

The Women and Youth opportunity for transformative cooperatives

Auma Okwany PhD

International Institute of Social Studies

Erasmus University Rotterdam

The Hague, Netherlands

Key challenges

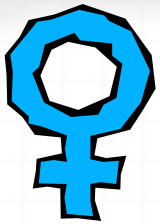
- The key role of Financial cooperatives in building better communities by enhancing financial inclusion
- Enormity of the potential versus the very narrow base, (31,481) room for growth – need for deepening and broadening outreach
- Unsecured/excessive lending/credit
- Broadening and cementing a culture of saving, financial literacy and smart loans/sustainable debt that can be serviced
- The Cooperative movement value system as pro-community and pro-poor people.
- The need for sustainable cooperatives
- Having the right structure and starting right!
- How a Gender and Youth focus can contribute to mitigating these challenges

Inclusive, responsive and sustainable CFIs

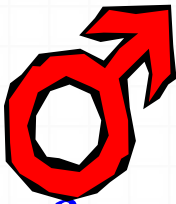
Outline

- Conceptual clarity – defining gender and youth
- Why the inclusion and participation of women and youth in cooperative institutions is important?
- Multiple and intersecting barriers that inhibit their inclusion/participation
- Inclusive and responsive cooperatives as a model for strong, resilient community based structures.

- Gender (as different from sex) and Youth (generation) are both social constructions – constructed by institutions from home to workplaces
- Conceptions shape engagement



Nature vs. Culture



Which of these statements is (mainly) about gender, which is (mainly) about sex?

- ✧ On average, women are smaller than men
- ✧ Men are natural leaders because they are rational
- ✧ On average, men are better-fed than women
- ✧ Women are weak and emotional therefore unfit to occupy leadership positions
- ✧ The infant mortality rate of girls is higher than that of boys
- ✧ Women can bear children, and men cannot
- ✧ All men are good in sports
- ✧ Women are better carers for children, the ill and the elderly (which is why they make good nurses and teachers)
- ✧ Men are better at mathematics than women
- ✧ Women earn lower wages than men
- ✧ There are more men than women in parliament

Sex	Gender
Biological characteristics	Social roles and relations
Innate	Learned / constructed
Unchangeable(?)	Changeable
Denotes difference	Denotes inequality

Gender and Youth

- How a person's biology is culturally valued and interpreted into locally accepted ideas of what it is to be a woman, man or youth
- Youth: a life-phase
- Gender and youth are socially constructed and both are something that we “do” rather than something we “are”
- They are changeable
- Relational concept (power relations)
- **Context** specific (plural)– Change over time and vary with ethnicity, class, disability, culture, religion, etc
- **They are institutional** – Norms about gender and youth structure males, females and young people's involvement in socio-economic life including cooperatives

Why involve women and youth?

- Cooperatives are based on values of self-help, mutual responsibility, and *democratic member control*.
- Can they be regarded as truly democratic if women and youth do not have equitable access including at decision-making levels?
- Many are spaces where older males are 'gatekeepers.' Need for space for all voices, concerns and the active involvement at all levels
- The numbers are telling

Size matters

■ Sheer Numerical Strength

Women
50% of the
human resource
base

- Un and Under-educated/
unemployed
- Lack voice
- Lack access to
means of
production
(Finance,
Collateral)

Lack
entrepreneurship
skills

African Countries
15-35yrs [up to 70%
below 35]

Africa Youth Charter: 15-
29 years [27%]

UNCRC: 15-24 years
[22%]

