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Traditional Cooperatives Among the Kpelle in Liberia
(Einheimische Genossenschaften bei den Kpelle in Liberia. Deutsche
Zusammenfassung)

Contents:

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Types of Cooperatives
- 21 Labor Cooperatives
- 22 Saving Cooperatives
- 23 Other Work Groups
- 3 Organization of Labor Cooperatives
- 4 Conclusions and Summary
- 5 Schlußfolgerungen und Zusammenfassung

1 Introduction

Most African countries have a modern cooperative movement, and those without one are trying to build it up because cooperatives are considered to be one of the most important organizations for agricultural development. To build up a modern cooperative movement usually takes about two decades, and considerable amounts of money are needed as well as a large number of expatriate personnel who in most countries were supplied by the colonial powers.

The idea of developing agriculture through cooperatives and also certain organisational patterns were introduced to Africa by Europeans. The cooperative experts believed in an ideology according to which any development in Africa had to take place in the same way as it had done in Europe. Therefore, they never checked whether there were possibilities of development other than those offered by European models. However, among most African tribes strong traditional cooperative elements exist. Especially in a country like Liberia which has never been under colonial influence, these cooperatives are still functioning very well and some have changed by adapting to modern economic conditions. Instead of starting a new cooperative movement without roots in African culture, these traditional cooperatives should be modernized. This approach would not only require less money, less time and less technical personnel but would even be more effective.

Most traditional cooperatives are of two kinds:

a) Labor cooperatives: The members pool their labor to increase labor productivity, working in turn on each member's farm (in Liberia mostly on rice farms); since rice has become the most important cash crop of the tribal population, labor cooperatives have adapted to the new economic conditions in such a way that they help the farmers to grow more rice for sale. Labor cooperatives can easily be modernized by adding new functions to existing ones and can thereby solve the farmers' most urgent problems which are marketing and introducing better farming methods, seeds and seedlings, and modern tools.

A second step of modernization would be to introduce the processing of agricultural products, e. g. rice milling, sugar-cane rum distilling, fruit canning, etc.

b) Saving and credit cooperatives: In traditional cooperatives, saving was originally in kind (in Liberia usually in rice). Since the introduction of the money economy, they have successfully modernized themselves without any outside help. They have developed into two different types: The one modernized type is the saving cooperative where people turn in a certain amount of money weekly or monthly and the members get the total in turn, thus enabling them to acquire a larger object. Since there are no banks in the interior and individuals can hardly keep money in the house due to their family obligations, this is the only successful way of saving. The other modernized type is the saving and credit cooperative where people turn in certain amounts on a regular basis. The money is loaned to members and, at different interest rates, to nonmembers. Thus the people's needs for credit are satisfied. The amounts accumulated by the cooperative are usually redistributed to the members at the end of the year.

Traditional cooperatives have proved to be flexible and able to solve various economic problems in different situations. Nevertheless, the modern economy is too complicated for a traditional organization to adapt to it fully without outside help. Here is an urgent need for technical aid and for the provision of funds for starting a modernization program.

It is generally agreed that the technical problems of agricultural development in the tropics could be solved relatively easily; the moot point usually is the social problem, i. e. the problem of introducing to the societies in the tropics the new techniques and methods of farming, marketing, etc. This problem can be solved through modernizing

traditional cooperatives. While most farmers are very suspicious of entirely new organizations or institutions, they are much more prepared to respond to the modernization of their own traditional organizations. Modernizing traditional cooperatives could therefore be a much more suitable field for development aid than many show — off projects which involve large amounts of capital but are of little benefit to the broad population.

Despite the similarities of cooperative structures in many tribes, there are also marked differences. Any program of action therefore has to take into account the specific cooperative structures in a given tribe, which means that field research has to be done first. In order to present a case-study of traditional cooperatives suitable for experimentation, we have chosen the Kpelle tribe in Central Liberia. The Superintendent of that area takes a special interest in traditional cooperatives and their development. Field research was carried out between September 1967 and June 1968. The author was accompanied on some trips by students of the University of Liberia. The study is part of a Survey of Traditional Cooperative Societies in Liberia, sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft^{1, 2}.

