

Moroccan Cooperatives: Exploring Development and Organizational Discourses

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ABSTRACT: Moroccan cooperatives have emerged as critical vehicles for socio-economic development, driven by the country's New Development Model (NDM) and National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS). These developmental discourses emphasize inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation, influencing how cooperatives function and evolve. This paper investigates the interplay between external developmental narratives and the organizational cultures of Moroccan cooperatives, highlighting the way these entities adapt and internalize policies to align with national goals. By analysing the mechanisms through, which discourses shape culture and vice versa, the article provides insights into the transformative potential of cooperatives as mediators between policy frameworks and grassroots realities. The study concludes with policy recommendations and identifies areas for further research to enhance the role of cooperatives in fostering sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: Moroccan Cooperatives, Developmental Discourses, Sustainability, National Sustainable Development Strategy, Inclusivity.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Moroccan Cooperatives increasingly play a pivotal role not only in the socio-economic domains, but also in the sustainable development of the country. They are considered as vital organizational forms in Morocco's socio-economic landscape, especially during the economic crises such as the advent of Covid-19. Therefore, Moroccan cooperatives are more inclusive and sustainable alternatives (Rhouiri et al.,2023). Recently, the significance of Moroccan cooperatives has been further recognized within both the National Sustainable Development Strategy (2011) and Morocco's New Development Model (2021), which emphasise the values of inclusivity, sustainability and innovation.

Analysing cooperatives within the framework of the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) and the New Development Model (NDM) is of paramount importance as it allows us to fully understand how these organizations can serve as instruments of the socio-economic growth and development of Morocco. In fact, cooperatives and the cooperative economy exemplify the principles of the NSDS and NDM since they promote community engagement, equitable resources distribution, and local entrepreneurship. Furthermore, examining their legal and organizational dynamics reveals their potential to bridge the gap between national development goals and grassroots implementation. The key to development lies in the process of putting policies, strategies, and initiatives into action at the local level. Cooperatives as local organizations translate the goals of NDM and NSDS into tangible outcomes.

The present article attempts to investigate the way Moroccan cooperatives function within their legal framework and the extent to which they align with the goals of both NSDS and NDM. It also addresses the question cooperatives can function as vehicles for socio-economic development by examining their organizational dynamics through the lenses of developmental discourses and organizational culture(s). By doing so, it highlights the method Moroccan cooperatives can serve as a bridge between policy and practice in promoting sustainable development thanks to the developmental discourses, organizational cultures, and their unique organizational identity.

1. Historical and Legal Framework of Moroccan Cooperatives

Moroccan cooperatives trace their roots to the mid-20th century, when they were first established as small business-like tools for rural development and social solidarity. Over time, the legal framework evolved to include a broader range of cooperative activities, including agricultures, crafts, and artisanal as well as touristic services.

1.1. Historical Evolution of Cooperatives:

Historically speaking, the cooperatives movement has first emerged in Europe during the nineteenth century.

However, there is a scholarly disagreement about the first time this movement has begun. A number of scholars such as (Webb, Webb, 1921; in Forno, 2022), for instance, state that its roots traced back in the eighteenth century. According to them, a number of cooperatives were developed in both Britain and France, especially in the framing industry and consumer organizations (Holyoake, 1908). Accordingly, the Rochdale Society of equitable Pioneers, founded in 1844 in England, is regarded as the foundation of the modern cooperative movement (Digby, 1948). The idea behind this movement was to reorganize the industry from the production for exchanges to the production for use (Webb, Webb, 1921; in Forno, 2022).

This movement expanded across Europe, the Americas, and later globally adopting to local needs, particularly in agricultural and consumer sectors (Forno, 2022). Since the 1990s, cooperatives decided to embrace more sustainable and ethical practices in order that they could respond to consumers' demands by opting for more eco-friendly and fair-trade products, which reappraises the nineteenth-century Rochdale Pioneers' original ideas (Forno, 2022).

According to the Declarations of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) (2011), a cooperative can be defined as "an autonomous association of persons voluntarily brought together to satisfy their common economic, social and cultural aspirations and needs, through a collectively owned and democratically examines enterprise" (Chevallier, 2013; Ouddach & Tlaty, 2024). In the same vein, a cooperative is characterized as an enterprise in which ownership is not based solely on share investment. Instead, ownership is based on different kind of relationships within the organization, such as being employees, suppliers, or customers. Additionally, voting rights are not tied to the amount of capital contributed, but they are shared equally among all members. The individuals, who use or benefit from the goods or services provided by the organization, hold the authority to participate in decision-making process (Jones, Kalmi, 2009).