85% defined youth as between 18-35 years; 10% 25-35
and 5% as those 25-45%

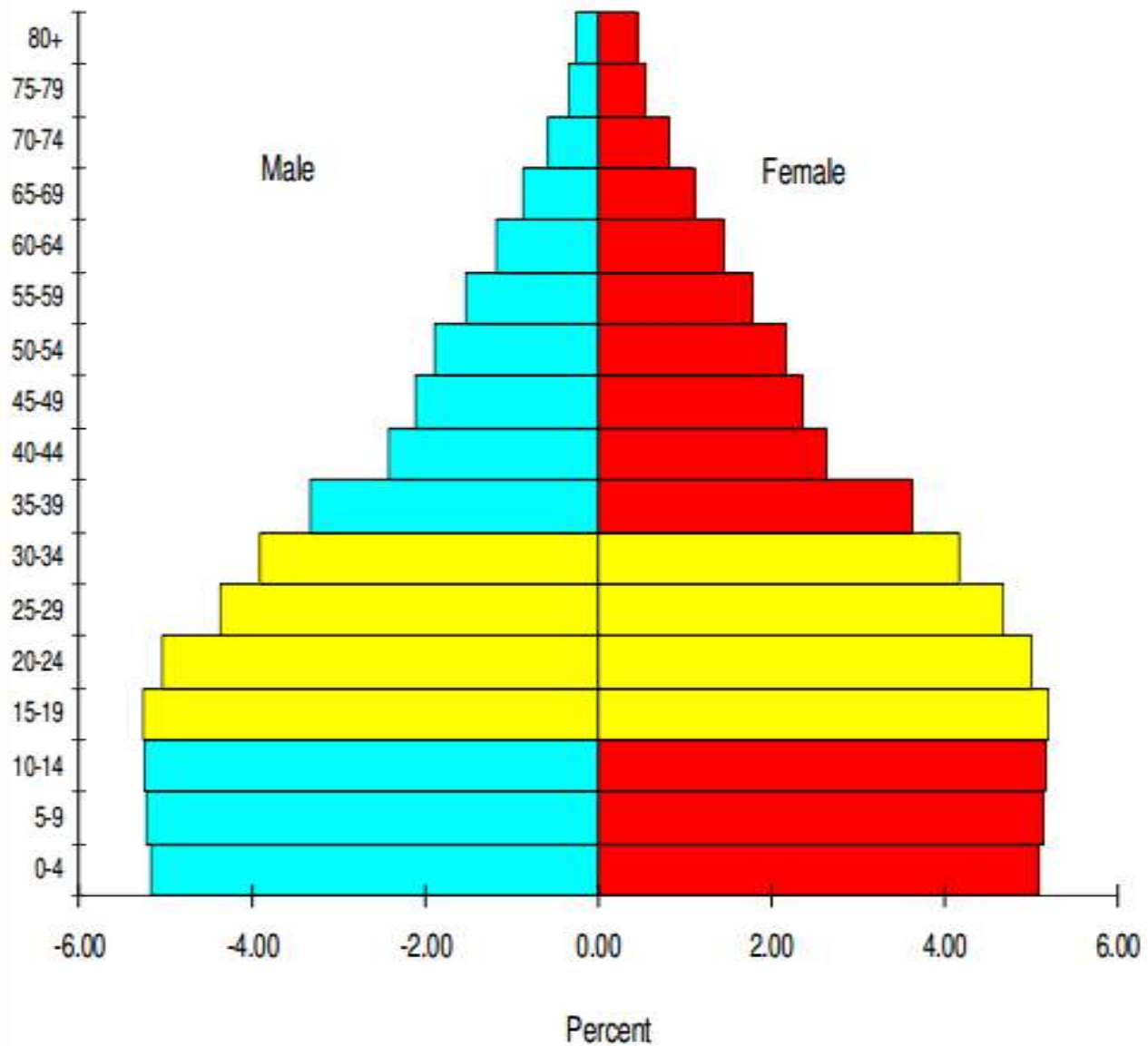
Youth numerical strength: South Africa

**Total population under 35 years:
70.3%**

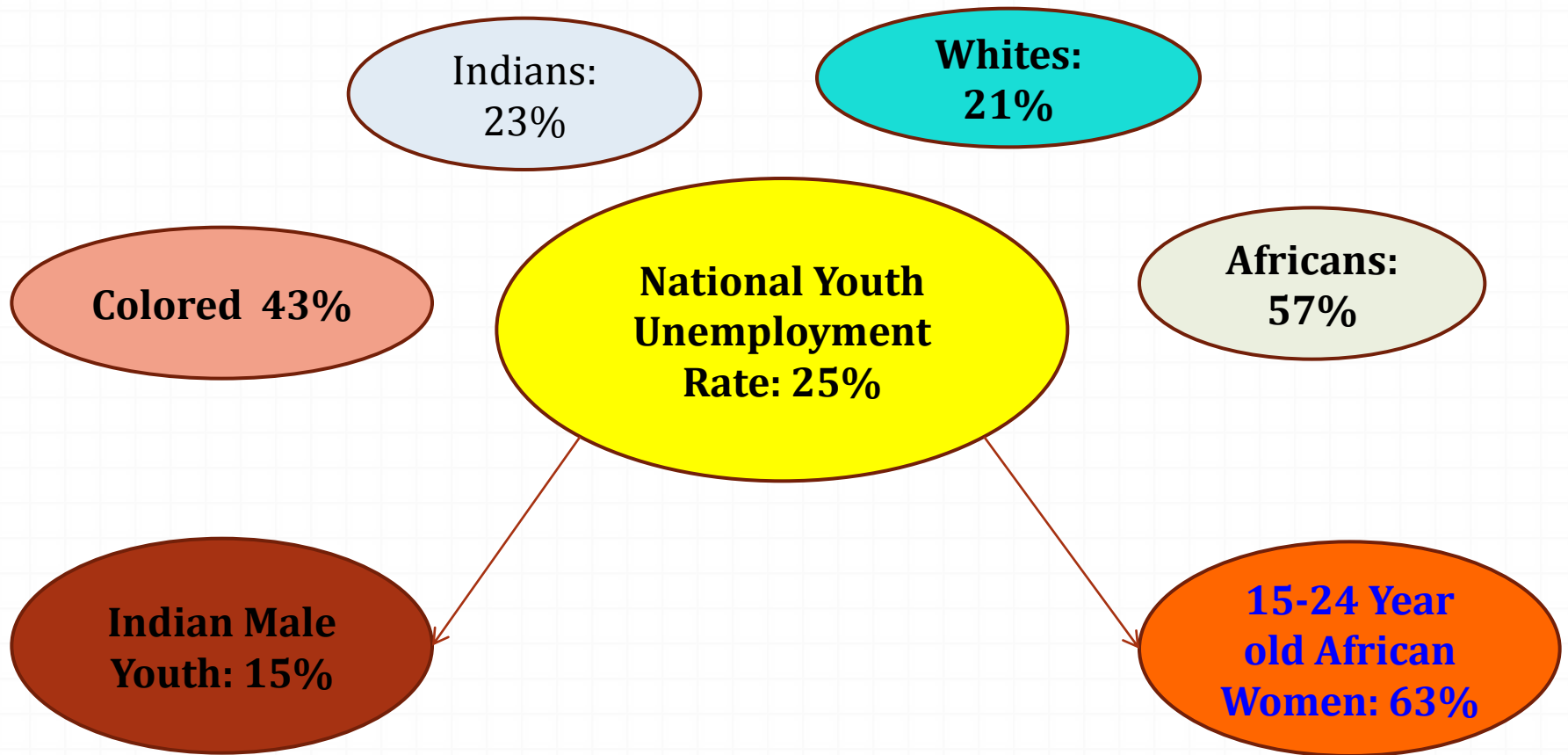
**Population
under 15 years
31.3%**

**Population 15-
35 years:
39%**

Total South African Population by Age and Gender: 2010



Youth Unemployment? S. Africa



Figures worst for young African Women, rural and peri-urban youth and youth with disabilities

The Cooperative solution

The story of a woman who we shall call Nomsa is illustrative. Thirty three year old and a mother of two children aged 2 and 4 years, she was widowed when her husband died after a long illness that contributed to the depletion of the family resources including the collapse of her small business which was her means of livelihood. She started another enterprise growing vegetables and supplying schools. She was awarded a five year government contract to supply vegetables and prepare meals for schools. She needed capital and tried to get a loan from her commercial bank to expand her enterprise but was turned down. Fortunately, she was a member of a stockvel which had a saving of 100,000 Rand. She used this as collateral and took a loan from a CFI and after paying it back she borrowed a larger sum and soon was able to expand her business. This cycle of low income, low-credit, low-investment to more income, more credit, more investment has seen her grow and operate an enterprise that currently employs 39 people 13 who cook at the schools and 26 who work on her farm.

This story highlights:

- The vulnerability of many women in Africa who are victims of structures that place heavy burdens on them
- Women's double burden of reproduction and production