¹ Field research: Field research was done in the following places:

- a) on the main road (Monrovia-Kakata-Ganta Highway):
 - Salala
 - Thema Town (between Salala and Totota)
 - Cuttington
- b) on side roads off the highway:
 - Platotaa (near Cuttington)
 - Sinyea (near Cuttington)
 - Sanoyea (at the end of a side road about 25 miles from Totota)
 - Zibei (12 miles south-east of Palala)
 - Bopolu (at the end of the Suehn Highway, about 60 miles north from Monrovia)
- c) on bush paths:
 - Palaquellie or Palakole (about 9 h walk from Suakoko or 7 h from Bopolu, north-west of St. Paul river)
 - Galama (1 h walk from Sinyea near Cuttington)
 - Baekole (2 h walk from Sinyea near Cuttington)
 - Kayarta (3 h walk from Sinyea near Cuttington)
 - Nannah (30 min walk from Salala)
 - Bokai Town (1³/₄ h walk from Salala)
 - Gbanyan-Kollief-Felenta (2 h walk from Salala)
 - Dschadamu (4 h walk from Salala)

Additional research was done in Thelma T. Reeves Rubber Plantation (Forma Chiefdom, near Bong Mine) and in Vangekor, a Kpelle settlement on Vai territory.

² Nomenclature: There are two major types of cooperatives among the Kpelle: the work group called kúú and the saving group called bunyèi. The term kúú is explained as meaning "I work for others and others work for me"; the members of such a group work in turn on each member's farm. Kúú denotes an indefinite work group; the definite form is gúú. There is some confusion about the term kuu which is due to the fact that Kpelle is a tonal language. There are three different words spelled kuu:

- kúú (high tone) which signifies a group of people working together;
- kuu (middle tone) which signifies a feast;
- kùù (low tone) which signifies a point of time agreed upon.

Some assume that a cooperative work group always ends with a feast and argue that the connection between agricultural cooperation and feasting is so close that the same word is used for both. But not only is the word kúú different from the word kuu but there is usually no feast at the end of the work session of a kúú.

A kúú operates on strict mutuality over a period of time. There are also types of economic cooperation where this mutuality is missing; they are informal work groups referred to as

2 Types of Cooperatives

21 Labor cooperatives

a) Labor kúú proper

The labor kúú is predominantly used on rice farms. According to the type of agricultural activity, there are different kinds of cooperatives. Often the same cooperative does all types of work during the agricultural cycle (except those ascribed to the other sex); but on principle it is equally possible to form a new cooperative for each type of activity. The system of sexual labor division overlaps the cooperative activities in such a way that certain types of cooperatives are only organized by men and others by women. According to activity, the following types of cooperatives are organized on rice farms:

- kwaobo kúú = brushing bush cooperative, consisting of men (in Sinyea, it was found that also women do brushing);
- wuru pong kúú = felling trees cooperative, consisting of men;
- burning farm cooperative, consisting of men (not everywhere done cooperatively);
- kwatenga kúú = cleaning farm cooperative, consisting of men (only organized if the bush has not been properly burned);
- building kitchen (= store room for rice) cooperative, consisting of men;
- fence building cooperative, consisting of men (not everywhere done cooperatively);
- kwasi kúú = scratching farm (and planting) cooperative, consisting of women;
- weeding cooperative, consisting of women (in Sanoyea, it was found that also mixed cooperatives consisting of men and women do weeding);
- molongtee kúú = harvesting ("cutting rice") cooperative, consisting of women. Nearly everywhere, men may join if a speedy harvest is necessary. (In Palaquellie, cooperatives are said never to be mixed.)

Work cooperatives are also classified according to the musical instruments used:

- kiling kúú = cooperative with a drum (this is the predominant type);
- bu kala ya nga = cooperative without drum;
- wuli kúú = singing cooperative (without drum but with singer).

According to activity, a further type has to be mentioned: On a rubber plantation in the Kpelle area, it was found that most of the 44 workers form work groups of five to six members in order to clear their "task" (each worker is responsible for the tapping of the rubber trees and the clearing of the underbrush of two "tasks", each task containing about 450 rubber trees on approximately four acres).

b) Kpiri seche kúú = load-carrying cooperative

In a load carrying cooperative, a group of people joins to carry in turn for each member large quantities of products to the market. Today, they have diminished in importance. There were many large load-carrying cooperatives shortly after the war when the single barrel gun was imported in the Kpelle area and each young man wanted to have one. In order to get the money for a gun, they helped one another to carry their palm kernels or other products to the market for sale.

continued from page 117

timii kúú. In descriptions, it is stressed by the Kpelle that a timii kúú is no proper kúú. The translation is "work-for-nothing-group".

