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# Cooperative Societies, Housing Provision and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *The study is based on the need to motivate individuals in similar wage earning employments to overcome challenges militating against accessibility to basic family needs including home ownership through incremental development. The study employed qualitative research method to carry out empirical investigation through interviews with members as well as some executive members of Covenant University Staff Cooperative and Multi-purpose Society Limited, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria to obtain primary data for the study as well as secondary data from earlier annual reports of the Co-operative Society. Data presentation was through the use of tables and percentages. Findings showed that various avenues provided for accessing credit, at short notice, with very low interest rates and generous repayment periods by the Covenant University Staff Cooperative and Multi-purpose Society Limited, significantly assisted members in embarking on massive housing construction on incremental basis in addition to access to funds for other family needs with ease within the ten years of the Cooperative Societies' establishment. The paper concludes that project funding through co-operative societies' approach has great potentials for minimising frustrations inherent in the pursuit of achievements through loans from commercial banks at variable interest rates. The paper recommends the encouragement of Staff Co-operative Societies across all segments of establishments in the country*

**Key words:** cooperative society, housing provision, poverty alleviation, Nigeria

## 1. Introduction

Throughout the human history, housing has been playing two major roles in a man's life. Economically, housing constitutes an important provision to a nation. It provides not only shelter but

also security, comfort and dignity. It is also a social necessity, because good housing enhances healthy living which in return influences human labour

productivity. It also stimulates investment in other sectors of the economy. For these reasons, much attention and premium are often put in place on home ownership no matter the age, sex, income or type of job the head of a household does in any part of the globe. Despite the availability of abundant, unused and ripe land at the periphery of most towns and cities in Nigeria, accessibility to low interest rate financing constitutes the major hindrance to easy acquisition of affordable housing among low and middle-income earners in the country. Walley (2010) opined that land acquisition and building a home require incredible determination. UN Habitat (2005) recorded that affordable housing is inadequate though those that have access to what can be regarded as adequate shelter find such shelter unaffordable. In many countries, Nigeria inclusive, the socio-economic and constant political changes over time had put pressure on governments, thus constraining their involvements in meeting housing needs of the teeming and ever growing populace. With limited and dwindling resources at government disposal, it has become impossible for the government alone to cater for the current shortage of housing and poverty being encountered by the citizenry. This reality had led the government at various times to embark on policies such as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), privatisation/commercialisation, Public and Private Partnerships (PPP), monetisation of public servants' benefits, etc. All these policies were geared towards shifting from public at financing, management and responsibility for basic societal needs of the common man through private initiatives. Experience, over time, has

shown that non-availability of cheap and adequate finance have been the main reason why private sector developers often fail at taking up the responsibility of championing the affordable housing provision issue in the country.

Globally, the world is currently witnessing two different demographic trends. While in the industrialised countries birth rates are falling and life expectancy is steadily increasing, in the developing countries, such as Nigeria, the reverse trend holds true. In Africa, the birth rate is still at high levels, with majority of the population being below the age of twenty years. A growing population portends pressure on the ecological system, thus increasing the need for food, shelter, jobs and other basic necessities of life. The demands of the ever growing population have created further problems of developable land scarcity; conflicts over the use and ownership of land hence the ever increasing rate of urbanisation with rapidly growing slums and squatter settlements within cities in the developing countries such as Nigeria.

The resultant effect of the inability of governments across the globe, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria, to address the needs of the growing population, in such areas as housing and employment generation, has inevitably led to systematic decay of value systems. Family structures, which from time immemorial has always been a very reliable and effective system of social security has disintegrated thereby leaving the weaker and vulnerable members of the society to suffer. The gap between the rich and poor has continued to widen within many societies especially in the developing countries. Poverty, unemployment and

social disintegration often result in isolation, marginalisation and violence.

While these problems affect all countries one way or another, there is a general consensus that the situation of most developing countries, particularly of Africa, is critical and requires special attention and action. As a means of addressing the challenges facing most developing countries, this study was set out to identify the potentials of cooperative societies through which members of a community could collectively provide the needed funding for their home ownership and other necessities of life at the lowest rate of interest, friendly repayment terms and stress free co-operative loan administrative processes thereby unconsciously lifting the societal spirit and by extension reduce drastically the poverty within the society.