- Also their resilience and resourcefulness
- The power of networks and mutuality – when harnessed can lead to transformative development
- Journey from survival to transformation shows: The role of cooperative institutions as agencies that hold enormous potential for the entrepreneurial development of women and youth in Africa and for bringing about economic and social transformation

Why women?

“Women are 66 percent of the workforce, receive 10 percent of the income and own 1 percent of the means of production.

Women also comprise half of worlds population, perform two thirds of world’s working hours but also comprise 70% of the worlds poor. ”

Why women and Youth?

*“Poverty is inseparably linked to lack of access to or loss of control over resources, including land, skills, knowledge, capital and social connections. Without these resources, people have limited access to institutions, markets, employment and public services. Young people are particularly affected by this situation. Therefore, specific measures are needed to address the **juvenilization** and **feminization** of poverty”*—United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth.

- Many women have special skills in, management including budgeting, marketing and trading, mobilizing and mentoring as well as knowledge of local contexts
- Evidence – Small and medium enterprises powerful tool for bringing about transformative development.
- Women owned SME in Zimbabwe 67%; in Lesotho 73%; in Swaziland 84% and in two South African townships 62% (FAO) .
- Women and girls reinvest 90%of their earned income with families compared to 30-40% for men (Pop council)
- World Bank Report Women entrepreneurs drive economic growth in Africa
- Involving women in management of cooperatives including the board is “good business”.