The term bunyèi is explained as meaning "putting it in the hand" or "to put it in the next person's hand (e. g. rice or money)". Such a saving cooperative is nowadays also referred to as susu which is derived from the Yoruba word esusu.

The term kúú may also be used as a general term for "cooperative". In large parts of Liberia, it has even become a term in Liberian English. To distinguish the work group from the saving group, it is called labor kúú and the saving group money kúú. Sometimes, the spelling coo is used.

c) To tie kúú = palm-nut cutting cooperative

Palm-nut cutting cooperatives are usually small, consisting of about 3—10 members; one, however, was found to have 20 members. Every one or two weeks, each member brings a stipulated number of bags of palm nuts. The members' wives help to wash the palm nuts. The palm-oil is manufactured cooperatively. Each member receives in turn the total amount of palm-oil produced at a time. In case of the cooperative mentioned above (with 20 members), it was agreed upon that each member should contribute 3 bags (50 kg rice bags) of palm-nuts every two weeks. The proceeds from the palm-oil they produced together was not given to individuals but kept and finally handed over to the Clan Chief to make up for each member's contribution to the President's Birthday (\$ 20.— per person).

d) Spinning cooperative

A spinning cooperative usually consists of 6 to 10 women, sometimes up to 15. The one who organized the group is the leader. In the morning, one member brings a little basket full of cotton and divides it among the group. They spin it and give it back to the owner. This is done in turn until every member has once used the cooperative's services for one day. According to members, cooperative work is less tiresome, and the individual produces more thread in a cooperative than when working alone.

e) Laa tee kúú = house-thatching cooperative

Each year before the rainy season, the thatch roofs of the huts have to be repaired or replaced. A group of twenty people may join together (those whose roofs do not need repair would not join) and in turn cut the thatch for each member of the group and repair or renew his roof. While in a farming cooperative, a member who does not appear at a work session and refuses to pay a compensation can be sued before a court, this is not the case in a house thatching cooperative. Although it is a cooperative because of the reciprocity of the work done and its existence over a certain period of time, it seems at the same time to be considered as being close to an informal work group.

f) House-building work group

A house building work group is usually formed ad hoc; there is no strict mutuality involved (although in the long run, mutual help balances), and the group is informal in the sense that it is only formed to help one man and it lasts for one or two days. Such a work group is sometimes called a *timii kúú*. The size of such work groups varies considerably according to areas as well as to the popularity of the house owner. — However, if there is a sufficient number of people who all want to build a house, a proper *kúú* may be formed based on strict mutuality.

g) Other cooperative work groups

Since the term *kúú* is not limited to a few economic activities but rather denotes a type of economic cooperation based on strict mutuality, this principle of cooperative can be extended to a number of other activities, e. g. the production of sugar cane rum.

22 Saving cooperatives

The principle of a saving cooperative is that a certain amount of cash or kind agreed upon at an organizational meeting is collected from the members at subsequent meetings and the total amount is given to one member each time; if contributions are equal, all members receive the total the same number of times; if contributions are unequal, the number of turns of each member is multiplied with his shares. The term for any saving cooperative is *bunyèi*. The number of officers in a saving cooperative has been increasing. While the headman (*bunyèi golong*), today often referred to as President, originally collected the money or rice or whatever was saved, there is today also a treasurer, collector and a secretary for whom the English terms are used.

a) Morong kau bunyèi = rice saving cooperative

In former times the rice saving cooperative was the most common type of saving cooperatives. Anything between about 4 and 30 members join and contribute every evening one cup or weekly 5—7 cups or anything as arranged. The total is given in turn to one member each time. Traditionally, it was only formed by women. It is still practiced today but has diminished in importance. There are areas in which it disappeared. In some instances, it has become more of a marketing than a saving cooperative. In Palaquellie e. g. which is close to a diamond mining area, rice saving cooperatives are formed in order to get sufficient rice to be transported to that area and sold there.