## **2. Poverty as an Albatross of the Masses in the Developing Countries**

There is no single satisfactory way of defining poverty. The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines 'poverty' as a state of being poor. Onibokun (1983) was of the opinion that 'poverty' can be measured in terms of income, inadequate access to basic infrastructure like water, health and educational facilities, transportation and even information will be important in defining 'poverty' in a developing country like Nigeria.

Poverty in Africa is substantially higher than in other developing regions of the world. More significant is the fact that poverty in Africa is chronic and rising. Poverty reduction attempts constitute the most difficult challenge facing most countries in the developing world where on the average majority of the citizens

are considered poor. Evidences in Nigeria show that the number of those within poverty range has continued to increase. For example, the number of those within poverty bracket increased from 27% in 1980 to 46% by 1985; it declined slightly to 42% in 1992; but increased very sharply to 67% by 1996 according to National Bureau of Statistics (1999). Poverty alleviation was seen as a means through which the government can revamp the battered economy and instil self-esteem in majority of Nigerians who had been dehumanised through past military regimes (Ogunsemi, Asaju and Mordi, 2002).

Smith (2005) came up with some tentative ideas through which majority of the citizens can be freed from the bondage of poverty. One of such means is through the elimination of working cap trap. Lack of accessibility to credit facilities often prevents small-scale business men and women from expanding their businesses or procures their shelters. Being part of group-based schemes such as Co-operative societies ensures the sharing of risks and ensures that loans if given are viable and recoverable with ease. Moruf (2013) sees credit as a catalyst that activates other factors of production and makes under-used capacities functional for increased productivity. Generating new knowledge based on experience from established co-operative societies across the world is a practical way of eradicating poverty. In the opinion of Komolafe (2013), co-operative society members consist of all income groups, all ages from all walks of life joining forces together to meet common needs ranging from products, services, housing, financial services, etc. and for these reasons, organising people of like

minds together to meet common needs is a major means of freeing Nigerians from their financial incapability and by extension eradicating poverty with time.

### **3. The Concept of Housing**

Housing has been described as a complex product of both public and private efforts and investment. It consists of the immediate physical and service environment for individuals and family living. According to Mile (1970), the concept of housing include environmental factors such as the general land use, recreation areas, shopping facilities, infrastructural services, nuisance of pollution and noise, etc. all of which have resulted in the three aspects of housing as it concern economics, social and environmental.

With regards to economic and social aspects of housing, there is very little that can be done because it is quite impossible to make people live above their incomes and social status. Freeman (1984) pointed out that the worse the property is shows the lower the income of the household tends to be hence the less the ability of the household to pay. This being the case, it is incumbent on home providers to take cognisance of the people's income as well as their social status into consideration in providing houses for them. Apart from the fact that no government in the world has been able to provide adequate housing for all its citizens, providing houses which the occupants cannot maintain properly will amount to a colossal waste of scarce resources.

The environmental aspect of housing is a more unifying factor in which people of different classes and social status can benefit. This include proper maintenance of the environment,

cleanliness, accessibility, lighting, good infrastructural facilities, etc. All these needs are far more than what an individual can provide or cope with alone. It is therefore the responsibility of government to provide and maintain the common neighbourhood environment within its area of jurisdiction. More emphasis ought to be paid to the provision of these essential services and facilities instead of providing additional new houses which will only benefit a few privilege individuals.

### **4. Earlier Efforts at Providing Affordable Housing in Nigeria to Date**

Subsequent governments in Nigeria had always been mindful of the housing challenges in the country and over the years had taken various steps aimed at reducing the burden. Some of the steps taken include the establishment, in 1928, of the Lagos Executive Development Board, establishment of Nigerian Building Society in 1956, creation of the National Site and Service Scheme in 1986, introduction of the National Prototype Housing Program by the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing, setting up of the State Housing Corporations by various state governments in the country, creation of Federal Mortgage Bank of Nigeria in 1977, promulgation of the National Housing Policy document in 1991 which culminated in the enactment National Housing Fund scheme by Decree No 3 of 1992, establishment of the Federal Mortgage Finance Limited in 2001 as well as the creation of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in 2003 to midwife affordable housing provision in the country.

