



## **BANGLADESH'S COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP: PATTERNS, ISSUES, AND PROSPECTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Co-operative in Bangladesh has conceded its period on its system. In starting stage however it worked with horticulture just, now it is working with financial circles. Considering its competency and successful utility in post-free Bangladesh Co-operative Society is unavoidably perceived as of the most imperative divisions of the economy. Genuinely Co-operative is built up as a social issue. The word cooperative, like the cooperative society, is a collective noun. The term "cooperative," which refers to a collection of people working together, has been around since the dawn of time. This might clearly distinguish between short-term/coincidental and long-term/permanent cooperatives, as well as informal and formal traditional modern scientific, truly pure and pseudo cooperatives, and parochial cooperatives.*

*In this article, an effort has been made to understand the pattern of cooperative leadership by examining their age, education, occupation, landholding, income, and other factors. The study will also highlight several issues that co-operative groups face in Bangladesh, as well as potential solutions.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cooperative societies, Economic contribution, Business Development, Leadership

### **BACKGROUND**

Co-operative Movement started its journey with the intent of helping the poor farmers and landless through providing agricultural and other credit to them. Later on, the scope and objectives of the movement were extended to weaver, fisherman, auto-rickshaw puller and so on. But the movement could not provide its services to its client's up to the expectation. Researchers and practitioners found some factors responsible for this. The important factors were: lack of co-operative education and training, lack of effective and enlightened leadership, violation of established principles and practices and lack of commitment of both officials and co-operators. (Cooperative Movement, 2004)

Leadership is essentially an important factor of any organisations, especially co-operative organization. Leadership is a group of members who hold the high positions, enjoy high prestige and exert influence in a given society (A, 2001). In this study the members of the Managing Committee of the co-operative societies are considered as 'Leaders'. Virtually leaders of the co-operative societies are the real 'match-maker' who can cultivate, harvest and distribute the crops of the movement to the societies in a good manner. The co-operative leaders could

lead to do some good things in a good manner for the betterment of the societies (Abol Qasem, 2005)

Co-operative movement in this sub-continent has passed almost a century. During this period a lot of experiments were made on it. And as an outcome, it has taken different forms and shapes, types and dimensions. But the fact remains that cooperation as a way of emancipation for the poor achieved considerable failure instead of success. (Maruf, 2011) To many, this failure owed to a great extent, among other, to the dissatisfactory performance of the co-operative leaders. The leaders were wrongly selected, in most cases they really did not represent the client groups for which they were selected/elected, their commitment and dedication to the society were meagre and their quality and qualifications to run the society were almost absent. This is how it is important to know the socio-economic background of cooperative leaders. (Tofael, December 2009)

Some courses on Co-operative Management were held at Bangladesh Co-operative College (BCC), Comilla during 1992-93. Including 11 females forty cooperative leaders attended the courses. (Tofael, December 2009) The author took the opportunity to study their socio-economic back



ground. Thus an attempt has been made in this article to know the pattern of co-operative leadership analysing their age, education, occupation, landholding, income etc. The study will also highlight different problems as well as remedies of co-operative societies in Bangladesh.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

— To know the background of the co-operative leaders in terms of their age, occupation, education, landholding and other factors.

— To study the role of cooperative leaders in performing different activities.

— To know the problems of cooperative societies and probable solutions thereof.

## 3. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The study has been limited to analyse some selected issues of 40 co-operative leaders who attended the Co-operative Management courses conducted at BCC during 2021. Most of them belonged to the Savings and Credit co-operatives, Agricultural co-operatives, Women co-operatives, Fisherman co-operatives, Weaver's co-operative societies, etc. Out of 40 respondents under study 5 were

chairman, 14 managers and another 21 were the members of the Managing Committee. Information for the study was collected through a structured questionnaire.

## 4. LIMITATION

There are approximately 11 lakh members of the Managing Committee of more than 1.26\* lakh co-operative societies in Bangladesh. They are generally known as co-operative leaders.. (Directorate, 2020) For this study information were collected from only 40 leaders which may not representative

Still then, the effort may give a picture about the leadership pattern as well as problems and prospects of the co-operative societies in Bangladesh.

## 5. FINDINGS

### 5.1 Age:

Fifty percent of the leaders under study belonged to the age groups of 29-39 and 33% belonged to the age groups of 18-29. Thus it is obvious that younger have come to the cooperative leadership which constituted more than 82% of the total respondents (table-1).

**Table-1 : Age of the. Co-operative Leaders**

Age-groups	No of respondents	%
18 - 29	13*	32.5
29 - 39	20	50.0
39 - 49	4	10.0
49 and above	3	7.5
Total	40	100.0

\* All are above 21 years.