b) Kâpa bunyèi = seng kau bunyèi = money saving cooperative

The money saving cooperative is a modernization of the rice saving cooperative; the main difference is that money was substituted for rice. It developed around 1930 when Firestone started its operation and when, for the first time, cash became available for large parts of the population in the interior. Contributions are weekly or monthly. According to the trend, women make weekly contributions of 5 to 25 cents, while men seem to prefer monthly contributions of larger amounts. The number of members may be anything from two on up. Groups of thirty members are not unusual. Contributions are usually relatively small in large groups and big in small groups: they may be between 50 cents and \$ 2.— in large cooperatives and reach \$ 50.— or even more in cooperatives of two or three members. Men and women usually form separate groups. In the absence of banks, saving cooperatives are mainly formed to enable the members to save and to acquire some large object, pay the bride price, or pay the tax. In a proper saving cooperative, the money is redistributed immediately. There are, however, some cases where the cooperative purposely formed as a so-called treasury to meet requests from the government or government agents; there, the money is kept and amounts due are paid cooperatively.

While this is only a variation of the usual saving cooperative, there is also a saving and credit cooperative which represents a further development of the traditional rice saving cooperative.

c) Credit cooperative

Since it developed out of the saving cooperative, it is still often referred to with the same name: kâpa bunyèi. But the proper name begins to be kongpanya or company. It is of recent origin (about 10 to 20 years old). Members pay in certain amounts weekly or monthly. Instead of redistributing the money immediately, it is kept and loaned at an interest of about \$ 1.— per \$ 10.— (= 10 %) for members and 25 cts. per \$ 1.— (= 25 %) no matter for how long, but usually not longer than three months.

d) Kolú bunyèi = iron money saving cooperative

Kolú (or korú) are thin, twisted iron bars, 10 to 20 inches long, which were used as primitive money in the Northern parts of Liberia and the neighboring areas of Sierra Leone and Guinea. Although they have never been universally used among the Kpelle, they infiltrated into some parts of Kpelle country where they were also used in saving cooperatives. Since they are not in use any more today, the iron money saving cooperatives have also died out.

e) Wuló bunyèi = palm oil saving cooperative

The principle of saving rice or money is applicable to a number of commodities, e. g. palm oil. In such a case, it often takes the form of a marketing cooperative. One cooperative was found consisting of 5 members of which each one contributed bi-weekly five gallons of palm oil. Each one got the total of 25 gallons in turn and carried it with some members of his family to Salala or to Firestone to sell it.

23 Other work groups

a) Informal work group

The informal work group is either called *timii kúú* = work for nothing cooperative, or *kpong mââ belaa* = people who are helping. The purpose for which it is formed most often is house building. First, a small group of 4—5 members cuts the sticks and later, a bigger group of 8—15 puts up the house: the old men do the measuring, the young ones dig the holes for the sticks and poles. A third step is daubing, and finally, the thatch is cut and the house roofed with the thatch. Different groups may be formed for all these types of work, or it may all be done by one group.

Informal work groups may be formed for many other economic activities; they may replace any type of cooperative if some one is not able or does not want to join a cooperative. The burning of the farms seems to be done more often by informal work groups than by cooperatives. Another activity informal work groups are formed for is the beating of palm-nuts to make oil.

b) "Government farm"

One of the rare instances when land is owned cooperatively and the produce is disposed of communally is the so-called "government farm" which has developed in a number of places among the Kpelle and also in other areas. When a government official or representative (soldier, District Commissioner, town inspector, sanitary inspector, etc.) visits the town, it is usual to feed him; it also happens that goods, especially rice, are requisitioned. To meet these demands which are too heavy for the individual budgets, the men of a village join together, occupy a piece of land communally and grow rice cooperatively. None of the individual members has any property or usufructual rights over that land. After harvesting, the rice is stored in a so-called rice kitchen which is also built and owned communally. Some old people (*tátua* = those who stay always in town to meet strangers, or *móóka* = elders) take care of it and meet the demands. A group of people making such a "government farm" is not considered a *kúú*.

c) Group work for chiefs

Since the Kpelle belong, seen from the type of social structure of their society, to the segmentary societies and had only little centralization in their traditional culture, persons of wealth and influence joined cooperatives or hired their services but never used their influence to force the villagers to work on their farm; the concept of statute-labor was absent. When the central government in Monrovia introduced chieftaincy, little changed. Chiefs joined cooperatives as they had done before. A higher chief (clan chief, paramount chief) or any other rich chief may also hire a cooperative which means he has to pay for their services if he does not work on the other people's farms; this possibility of hiring a cooperative is also open to anybody else who can afford it. There are, however, some exceptional cases where the chiefs used the new power vested in them by the government and forced people to work on their farms without compensation. For such compulsory work on their rice, rubber, sugar cane, citrus fruits or coffee farms, they may either call upon the whole village or upon an existing cooperative. Groups formed to work on a chief's farm are not considered a *kúú*, mainly because the element of reciprocity is absent.