Despite all these efforts, in 2006, the then Minister of Housing and Urban Development declared that the country needed about ten million housing units before all Nigerians could be sheltered. By the following year, the then president of the country put the national housing deficit at between eight and ten million units (Yar'adua, 2007).

### **5. Issues Militating Against Realisation of Affordable Housing Provision in Nigeria**

Odu (1992) identified finance to be the economic power needed to mobilise materials and other resources required to actualise the goals of the various housing policies and schemes. In the same vein, Agbola (1998) and Diogu (2004) reiterated the importance of finance to housing provision and asserted that the propensity of individuals in the society to save to be the fulcrum for housing acquisition by individual households. This is attributable to the fact that investment in housing, like in any other sector, entails an opportunity cost. Such cost is the returns on the alternative form of investment and unless until the returns to housing investment are commensurate with or better than investments in other sectors, there will be no significant in-flow of investible funds to housing development especially from the private investors.

Lemo (2007) studied the production and supply of housing in Nigeria and noted that individual housing development continues to be constrained by the prevailing problematic land administration; poor infrastructural facilities such as road, electricity and water; lack of long term finance for housing construction; high inflation and interest rates; low income/poor earning power of the citizenry coupled with low

savings culture of the people due to the absence of suitable home savings mechanism. Faleti (2007) found that the cumbersome legal framework, requirements for Governor's consent as well as processes involved in obtaining Certificate of Occupancy, which are some of the provision of Land Use Decree (Act) of 1978 requirements, lengthened land acquisition/perfection of title processes. In addition, the cost of stamp duties, transfer duties and various taxes and levies make transaction costs too high for both low and medium-income earners thereby exacerbating the existing problem of affordable housing accessibility. Ayedun (2011) identified problems of high cost of building materials as well as reluctance of the citizens to adopt local building materials for their homes; land tenure issues; poor housing finance system; lack of housing education, amongst others, as constituting serious bottlenecks to affordable housing provision in the country.

Ademiluyi (2010) remarked that despite numerous interventions and efforts by the successive governments in Nigeria, actual achievements in terms of providing adequate housing in the country remains essentially at minimal level as a result of first, poor plan implementation. For example, only 13.3% achievement was recorded by the Federal government out its set target for housing program in the Third National Development Plan (Mabogunje, 2003). Second, is the frequent policy changes as a result of constant changes in government, which in most cases fail to carry out proper assessment and evaluation of the existing policies and programs by the incoming administration. Third, house seekers' incomes are relatively low in

comparison with house market prices thereby resulting in an affordability problem. Four, prices of various building materials are very high and constantly increasing e.g. a 50kg bag of cement has risen from N650 in 2000 to N2, 800 presently. Five, lack of effective coordination among housing agencies within the three tiers of government (federal, state and local) in the country. Six concerns the politicization and favouritism of housing issues over the sitting of housing estates (Onibokun, 1983). Seven is the indiscriminate abuse of power through massive corruption across board in the dispensation of housing funds, award of contracts and project execution.

## **6. Cooperative Societies**

International Cooperatives Alliance and International Labour Organization (2003) defines cooperative societies as autonomous associations of individuals who voluntarily comes together as united force in order to meet their mutual social, cultural and economic needs and wants through the help of a jointly owned and democratically managed enterprise. This type of group mostly of interested persons characterised by limited means of livelihood usually make equitable contribution to the resources required and thereby accepts fair or equal share of the benefits and risks that may come with the undertaking in which the members participate. Historically, it is worthy of note, that prior to the advent of colonisation of Africa, the indigenous Africans has been living peacefully and happily together through cooperation. Hence, cooperation is a way of people organising themselves into groups with a view of deriving mutual benefits from

such cooperation dates back to human existence especially in African countries including Nigeria. Tribes and ethnic groups were organised as cooperative structures, allocating jobs and resources among each other, only trading with the external communities. A cooperative society is an autonomous association of persons who voluntary cooperate for their mutual, social, economic, and cultural benefit. Cooperative Societies are typically based on the cooperative values of “self-help, self-responsibility, democracy and equality, equity and solidarity” and the seven norms of co-operative societies which include voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; economic participation by members; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; cooperation among co-operatives and concern for community must be present. Since it is common knowledge that the government cannot meet the needs of the populace at all times, the populace must not fold their arms and suffer in perpetuity, hence the emergence of many co-operative societies in Nigeria.