1.2. The Legal Framework of Moroccan Cooperatives

Definitely, the Moroccan cooperatives are considered as the primary tools to promote the social and solidarity economy. In the same line, the Law 112-12 is a legal framework that is related to the Moroccan cooperative. It defined it as a "group of individuals and/or legal entities who agree to come together and unite with the aim to establish a business that meets their economic and social needs, and it is managed in accordance with universally recognized fundamental values and principles of cooperatives." (Law 112-12 on Cooperatives, 2011)

Accordingly, cooperatives are run in a democratic way to improve the socioeconomic situation of members, to reduce, for the benefit of its members, the cost price or sale price of certain products or services, and to enhance the market quality. As regards the enhancement of market quality, the cooperative may focus on better production methods, higher standards, or added features that make the products more attractive, durable, or competitive. This improvement in quality can help members gain more satisfaction from the products, increase their market value, and potentially attract more customers; thereby, the cooperatives' goals of economic and social growth for both members and community are met.

1.3. Governmental Support for Cooperatives

Indeed, the Moroccan government seem to play a pivotal role in supporting both the establishment and the operation of cooperatives. Its support lies in ensuring that cooperatives contribute effectively to national development goals. This support is provided through numerous ways, including legal, financial, and administrative support. Based on the document of 112-12 Law, cooperatives are recognized as a distinct type of organization that are legitimized and protected under the Moroccan law. This law outlines clear procedures for establishing cooperatives and it makes this process more accessible for individuals. Moreover, it highlights a detailed guide for the organization and the governance of cooperatives including member rights, decision making processes and financial reporting.

Financially, Moroccan Cooperatives may benefit from several funding programs: international and national ones that aimed at supporting the establishment and expanding of these cooperatives and their organizational operations through funding, credit facilities and tax incentives. Several international and national programs have been remarkable in funding and supporting Moroccan cooperatives. Furthermore, they introduce practices and discourses of sustainability and innovation within Moroccan cooperatives. The following table introduces these programs and initiatives that support Moroccan Cooperatives and the discourses they highlighted.

Program Name	Program Type	Support Provided	Mission	Highlighted Discourses
USAID Cooperative Financing Program (CFP)	International	Direct grants of 90,000 dirhams to cooperatives in agriculture, handicrafts, and tourism sectors.	Promoting growth and resilience of cooperatives during economic hardships, with a focus on women and youth.	Economic resilience, empowerment of women and youth, sustainable growth.
USAID Cooperative Resilience Program	International	Training, coaching, and climate financing for vulnerable cooperatives and entrepreneurs.	Strengthening capacity to adapt to climate change and economic shocks, expanding activities, and addressing water scarcity.	Climate resilience, rural development, and economic adaptation.
Innovation Support Fund	National	Financial assistance for R&D, prototyping, industrialization, and patent valorisation.	Promoting sustainable industrial practices through innovation in R&D and industrial development.	Industrial innovation, sustainability, and technology advancement.
MOURAFAKA Program	National	Strategic diagnosis, training, and operational skills support for new cooperatives.	Enhance sustainability and management efficiency of agricultural cooperatives.	Cooperative sustainability, capacity building, and effective management.
IFC's Support for Solar-Powered Irrigation Systems	International	\$36 million risk-sharing facility providing loans for energy-efficient solar-powered irrigation.	Promote sustainable agricultural practices through renewable energy adoption.	Renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and financial accessibility for SMEs.

Table 1: International and National Programs and Initiatives that support Moroccan Cooperatives and the discourses they highlighted.

Administratively, the Moroccan government offers advisory services to engage cooperatives in the local and national markets and even in the international ones. For instance, the regional offices of the Office for the Development of Cooperation (ODCO) provide an ongoing administrative and strategic advice to cooperatives, with the ostensible aim to align them with the developmental goals.

2. DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSES SHAPING MOROCCAN COOPERATIVES

Development discourse highlights and includes the academic and policy-oriented discussions and practices that focused mainly on the idea of development. This discourse is originated in the context of post-World War 2 initiatives that aimed at promoting economic growth, improving social conditions, and enhancing governance in developing countries (Watts, 2009). In development discourse, participation refers to the extent in which stakeholders or beneficiaries engage in the process of planning, execution, and evaluation of the development project and strategies. This discourse is exclusively relevant to Moroccan cooperatives, where participatory approaches are critical to fostering inclusive and sustainable development. Here, the goal of participation is fundamental as it engages people, who are particularly socially or economically marginalized, at the heart of development initiatives. By doing so, participation seeks to empower these people by influencing practices and policies thanks to those development discourses.

Historically speaking, participation emerged as a cornerstone of “alternative development strategies” in the 1980s and 1990s, a period that witnessed the integration of mainstream development paradigms (Hickey, Kathari, 2009). Methodologies such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) became widely adopted as tools for engaging local communities in decision-making processes. Significantly, these methods

have gone beyond the localized projects to shape broader development policies, such as the World Bank's Voice of the Poor studies and poverty reduction strategies, which emphasise participatory governance (Hickey, Kathari, 2009).

In the context of Moroccan cooperatives, participation is a crucial element for achieving inclusion economic growth and social empowerment. Cooperatives in Morocco often involve diverse members including farmers, artisans, and women, depending on the type of the cooperatives, whether it is agricultural, artisanal, or ecological products cooperatives. Those members may otherwise have limited access to decision making. By adopting development discourses and participatory methodologies, cooperatives can ensure that all members contribute and benefit from their activities. In the same line, the law 112-12 highlights the "open door" and "one person, one voice" principles. Those principles promote inclusivity and ensures that any individual who supports the cooperatives 'goals can participate. Moreover, they state that each member has an equal say in the cooperatives' decisions, which ensures democratic control and allows that all members have an equal influence.

Those development discourses are significant in sectors such as agriculture, handicraft, and tourism. This means that cooperatives play a significant role in enhancing the livelihoods and preserving cultural heritage. Nonetheless, putting those participatory approaches into practice within Moroccan cooperatives is not without its difficulties. While the idea of participation is often celebrated, the reality can sometimes fall short, as it might reinforce existing inequalities instead of breaking them down. In some cooperatives, decision making tends to be dominated by a few influential individuals which leaves other members struggling to make their voices heard.

More importantly, external factors such as government agencies and NGOs may inadvertently impose their agendas, which will undermine the autonomy and self-governance of cooperatives. To overcome these challenges, Moroccan cooperatives need to adopt more inclusive and effective participatory practices and development practices.

2.1. The National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) and the Development Discourses of Cooperatives

The NSDS sets Morocco's roadmap for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs). It prioritizes ecological balance, social cohesion, and inclusive economic growth, which positions cooperatives as instrumental actors in sustainable practices. This developmental strategy introduces several discourses that align with the principles of cooperatives and the way they should operate in their communities across multiple sectors, including agriculture, water management, and energy efficiency. Thus, Specific initiatives like the Green Morocco Plan and rural development programs translate the cooperatives' efforts to empower communities economically. Moreover, this national strategy focuses more on education, capacity building, and reducing inequalities which goes hand in hand with the cooperative principles of education, training, and information. The Development discourses that are highlighted from the NDSD are: sustainability as a core value, stakeholder involvement, economic inclusivity, resilience through collaboration, and human development and education. By keeping those discourses in mind, policymakers and cooperatives' members can enhance the performance and the effectiveness of the cooperatives' organizations and maximize not only the economic rewards or revenues but also the sustainability of the cooperatives and their effective involvement in the socio-economic development of the country.

2.2. The New Development Model and the Development Discourses of Cooperatives

As a matter of fact, the New Development Model (NDM) identifies cooperatives as pivotal instruments for addressing some of the most pressing societal challenges, including the problems of rural areas, gender disparities, and the limited opportunities for youth. Rooted in values of solidarity, inclusion, and sustainability, cooperatives embody a human-centered approach to economic and social development.

Rural areas in Morocco face significant challenges, from limited infrastructure to unequal access to economic opportunities. As a response, cooperatives offer a promising pathway to overcome these hurdles by providing resources, promoting local entrepreneurship, and enabling community-based economic forms.