3 Organization of Labor Cooperatives

Since work cooperatives are the most common and, in regard to the economy, the most important cooperatives among the Kpelle, they will be dealt with in some detail. *Number of work cooperatives:* Since work cooperatives are combined with the system of sexual labor division, work cooperatives exist in pairs, one being formed by men for the activities to be performed by men, one consisting of women for the activities

habitually performed by women. The number of such pairs in a village depends on its size. A small village may have one kúú for men and one for women, while bigger villages which are usually divided into quarters may have as many pairs as quarters. It may also happen that there is more than one pair of cooperatives in the quarter either because the quarter is rather large or there was disagreement leading to the formation of two different groups or people just prefer to cooperate in smaller groups. Traditionally, each village had its cooperatives. Although this is still true for most villages today, the number of cooperatives tends to diminish. In towns like Salala, cooperative activities have stopped. In remoter places like Palaquellie, they are still strong as in earlier days: Palaquellie has three quarters, and each one has its own cooperatives. In Bokai Town, in Gbanyan-Kollief-Felenta, in Thema Town and in Dschadamu, all small villages, there is one pair of cooperatives in each one. In Sanoyea, a large village, there are two big cooperatives and several small ones.

Size: In theory, work cooperatives may consist of anything between 2 and about 40 members. Normally, they consist of 6 to 15 members. They are said to have been larger in earlier days, with about 25 to 30 members; of course, this could not be verified. There seems to be some doubt among the Kpelle whether or not to call small work groups of two or three members a kúú; some clearly deny it and call them informal work groups while others refer to them as kúú. This confusion seems to be due to the ambivalence of the term which sometimes refers to any kind of cooperation but properly only to formal mutual aid work groups.

During the time of the interviews the Palaquellie cooperatives had 12—15 members; in Bokai Town there was one group with 11 men and one of 6 women, in Gbanyan-Kollief-Felenta one of 10 men and one of 12 women, in Dschadamu one of 4 men and one of 4 women, in Sanoyea one of 15 and one of 12 members plus several small ones of 2—4 members, in Thema Town one of 6 men and one of 12 women. At Cuttington, there were two groups of 12 to 20 members.

Duration: In most cases, a cooperative is formed for one agricultural season which comprises most of the tasks to be done by one sex. It may also be formed for a certain agricultural activity within a season or for a year. It is also possible to establish a cooperative for a number of years, allowing new members to enter or old ones to leave between two seasons after completion of a full round-turn. Traditionally, when it was customary for all or nearly all men or women of a village to participate in cooperative activities, the kúú-cooperation was a permanent institution assembling the men and women each year for the various economic activities.

Membership: Participation in a cooperative is voluntary, but once somebody joins the group, it becomes mandatory for him to abide by the rules of the cooperative. In many places, especially in smaller ones, it is customary though not compulsory for all adults to join the cooperative. In small villages, the cooperative consists of the adults of the village; sometimes, people from neighboring villages join. In larger villages, there are various ways of forming a cooperative: either the people from one quarter form a cooperative which probably has been the most usual case, or the bulk of the members comes from one quarter but people from other quarters may join, or membership is just mixed from all quarters. In either case, people from neighboring villages may or may not join. If people from other tribes have moved into a village as it is very often the case today, they join the cooperative in the same way as the Kpelle do. In the border areas, the two tribes meeting there mix freely in cooperatives. Thus, a cooperative is on principle a voluntary as well as an open organization. Traditionally, in small, remote villages, this was not always obvious because of the lack of foreigners who could have joined, and because of the readiness of the people to join. Today, the character of the cooperative as a voluntary association becomes more apparent.

Manifest functions (economic): Asked why they form cooperatives, two reasons are

universally given: The first reason is that by working together the task is performed faster or in a given time more work is done respectively, while the second reason refers to the fact that group work is more enjoyable and thus "work is not easily felt". Both reasons can be summarized in the major economic function of work cooperatives: increased labor productivity. An additional reason given is that cooperatives may be formed because work would be too difficult for an individual or for a family.