Aston (2011) identified co-operative societies to be the instruments that provide a direct stake in major economies for people and communities by creating powerful incentives for local social cohesion and cooperation, as well as at regional and national levels. He noted that cooperatives have proven themselves to be potent developmental tools around the world through the employment of 20% more than corporations and with more than 800 million members internationally as well as nearly half of the world’s population benefiting directly from their membership and participation. He concluded that co-operative societies are

arguably the most representative business model to the concept of Ubuntu in South Africa.

### **6.1 Co-operative Societies in Nigeria**

Yebisi (2014) noted that the gradual denudation of the Nigerian traditional communal welfare system by colonialist and neo-colonialist to a society, where people tend to think of everything as business and essential services as being fragmented among investors, management and customers, that is, those who own, those who control and those who use, with each of the three elements looking after its own interests, are the very antithesis of co-operatives. Co-operative societies are enterprises in which owners, those who control and those who use are all the same people. Co-operative Societies like other business organisations are established to meet certain needs. They can be classified into four broad categories, according to the tasks performed. These include marketing, purchasing, service and processing associations (King, 1981).

According to Kareem, Arigbabu, Akintaro and Badmus (2012), there is hardly any workplace in Nigeria today particularly government establishments, where a cooperative society is not operational. Their operations are quite effective because transactions of money are carried out in conjunction with the employers on behalf of the staffs. For example, staff savings into cooperatives are deducted at source and repayment of loans is also done through deduction from staff salaries as instructed by the operators of the societies (Kareem, et al., 2012). The cooperative societies mobilise funds for use in the sectors where funds are needed and also create in the members' the spirit of savings. The motivation behind the formation of

cooperative societies stems from the need to encourage thrift among members and to pool these savings into a fund so that members can borrow from the pool should the need to borrow arise. The depositors also constitute the borrowers most of who knows one another through some common bond and these pre-existing social connections help to circumvent problem of imperfect information and enforceability.

Cooperative societies are useful for providing easy access to "cash" in a convenient and less stringent manner. Members do not have to provide collateral for loans as required by banks. Loan processing is quick and usually available within one or two weeks. Loans from banks can take up to six months due to the demand for several documents and administrative processes to ensure that risks are minimised if not totally avoided. Cooperative societies' activities reduce considerably the level of poverty in the society by making loans more accessible to low income earners based on their saving capabilities. Cooperative members have been able to expand their businesses and by extension increase their profit margins and accumulate some savings in their accounts as a result of cooperative assistance. According to Kareem, et al., (2012) in their study concluded that co-operative societies have positive effects on members' welfare and that the role co-operative societies in poverty reduction and capital formation cannot be overlooked in the development process of any country, particularly in less developed countries like Nigeria. Studies by Akinwumi (2006) and Oladejo (2011) have shown that that cooperative society's approach provides the best

funding alternative to all other economic grouping and schemes. With 48,856 co-operative societies in South-western Nigeria as at September, 2012 according to Oladejo (2013), one can reasonably deduce that the spread of cooperative societies in the country contribute significantly to the provision of basic needs of members at low and fixed interest rates in the area of direct purchase and sale of food and household items from companies thereby eliminating middlemen, collective large scale farming, harvesting and sale of produce direct to end users, group acquisition of land for co-operative society members, housing development, provision of welfare bus services at lower transport charges, etc. each co-operative society decides its area of

priority in terms of the pressing need of members.

**6.2 Covenant University Staff Cooperative Society as the Case Study**

Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria was established in year 2002 and by year 2006, Faculty and Staff of the University established and registered the Covenant University Staff Cooperative Multi-purpose Society as a means of relieving members from the stringent loan/overdraft conditions and bureaucratic delays of commercial banks. From 156 members in 2006/2007, the society has grown to 853 members by 2014/2015 as depicted in Figure 1. Presently members of Staff and Faculty of the University, across board, are members of the Co-operative Society.