- Youth entrepreneurship -sustainable solution to unemployment
- Youth possess qualities of enthusiasm, motivation, enterprise, risk-taking, flexibility, energy, resourcefulness and willingness to try new approaches
- Key force behind technological innovation = a crucial asset for boosting the development of cooperative institutions.
- Both create a dynamic responsive workforce. Impact economic growth and development
- Given the critical roles of women and youth, enhancing their productive capabilities and involving them in decision-shaping/making within the cooperative movement will boost the numbers, diversify activities and fortify the cooperative movement.

Barriers to active involvement of women and youth in cooperatives

- Norms and power relations that lead to formal equality without substantive equality
- Women's productive and reproductive roles
- Constrain their entrepreneurial activities and affect how these enterprises are able to translate to sustainable impacts on poverty and development
- Example: Women (in agriculture) undertake most of the cultivation BUT do not own land (lack of access to or control over credit and assets (land), not targeted in technical training
- (Lack of) access to market information ~ value chain management, product information, pricing.

Factors defining exclusion contd.

- (Mis)perceptions about youth. Youth as high risk, unreliable, immature.
- Leadership of cooperatives nested within contexts wherein the state and its institutions construct unequal gendered relations and state power is male power.
- Older males are “gatekeepers” in cooperative institutions. Leads to exclusion of women and blocked mobility of youth “waithood”
- One stroke view of members means that products are not tailored to the unique and diverse needs

RESPONSIVE and INCLUSIVE COOPERATIVES

- Representative governance structures. Numbers (avoid compromising quality by adding and not stirring or tokenism).
- Engage with norms that marginalize. Going beyond legislation and policies- (attitudes) stimulate dialogue around gender roles and relations.
- Inclusive structures- change from apex bodies downwards requires Listening to all voices including women and youth
- Succession planning – going beyond the rhetoric. Opportunity, delegation, mentoring, nurturing youth- key to sustainability. “If you start something and you fail to involve young people it will surely fail”
- How to accommodate the wealth of experience of older management. [Ghana ex-officio non-voting position].

- Linkage with educational and social institutions to encourage a savings
- Moving beyond small consumption and production loans to include insurance (such as formal/flexible voluntary savings, health, asset, accident and life insurance and production and livelihood credit);
- Providing diversified services/support (heterogeneity)
- Harnessing ICT to provide more effective support (using E-business applications; phone banking) and to make SACCOs more efficient

- Undertake research (country and multi country studies) to find out the status, constraints, and opportunities for participation of ALL.
- A fundamental shift in conceptions of and engagement with women and youth in design and delivery of services
- Strong foundations ~ Extending downwards – inculcating a savings culture from early stages to build strong foundations

Teach Children to Save South Africa™ (TCTS SA™)

Introduced in 2008 by the **Banking Association South Africa**. Generic financial literacy programme to inculcate a culture of saving in children and promote volunteerism in the banking industry and the broader financial sector.

17 banks and 31 financial institutions have participated reaching over 500,000 learners in over 2,000 schools nationwide ~ with many more reached through programme integration.

Motto: “Ligotshwa limanzi”

(meaning best shape a stick whilst still moist).

Volunteer bankers & financial sector professionals become “teachers-for-67minutes” (Mandela Day)

Website: www.teachchildrentosave.co.za



- Mainstream cooperative education in the education curricula
- Develop products oriented to the needs of youth – Business start up, school fees, mobile banking, etc
- Affirmative action for youth in leadership (30% supposed to be youth and women).
- Mentor youth to take up leadership roles in the SACCOs (*It is the young trees that strengthen the forest – Luganda Proverb*)
- Youth inclusion is not a generational shift, but ensuring opportunities for meaningful collaborative participation

According to MCI (2010:13,

“We have studied change makers and learned from social entrepreneurs. We found that they start early. Changes they brought about as young people inspired a lifelong mission. An adult mentor encouraged them to pursue ideas.

Alone youth will walk fast, alone the old will walk slowly, together they will walk far

Concluding Remarks

- o There is a need to debunk myths about youth and their characteristics in the cooperative sector.
- o Youth inclusion is not a generational shift, but ensuring opportunities for meaningful participation.
- o Youth inclusion is good for cooperatives and youth –
Transformative Development



Our Cooperatives as Gendered Institutions

- What are the gender issues and concerns?
- How can they be addressed?
- How do addressing these gender issues and concerns translate to better business?