In agriculture, for instance, cooperatives can modernize farming practices, improve productivity, and enhance value chains. By integrating sustainable practices, such as water-efficient irrigation and renewable energy solutions, agricultural cooperatives can not only boost yields but also safeguard natural resources for future generations. More significantly, cooperatives serve as a bridge to markets, enabling small-scale farmers to negotiate better prices and compete in national and international markets.

The advancement of gender equity is both a moral imperative and a driver of national progress. Moroccan women, particularly in rural areas, often face barriers to economic participation and leadership. Cooperatives provide a powerful platform to dismantle these barriers by creating spaces where women can thrive as entrepreneurs, decision-makers, and community leaders. Through cooperatives, women gain access to critical resources such as training, financing, and market opportunities. For example, cooperatives specializing in crafts, agriculture, or food processing enable women to monetize their skills and contribute to household and community incomes. These ventures not only empower women economically but also elevate their social standing, challenging traditional norms and fostering a culture of equality.

Education and training programs within cooperatives further strengthen women's capacities, enabling them to acquire technical and managerial skills. These initiatives prepare women for leadership roles within their cooperatives and beyond, creating a ripple effect of empowerment that extends to future generations. By promoting values of equality and inclusion, cooperatives can also serve as platforms for advocacy, advancing zero-tolerance policies toward violence and discrimination against women.

Certainly, cooperatives align with the core values of Morocco's New Development Model. They embody a vision of inclusive progress, where no one is left behind. To fully realize this potential, a supportive ecosystem is essential. Policies that provide access to financing, streamline regulatory frameworks, and offer technical assistance can help cooperatives flourish. Public-private partnerships can further amplify their impact, linking cooperatives with markets, technologies, and expertise.

The journey toward a more equitable and sustainable Morocco is one that requires collective effort. Cooperatives, with their emphasis on shared responsibility and mutual benefit, are uniquely positioned to lead this charge. By empowering rural communities, uplifting women, and inspiring youth, cooperatives hold the promise of a future where every Moroccan can contribute to and benefit from the nation's progress. In doing so, the development of positive organizational cultures within cooperatives necessitates the implementation of more sophisticated and dynamic laws and policies. These frameworks should be periodically reviewed and updated to meet the evolving needs and challenges of cooperative organizations, and to construct and reconstruct an environment that promotes collaboration, innovation, and sustainable economy. The following table sheds the light on the he gaps in Moroccan Law 112-12 compared to leading international frameworks for cooperatives and it provides potential improvements that are in accordance with the development discourses.

Gap Area	Comparison with International Frameworks	Potential Improvements for Moroccan Law 112-12
Definition and Scope	International frameworks (e.g., ICA, ILO R193) emphasize broader roles of cooperatives, including cultural and environmental aspects.	It is preferable to expand the definition of cooperatives to include their social, cultural, and environmental contributions
Types of Cooperatives	Laws in the EU and Canada provide tailored legal provisions for specific types of cooperatives (e.g., worker, consumer, social cooperatives).	It is preferable to introduce differentiated legal provisions for various types of cooperatives to better meet sectoral needs.
Access to Finance	Frameworks in Canada and the EU promote cooperative banks, mutual credit systems, and favourable loan terms.	It is preferable to establish dedicated cooperative financial institutions or innovative financing tools, such as equity capital and risk-sharing mechanisms.
Digital Transformation	Modern laws in Finland and New Zealand encourage digitization and e-commerce for cooperatives.	It is preferable to include provisions to support cooperatives in adopting digital tools for management, member engagement, and market access.
Education and Training	ICA principles and ILO R193 mandate cooperative education and capacity-building initiatives.	It is preferable to strengthen legal requirements for cooperative education and training programs for members and managers.
Collaboration Networks	EU law (SCE Regulation) and South African policies recognize cooperative unions and federations for collective bargaining and advocacy.	It is preferable to facilitate and incentivise the formation of cooperative networks, unions, and federations for collaboration and representation.

Sustainability Standards	Sweden and the UN guidelines emphasize environmental sustainability and green initiatives in cooperative operations.	It is preferable to mandate sustainability requirements for cooperatives, including environmental standards and incentives for green practices.
Governance and Oversight	Germany enforces strict audits and regular reviews to ensure transparency and adherence to cooperative principles.	It is preferable to strengthen monitoring mechanisms, including mandatory audits and clear accountability frameworks.
Youth and Women Inclusion	India and Kenya incorporate explicit provisions to promote youth and women's participation in cooperatives.	It is necessary to introduce quotas or incentives to ensure greater participation of women and youth in cooperatives.
Legal Support for Expansion	International frameworks often provide explicit policies for international trade and expansion of cooperatives.	It is preferable to include provisions to support Moroccan cooperatives in expanding to international markets.