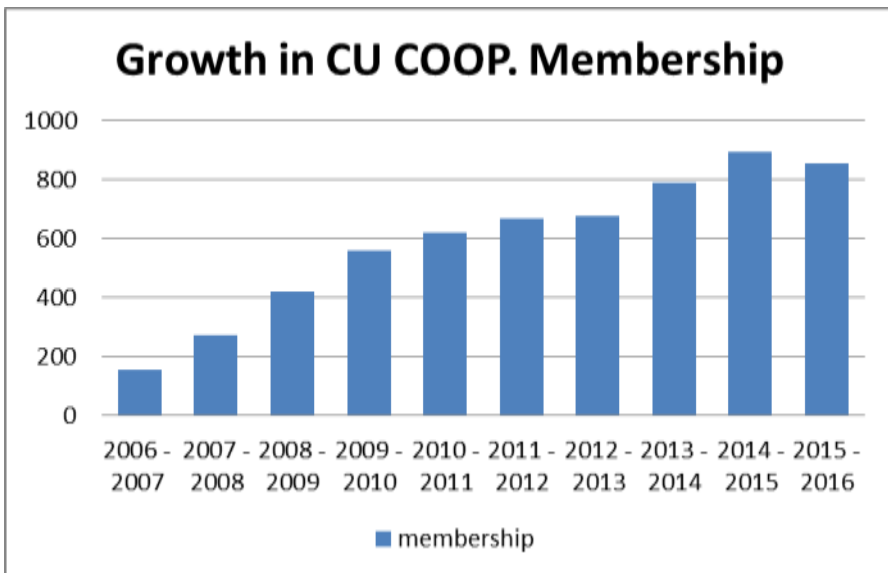


Figure 1: CU Cooperative Membership Growth Pattern (2006-2016)  
Source: CUSCMSL, 2017

From Figure 1, it is also obvious that, apart from continuous growth in membership, there were steady

increases in membership growth from inception up to 2014/2015 Cooperative year. One can attribute this development



to the consciousness the inherent benefits accruable to members. The drop in membership during the 2015/2016 cooperative year has been attributable to the movement of a few members of staff and faculty to greener pastures outside the establishment.

The savings culture by members was pursued with vigour as a means towards empowering them to qualify for

substantial loans with the duration for repayment and interest rate chargeable fixed jointly by all members at the general meeting of the society. Each member of the co-operative society is entitled to twice what he/she has as savings as loan at any point in time. The savings spread over 7 years is contained in Table 2.

**Table 2: Members’ Savings from 2009/10 to 2015/16 Cooperative Years**

Groups	Savings by range (₦000,000)	Years of Operation						
		2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
A	Up to1	99.23	99.52	98.62	98.65	93.86	92.77	88.43
B	>1 – 2	0.77	0.32	1.25	1.25	5.23	6.32	9.59
C	>2- 3	-	0.16	0.13	0.10	0.80	0.71	1.65
D	>3 – 4	-	-	-	-	0.11	0.10	0.11
E	Above 4m	-	-	-	-	-	0.10	0.22

Source: CUSCMSL, 2017

A closer look at Table 2 shows a gradual upward movement in members’ savings’ spread across the groups. Members’ savings increased from two million Naira ceiling to over two to three million Naira status for the periods 2010/11 through 2012/13 cooperative years. The increases in savings in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 cooperative years are worthy of note because the progress made is an indication of members’ confidence in the good management of

the society accounts as well as the hope of ready-made loans at short notice.

Obtaining any type of loan from a commercial bank is a time consuming exercise. Apart from the need to meet loan requirements, the issue of unstable loan interest rate at short notice becomes a nightmare to borrowers. As a means of assisting members of the cooperative society, flat interest rates on facilities are spread evenly based on the periods of repayment as shown in Table

3

**Table 3: Loan Facilities and Applicable Interest Rates**

Loan Facility Types	Repayment Period (Months)	Applicable Loan Interest Rates (Flat)	Maximum Processing Time (Days)
Asset	12	10	5
Regular	Up to 6	5	5
	7-15	7.5	5
	16-24	10	5
Overdraft	1	5	3

Source: CUSCMSL, 2017

From Covenant University Staff Cooperative Multi-purpose Society, every member has a right to apply at will for all types of loan by seeking the backing of two members of the cooperative as guarantors of such loan on each occasion. Approvals are obtainable with cheques available for collection within three and five working days if the loan application form is satisfactorily filled.

