

HOW TO INCREASE MEMBERSHIP IN A CO-OPERATIVE

Introduction

Members are needed to form a co-operative and do the required work to get benefits. The satisfaction of members should be the key focus of any co-operative society. It must be clear that people form co-operatives because they are looking for benefits which they are unable to get as individuals. In an effort to get these benefits the individuals must pool their resources and work together. Each member must know that they must volunteer their time and effort to the co-operative. Certainly this should be the same in a fisherman's co-operative society. According to the Co-operative Societies Act #31 of 2011 the least number of members to start a co-operative is fifteen (15).

What is membership?

Membership refers to the individuals who pay an entrance fee and purchase at least the minimum required shares to join a co-operative society. The members are the owners of a co-operative society since they contribute the capital. The members can be referred to as the building blocks of a co-operative society. The entrance fee is a onetime payment. However, the purchase of shares must be an ongoing activity as it shows the degree of commitment of members to their co-operative. Continuous capital investment in a co-operative provides the money to stimulate growth for the co-operative to deliver greater benefits to members.

Like any other business a co-operative a co-operative must grow if it is to successfully satisfy the needs of its members. One indicator of growth in a co-operative is increase in membership.

Why should membership be increased?

There is work to be done in a co-operative and the greater the membership the less demand on each individual. Any increase in membership is bound to bring benefits to a co-operative. These benefits include;

Increase capital

Greater economy of scale

Increase human resource

A further spreading of risk

How to increase membership

If membership in a co-operative is to grow there must be a strong effort by present membership to attract others. The co-operative must be promoted to increase membership. Activities to increase membership should include:

1. Provide goods and services to satisfy members

Satisfying present membership is a good way for a co-operative to promote itself.

2. Members encouraging others to join

It is the job of members to spread good news about their co-operative to excite outsiders.

3. Invite non-members to meetings

It is wise for members to invite targeted individuals to meetings so they could appreciate what goes on in a co-operative. This serves as a means to impress others so that they might be encouraged to join the co-operative. However, members must be certain to conduct themselves properly if they are to entice others to join.

4. Members promoting the benefits of their co-operative to others

People are attracted to benefits. They are likely to ask, "What is in it for me." If they are convinced about the benefits, then they will be more likely to join. If a member of a fisherman's co-operative is able to buy fishing gear from his co-operative at competitive price and have his co-operative buy his catch, he should share this experience with other fishermen.

5. The use of flyers

If the members believe in their co-operative there must be deliberate efforts to get others to know about it. An effective way to do this is by using flyers to promote the co-operative. Simple but attractively designed flyers can do the trick. All that is required is for members to distribute these flyers.

6. Use of the media

The print and electronic media can be used to promote co-operatives to increase membership. News bulletin, panel discussions and any good information on a co-operative can be used to bombard the public.

7. Use of social media

Face book etc. can be used to promote and make a co-operative a household name. The younger population is more attracted to the social media, so this is a medium through which they could be targeted.

8. Provide goods and services demanded in the market place

If a co-operative is able to satisfy a targeted market with demanded goods and services it will develop a favourable image. This image is bound to attract outsiders as people are attracted to success.

9. Provide low cost goods and services to members only:

Members invest money in their co-operative to get real benefits. The accessibility of low cost goods and services to members only is an effective way of attracting outsiders to join.

10. Provide goods and services to non-members at higher prices than members: Members in a co-operative are special and must be treated so. An illustration of special treatment is specially discounted prices to members. Non-members are not to receive the same benefits as member. The cost of goods and services to non-members must be higher than that offered to members. If they want the benefits of low cost goods and services they must become members.

Conclusion

There must be registration of new member in a co-operative on a regular basis. Attention must be paid to attracting young and talented individuals who are capable of leading the co-operative in the future. A smart way to enhance the future of a co-operative is membership and capital growth.