### 5.2 Education

Data shows that all of the leaders were literate. Their qualification ranged from class 1 to Masters degree. Remarkable feature is that about 33 % of the

respondents passed the SSC examination (table-2) It was also found that out of 11 female respondents 7 read up to class X

**Table-2- : Educational Level of the Co-operative Leaders**

Level of education	No of respondents	%
I-V (Class)	2	5.0
VI - X	9	22.5
S.S.C	13	32.5
H.S.C	10	25.0
Bachelor Degree	5	12.5
Master Degree	1	2.5
Total	40	100.0

### 5.3 Occupation

The cooperative leaders are involved in as many as eleven occupations. It has been found that the highest number of respondents (33 %) have taken farming as their principal occupation. Less than 50 %

have subsidiary occupations (table-3). And again agriculture provides subsidiary sources of income to majority of them. Thus agriculture is dominant both as principal and subsidiary occupation.



**Table-3: Occupations or the Co-operative Leaders**

Occupations Main	Subsidiary							Total (%)
	Farming (%)	Service (%)	Business (%)	House wife (%)	Tailoring (%)	Other (%)	No (%)	
Farming	—	3 (7.5)	1 (2.5)	—	—	2 (5.0)	8 (20)	14 (35)
Service	3 (7.5)	—	—	—	—	—	5 (12.5)	8 (20)
Business	2 (5.0)	—	—	—	—	1 (2.5)	4 (10.0)	7 (17.5)
House wife	—	—	—	—	3 (7.5)	—	—	3 (7.5)
Tailoring	—	—	—	1 (2.5)	—	—	—	1 (2.5)
Medical Practice	1 (2.5)	—	—	—	—	—	—	1 (2.5)
Poultry/Raising	—	—	—	—	—	—	1 (2.5)	1 (2.5)
Study	—	—	—	—	—	—	5 (12.5)	5 (12.5)
<b>Total</b>	<b>6 (15.0)</b>	<b>3 (7.5)</b>	<b>1 (2.5)</b>	<b>1 (2.5)</b>	<b>3 (7.5)</b>	<b>3 (7.5)</b>	<b>23 (57.5)</b>	<b>40 (100)</b>

No—have no subsidiary occupation

Others— Lawyer, contractor and teacher.

**5.4 Landholding**

It appears from the following table that more than 35 % of the leaders were small farmers and 27% were medium farmers having an average land of 1.5 and 4.9 acres respectively. 10% are big farmers with an average 27.30 acres of land and only 9 % are

landless having an average land of 0.35 acres (table-4) .This means that 70 % of leaders own only 41 % of land while only 10 % of leaders own 59 % of land. This shows a clear concentration of land in a few hands. However, most of the leaders came from small and medium farmer's group.

**Table-4 : Land holding pattren of the Co-operative leaders.**

Size of landholding (in acre)	No. of respondents	%	Average holding
0.000 - 0.50 (Landless)	3	7.5	0.35
0.51 - 2.40 (Small farmers)	14	35.0	0.50
2.41 - 2.40 (Medium farmers)	11	27.5	4.90
7.41 and above (Big farmers)	4	10.0	27.30
<b>Total.</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>--</b>

\*5 students and another 3 did not response.

**5.5 Income :**

More than 22% i.e. about one-fourth of the respondents fell in the income group of taka 12001-24000/- However, the lowest and highest income of the leaders ranged from Tk, 2400/- to Tk, 1,20, 000/- per annum. Average income of the respondents was Tk, 36.532/ (table-5). Another sailent feature was that

12.5% leaders live along the subsistence level having an average income of Tk, 4680/-. Two women, two small farmers and one student (who is a private tutor) were in this group. Farming was the main source of income.

**Table-5 : Annual Income of the Co-operative Leaders**

Income groups (in taka)	No. of respondents	%	Average income (in Tk.)
Upto 6000	5	12.5	4680
6001 - 12000	5	12.5	9840
12001 - 24000	9	22.5	21200
24001 - 36000	6	15.0	33000
36001 - 48000	2	5.0	45000
48001 - 60000	4	10.0	60000
60001 - 95000	3	7.5	76000
95001 - and above	3	7.5	112000
Total	37*	95.5	36532

\* Three did not response.

### 5.6 Positions of the Respondents in the Families

Data shows that more than 72 % of the respondents are the head of their family (table-6). Of them about 63 % belong to the age groups of 18-39. Thus it is clear that the co-operative leaders are not only the

leaders of the society, but also the leaders of their own families and most of them are young.

