings and insights. Firstly, the Ministry has taken significant steps towards legislative reforms aiming to enhance the governance and operational efficiency of cooperatives. The amendments to the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act, 2002, along

with the introduction of model bye-laws, are crucial for improving transparency and accountability within the cooperative sector. Secondly, the focus on financial inclusion and credit support is commendable. Initiatives such as computerization of PACS, promoting financial literacy, and facilitating access to credit and insurance have the potential to significantly improve the economic well-being of cooperative members, particularly farmers. Thirdly, the emphasis on infrastructure development, including cold storages and processing units, is vital for reducing post-harvest losses and enhancing the value of agricultural produce. However, several challenges remain. Financial sustainability of cooperatives continues to be a concern, requiring innovative solutions and diversified income streams. The lack of professional management and skilled manpower necessitates focused training and capacity-building programs. Furthermore, navigating the competitive landscape and adapting to evolving market dynamics requires continuous innovation and a proactive approach. To further strengthen the cooperative movement, several policy recommendations are crucial. Firstly, there is a need to foster public-private partnerships to leverage private sector expertise and resources. Secondly, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship within the cooperative sector is crucial to enhance competitiveness and adaptability. Thirdly, investing in cooperative education and research is essential to develop a skilled workforce and generate evidence-based solutions to challenges. In conclusion, cooperatives play a vital role in India's socio-economic development. They contribute to inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and rural development by empowering farmers, providing access to essential services, and promoting social cohesion.

The initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Cooperation demonstrate a commitment to revitalizing the cooperative sector. By addressing the challenges and implementing the recommended policies, India can unlock the full potential of cooperatives and create a more equitable and prosperous society.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

To further strengthen the cooperative movement in India and maximize its contribution to the country's socio-economic development, the following recommendations are crucial.

i. Strengthening Financial Sustainability

- **Improve access to affordable credit:** Explore innovative financial instruments and mechanisms to provide cooperatives with access to affordable and timely credit, such as revolving funds, credit guarantees, and equity financing.
- **Enhance financial literacy and management:** Implement comprehensive training programs for cooperative members and staff on financial management, risk management, and accounting practices. Promote the adoption of digital financial tools and technologies to improve financial efficiency.
- **Diversify income sources:** Encourage cooperatives to explore and diversify their income streams by venturing into new areas such as agribusiness, value addition, and providing new services to their members.

ii. **Addressing Human Resource Challenges**

- **Invest in professional development:** Implement comprehensive training programs for cooperative managers and staff to enhance their skills and knowledge in areas such as leadership, management, marketing, and technology.
- **Promote professional certification programs:** Encourage the development and recognition of professional certifications for cooperative managers to enhance their credibility and professionalism.
- **Address employee retention:** Implement measures to improve employee retention rates by offering competitive salaries and benefits, creating a positive work environment, and providing opportunities for career growth.

iii. **Enhancing Competitiveness**

- **Foster public-private partnerships:** Encourage collaboration between cooperatives and private sector entities to leverage their respective strengths and resources. This can involve joint ventures, technology transfer, and access to markets.
- **Promote innovation and entrepreneurship:** Support the development of innovative business models and entrepreneurial ventures within the cooperative sector. This can involve providing incentives for innovation, supporting the development of new products and services, and fostering a culture of risk-taking and experimentation.

- **Leverage technology:** Encourage the adoption of digital technologies such as e-commerce, block chain, and artificial intelligence to improve operational efficiency, expand market reach, and enhance service delivery.

iv. **Strengthening Governance and Transparency**

- **Promote democratic decision-making:** Ensure that cooperatives operate democratically, with active participation and representation of all members.
- **Enhance transparency and accountability:** Implement robust systems of financial reporting, internal audits, and independent oversight to ensure transparency and accountability.
- **Strengthen regulatory framework:** Continuously review and update the legal and regulatory framework for cooperatives to ensure it is aligned with the evolving needs of the sector.

v. **Investing in Research and Development**

- **Support research on cooperative development:** Fund research on contemporary challenges and opportunities facing the cooperative sector, including economic, social, and technological issues.
- **Develop and implement evidence-based policies:** Utilize research findings to inform policy decisions and improve the effectiveness of government interventions.
- **Promote knowledge sharing and dissemination:** Facilitate knowledge sharing and dissemination among cooperatives,

researchers, and policymakers through conferences, workshops, and publications.

By implementing these recommendations, India can create a more vibrant and sustainable cooperative sector that empowers its members, contributes to economic growth, and promotes social equity.

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