Asset loans are approved for members who intend to acquire items such as household furniture and fittings, electronics, laptops, equipment, etc. The Cooperative Society encourages members to acquire such items, either through direct acquisition by the Cooperative Society from organisations and companies dealing with such items on behalf of members or acquire same items directly after obtaining the asset loan. Such a loan is repayable within a period of twelve calendar months at a fixed 10% interest rate.

Regular loan is of three types. Loans payable within six months attract a 5% interest rate while loans repayable between seven and fifteen months attract an interest rate of 7.5%. The third group consists of loans repayable between sixteen and twenty-four months. This group attracts a 10% interest rate.

A man is considered poor when he cannot meet either his basic needs (such as easy payment of children school fees, buying of or replacement of ageing car, building a house for the family, etc.) or sudden needs of the family (such as cater for sick immediate family members or parents and other family emergencies). To eradicate such poverty stigma, the overdraft window was created with the fastest processing time of three days maximum depending on

the urgency. All loans applied for is subject to the applicant's ability to repayment through direct deduction from applicant's monthly salary.

From the in-depth interviews with members of the Cooperative Society, most regular need of members centred on payment of school fees from Nursery to the University levels. This is evidenced by the high rates of loans being applied for and granted as shown in Table 3.

Although the University provides accommodation for both Staff and Faculty, yet the urge by most faculty and staff to have their personal houses is still there. This desire motivated the cooperative society to acquire three sites that have provided land for housing development for 236 members at affordable purchase prices. The documentations needed (land survey, estate lay-out design and government approval as well as Certificate of Occupancy processing) which are often cumbersome, time consuming and costly to obtain individually, are being handled corporately by the officers of the Society, with ease. The group efforts at land acquisition had eliminated the rampant family challenges and in-fighting especially from ubiquitous "Omo Onile" and unending litigations which are common in individual land acquisition processes. Much as prices of plots of land for development varies from one zone or area to another, depending on the location and the family owning such lands, the Society has been able to acquire or secure plots of land at approximately half of the selling/purchase prices which would have been incurred had it been such plots of land had been acquired individually. Same goes for the "Omo-onile development fees. One of the

major benefits of the decision of the Society to acquire land for members is the fact that the purchase of each plot of land is permitted to be paid for by all members in instalments through deductions from members' salaries so as to carry all income groups along.

A thorough look at the loan business circle indicated a gradual loan request

increase from the 2012/13 across to the 2014/15 Cooperative year from three to five million Naira demand, the spread of loans granted depict a unique pattern and increases upwards on yearly basis culminating in 0.58% of loan applicants taking loans of three million Naira and above.

Table 4: Spread of Loans Granted from 2009/2010 to 2015/2016 Co-operative Years

Loans by range (N'000,000)	Cooperative Years of Operation						
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Up to 1 m	90.03	90.18	93.94	84.03	59.02	76.68	75.54
>1m - 2 m	7.38	8.33	5.32	12.67	10.08	16.45	21.58
>2m - 3 m	1.59	1.59	0.92	2.72	4.33	3.99	2.58
>3m - 4m	-	-	-	0.58	5.60	2.24	0.30
>4m - 5m	-	-	-	-	0.72	0.64	-
>5m	-	-	-	-	-	0.16	-

Source: CUSCMSL, 2017

In-depth interview of members of the Cooperative Executives indicated that a reasonable number of Staff and Faculty have buildings which are at the various stages of completion outside the co-operative housing estate. The rate at which Staff and Faculty send their children to fee paying private schools (Nursery, Primary, Secondary, Polytechnics and Universities); acquiring exotic cars and investing in real estate, can be seen simply as an attempt at eliminating poverty of any type in the near future. This is another means of consciously "moving people to the next level" with ease in the face of harsh economic conditions being experienced by the generality of citizens in Nigeria.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendation

The cooperative society has been a blessing in situations where Institutions and organizations where such are hosted join hands with the officers of the Society especially as it relates to savings contributions and loan repayment deductions from source. The existence of a Cooperative society relieves the host community of incessant requests for financial support in form of loans to meet staff pressing financial needs. As a society, government needs to encourage the growth and sustenance of cooperatives in Nigeria with a view to eliminating poverty amongst the citizens in the country. However, if the three arms of the Nigerian government fail to get the Cooperative movement off the ground, one of the most potent developmental tools available to those most in need may be wasted thereby

rendering the masses powerless and

perpetually poor.

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