It should be mentioned here that 27.5 % did not reply. Some of them might be students and belonged to the joint families.

**Table-6 : Position of the Co-operative Leaders in Their Families**

Type of respondents	Head of the family	
	Nos.	%
Male of respondents	25	62.5
	4	10.0
Total-	29	72.5

### 5.7 Past Involvement to the Managing Committee

An attempt has also been made to know whether the cooperative leaders were involved with the Managing Committee in the past. It appears that about 37 % of the total respondents were previously

the members of the Managing Committee (table-7). That means they have been elected member of the Managing Committee for the second time. Their academic qualifications, honesty and sincerity played an important role to come to the power for second time.

**Table-7 : Past Involvement of the Respondents to the managing Committee.**

Age-groups	No of respondents	%
Member of The Managing Committee in the past	15	37.5
Was not in the Managing Committee	18	45.0
Did not response	7	17.5
Total	40	100.0

### 5.8

#### Affiliation with other Institutions

It was found that more than 53 % of the leaders have no affiliation to any political party. Only 27% have their affiliation to some major parties including the ruling ones. More than 32% leaders were related to some institutions like Union Parishad, Club etc. Most of them were holding the executive

posts (table-8). The average income of them was Tk, 52714/- per annum which is above than the average of total 40 leaders. It seems that they are considerably financially sound. Another 67% did not make any comment. So we can assume that they were not involved with such institutions.

**Table-8: Involvement of the Co-operative Leaders with other Institutions**

Name of organization	Designation	Nos.	%
Union Parishad	Chairman/Member	5	12.5
Club	General Secretary	4	10.0
Mukti Joddhah Sangsad	Deputy Commander	2	5.0
Gram Sarker	Chief	1	2.5
School	Asstt. Teacher	1	2.5
Total		13	32.5

### 5.9 Kinship Relation

Traditionally our kinship relation is very tight which may be considered as one of the indicators in measuring the nature and pattern of the leadership. (Barnes)The leaders were asked about the inclusion of their relatives in the Managing Committee. Only 32.5% told that they had own kin members, i.e. cousin, uncle, brother daughter, etc. in the Managing Committee of the societies.

In response- to another query, 22.5% leaders replied the benefits of the society were not shared on equity basis. Rich and strong members were fully favoured over the weak/poor members in respect of facilities like loan, training, etc. Another 17% respondents reported that rich members were partially favoured. The rest did not make any comments. Thus it can be said that poor or weak

members of the societies are not given priority in getting loan and other facilities.

### 5.10 Settlement of Social Disputes

To know the social status of the leaders, they were asked whether they were involved in settling down any social conflicts/disputes. (Beals, 1960) The information show that 20% of the total respondents played the role as 'Chief' and 30 % as 'Member' of the "Shalish Committee". Most of them are belonged to the age groups of 30-39. About 25% were present in the occasion as observers. And the rest 25% did not make any comments (table-9). The data reveals that the cooperative leaders are making contribution to the reconciliation of social disputes and other chaos at the village level.

**Table-9 : Role of Co-operative Leaders in Mitigating of Social Disputes**

Role as	Chief		Member		Observer		Total	
	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%	Nos.	%
	Age groups		Age groups		Age groups		Age groups	
18 - 29	3	7.5	3	7.5	3	7.5	9	22.5
30 - 39	4	10.0	7	17.5	5	12.5	16	40.0
40 & above	1	2.5	2	5.0	2	5.0	5	12.5
Total	8	20.0	12	30.0	10	25.0	30	75.0

### 5.11 Decision Making

One of the important thrusts of the cooperative organizations is to involve the members in decision making. The cooperative leaders were asked about the participation of the members in decision making process. More than 82 % respondents were in favour of making decision in prior consultation with other members. On the

contrary, 17.5% were not in favour of discussing the members in-making decision. About the place of holding the meeting majority (55%) of the leaders reported that the meetings of the societies were held at the residence of the chairmen or manager. This may also influence the decision-making process to some extent.

## 6. PROBLEMS OF THE CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETIES IDENTIFIED BY THE RESPONDENTS

The co-operative leaders were asked to point out the basic problems they faced in the societies. They mentioned as many as five problems which are enumerated below (table-10).

**Table- 10: Problems of the Societies Mentioned by the Respondents**

Problems	No of respondents	%
— Lack of co-operative education and training	38	95.0
— Lack of capital	37	92.5
— Lack of society's office building	36	90.0
— Conflicts among leaders	25	62.5
— Financial indiscipline	23	57.5

Note : Some respondents have more than one opinion.