Table 2: Gaps in Moroccan Law 112-12 Compared to International Frameworks and Potential Improvements.

3. THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES OF COOPERATIVES AND THE DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSES

The intersection of organizational cultures and developmental discourses is pivotal in understanding the evolution of Moroccan cooperatives. Developmental discourses, such as those embedded in the NDM and NSDS, serve as external influences that shape the internal organizational cultures of cooperatives. Organizational culture refers to the collective values, norms, and beliefs that shape an organization (Handy, 1993). It represents a system of shared mental programming that influences common beliefs, interpretations, and behaviours, expressed through artifacts and patterns of action (Altaf & Jinnah, 2011; McSweeney, 2002). In social economy organizations (SEOs), organizational culture is shaped by the organization's history, operates partially at a subconscious level, and is inherently diverse (Orsi et al., 2005).

When these discourses are internalized and adopted by cooperatives, they transition from external narratives into organizational discourses, actively driving practices, policies, and identity formation within the cooperative framework. Developmental discourses become organizational discourses when cooperatives actively incorporate them into their operational and cultural framework. These discourses are as follows:

The first one to start with is the Inclusivity Discourses from the NDM emphasize gender equity and youth participation. These discourses, once adopted, manifest in participatory decision-making structures and leadership roles for women and youth within cooperatives. The second one is concerned with Sustainability Discourses from the NSDS inspire cooperatives to embrace environmentally and friendly practices such as organic farming or renewable energy use, embedding these values in their operational ethos. As for the last one, it has to do with Innovation Discourses drive cooperatives to modernize their techniques, adopt digital tools, and compete in global markets, creating a sustainable and innovative culture. By internalizing these developmental narratives, cooperatives transform their organizational culture, aligning their internal values and practices with broader national and global objectives.

It should be stated that from an organizational perspective, Moroccan cooperatives must take proactive steps to integrate developmental discourses into their internal cultures and practices. Firstly, fostering adaptability within the organization is crucial. Cooperatives need to create a culture that is flexible and open to external influences, by seamlessly incorporating new ideas and practices that are in accordance with developmental strategies. Moreover, the cooperative's organizational identity should be linked with national goals. By positioning themselves as contributors to the NDM and NSDS, cooperatives can display their commitment to inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation.

Promoting internal communication is essential for ensuring that all members understand and embrace the developmental discourses being adopted. Participatory decision-making processes that engage all members can reinforce the cooperative's alignment with these values while fostering a sense of shared ownership. Finally, building partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations can enhance cooperatives' access to training, funding, and market opportunities. These partnerships can bridge the gap between grassroots initiatives and broader national objectives, which helps the cooperatives to remain resilient and impactful.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

Undoubtedly, further research is essential to deepen our understanding of the various developmental discourses that shape organizational cultures in Moroccan cooperatives. One promising direction involves exploring the role of digital technologies in facilitating the integration of these discourses into cooperative practices. Digital tools could also help cooperatives promote effective internal and external communication, improve governance, and expand market access. Comparative analyses across different cooperative sectors—such as agriculture, handicrafts, and services—could provide valuable insights into sector-specific dynamics and challenges. Longitudinal studies are also needed to track the evolution of cooperative organizational cultures over time and assess how they adapt to changing developmental strategies. Furthermore, the examinations of members' perspectives can shed light on how individuals perceive and contribute to the integration of developmental discourses within their organizations. Finally, global comparisons with cooperatives in other countries could identify best practices and provide lessons to enhance the resilience and effectiveness of Moroccan cooperatives.

5. CONCLUSION

The interplay between organizational cultures and developmental discourses is crucial for the success of Moroccan cooperatives. By internalizing narratives from the NDM and NSDS, cooperatives transform these external influences into organizational discourses, shaping their practices, identity, and strategic direction. Policy support, capacity-building initiatives, and continuous adaptability are essential for enabling cooperatives to function as effective mediators between policy frameworks and grassroots realities. Future research and strategic interventions can further enhance the role of cooperatives in driving sustainable and inclusive development in Morocco, ensuring their long-term viability and impact.

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