It seemed from the above table that the extent and magnitude of the problems like lack of co-operative education, capital and society's office room were very acute.

## 7. SUGGESTIONS GIVEN BY THE RESPONDENTS

The co-operative leaders gave some suggestions to overcome the problems mentioned above. They thought that if their suggestions would be taken care off, their societies might be benefited to a great extent.

Suggestions given by them are furnished below (table-11).

**Table-11: Suggestions Given by the Leaders for Future Development of the Co-operative Societies.**

Suggestions	No of respondents	%
— Loans should be given in time.	39	97.5
— Training on cooperatives should also be given to general co-operators	37	92.5
— Extension workers should make visit to the societies frequently	30	75.0
— Financial assistance is needed (for construction of the society's office room etc).	21	52.5

In addition, nine of the cooperative leaders mentioned that there should be provision for reward and punishment considering the level of performance. Again they (57%) thought that if adequate training on leadership and management could be arranged their contribution to the development of societies will certainly increase.

## 8. SUMMERY AND CONCLUSION

### 8.1 Summery

- 8.1.1 Comparatively young and middle-aged people have been controlling the management of the co-operative societies.
- 8.1.2 All of the leaders interviewed are literate. It is a unique indication in the pattern of co-operative leadership which may play a positive role in developing the co-operative habit and culture among the co-operators as well as common people.
- 8.1.3 Majority of the co-operative leaders under study are the heads of their own families.
- 8.1.4 Most of the leaders are small and medium farmers having an average land of 1.50 and 4.90 acres respectively. And farming has taken as main occupation by the highest number of the leaders.
- 8.1.5 About 25 % have come from higher income groups while another 25% from lower income groups. More than 42% have come from a moderate lower and higher income groups. The average income is about Rk. 36,532/- per annum. Main source of their income is agriculture.
- 8.1.6 More than 32% leaders under query have their own kith and kin (cousin, aunt, uncle,

father, mother) in the Managing Committee of the societies.

- 8.1.7 Some leaders (20%) have been playing an important role as 'chief' and some (30%) as 'member' of the Shalish Committee' in mitigating different social disputes at the village level.
- 8.1.8 More than 82 % co-operative leaders have opined in favour of discussion with the general co-operators in making any decision. Another 18% do not think so. They think that be-cause of illiteracy, the general co-operators cannot contribute to the decision making.
- 8.1.9 Some leaders (37%) have come to the Managing Committee for second time.
- 8.1.10 More than 32% have been involved in some institutions like gram sarker, union parishad, club etc. Besides, 27% have their affiliation to some major political parties.
- 8.1.11 Lack of co-operative education, lack of capital, conflicts among leaders etc. are the main problems of their societies as opined by almost all of the leaders. However they also made some suggestions such as disbursement of loan in time, training to the general co-operators, frequent visits to the societies by the officials etc. to these problems.

### 8.2 Conclusion

In a developing country like Bangladesh where 80% of the total population live below poverty line, co-operative can play an important role in bringing the positive change in the socio-economic



conditions of the masses. Co-operative is a way of uniting people, encouraging them to save, investing savings for undertaking individual and joint ventures, making democratic decision and so on. However, the success of a co-operative society depends mainly on pattern and efficiency of co-operative leadership. (J, 2005)

The co-operative leaders are the prime-mover of the co-operative societies. Once the age, the status and the wealth would determine the leadership in a society. But there occurred some changes in the pattern of co-operative leadership in course of time. Educated, sincere and younger people has started coming to the co-operative leadership. This is certainly a good indication to the success of co-operative movement contributing to increased leadership efficiency. The co-operative movement in Bangladesh could not achieve desired success mainly due to lack of

(i) co-operative training and education, (ii) proper maintenance of books and accounts and (iii) unity among leaders.

To run the co-operative societies in the right way the problems mentioned above need to be solved. First, both the co-operative leaders and the co-operators should be given intensive training on co-operative norms so that they will be aware of the duties and responsibilities. Second, necessary steps should be taken to maintain books and accounts properly. Persons concerned with accounts should also be provided training in this field. Again the leaders who are involved in accounts keeping should be made accountable to the general co-operators. Third, in many cases there observed conflicts among the co-operative leaders. Motivational training should be organised for them to develop the spirit of unity and cohesion. Finally, the frequent visits of co-operative officials to the societies can play an important role in smooth running of the co-operative societies.

The problems of co-operative societies cannot be solved over night. However, these can be minimized if the co-operative leaders are active, dedicated, sincere, honest and committed.

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