Latent functions (social): In one case, a man answered to the question why they formed cooperatives: "The importance of the kúú is that people can share work that is difficult as well as form friendship among members." The latter part of the answer refers to the latent function: The Kpelle belong to the prevalent type of African societies which is called segmentary, i. e. the main structural feature of the society is its composition from extended families like segments, within the same social layer. While a hierarchical society with a king at the top guarantees the cohesion through the hierarchical structure, the higher element always comprising the lower ones, thus the whole of the society being a firm social pyramid, the segmentary society needs special institutions for the integration of its segments. Apart from age sets, secret societies and less formalized institutions, cooperatives serve an integrative function for their society, too. Since members are usually not aware of this function, it may be called a latent one.

Organizational meeting and rule-making: Anybody can call for an organizational meeting and thus become the founder of a cooperative. Often, the founder is a respectable person whose appeal for the formation of a cooperative the people are more inclined to follow than the appeal of a less influential person. Today, it is often the chief who calls a meeting. This is especially true for the Kpelle in Bong County (these are most of the Kpelle) whose Superintendent, himself a Kpelle, is "pushing the idea of kúú" and has appealed to all chiefs to establish more cooperatives to increase agricultural production in line with President Tubman's agricultural policy called "operation production". At the organizational meeting, the rules or bye-laws are fixed. The rules mainly concern sanctions against absenteeism: If somebody fails to get an excuse from the headman and stays away from a work session, he has to pay a fine which is \$ 5.— nowadays (the market price for a day's work lies between 50 c and \$ 1.—). If somebody is late in the morning, he is charged 25 c (which is called \$ 25.— "to make it sound big to frighten the person"). If somebody refuses to pay such fines, he is taken before the local authorities. — In addition, the organizational meeting decides whether each member brings his own rice for the meals or whether the owner of the farm provides it. They also arrange the order in which work is done on the members' farms.

Officers: The cooperative is often called upon by the town chief, an elder, or some other influential man. However, he does not necessarily become the leader; in many cases, the founder just becomes a regular member without special privileges. The only exception was found in Thema Town where the cooperative works on the chief's farm while he does not work on the other farms. — The owner of the farm on which work is done on a specific day is called guú lèei; apart from providing the food, he has no specific role. — The leader of a cooperative is called kúú laa nuu; sometimes the terms nun kaa dee (big man) or kúú nun kata are used. Main leadership qualifications are general leadership abilities, being well-known to everybody, being honest, industrious and strong; e. g. leader may become a person who has found recognition for making two farms a year instead of one as most other people do. Usually, the leader is appointed by the group. In larger places, the leader is usually different from the "biggest man" or from the chief; only in small villages with little division of official functions, the "big man of the village" becomes the leader of the cooperative. In a few cases as in Thema Town, the chief appoints the leader; however, if the people are not satisfied with the man, they can ask for another one to be appointed. If the chief himself is the leader, he also joins in the work as all the others do. In

Cuttington, the leader is referred to as headman or ovahea which is a corrupted form of overseer. — In case the leader is absent, the assistant leader takes over his functions. He is called kúú nun kata kwelle nui or galúng kwelle núng or kúú ti. If the leader is present, the assistant leader has no special duties. Only in some areas, he is supposed to handle matters in dispute; more often, matters in dispute are settled by the leader or by some important person within the cooperative itself. — Small cooperatives have only the office of the leader, and in two or three man cooperatives, even this office may be absent (in such cases, however, it becomes questionable if this is still a cooperative). In larger groups, there is a supervisor who controls the work and who reports a person who does not appear at a work session to the leader; he is called kuu golong. — Presently, the composition of the cooperative's committee, to use a modern term, is becoming more complex; in a neighboring tribe (the Mano), the committee may comprise all offices of the whole political hierarchy of the central government. The first beginnings of this trend can be seen now among the Kpelle. One new office added recently in a few areas (the more developed areas, actually) is the office of the collector who collects fines and fees paid by persons who hire a cooperative; he is called seng kau song nuu. A complementary office is the one of the treasurer: sengkau lai kei long, who keeps the money he receives from the collector. The soldier or kela nuu carries a person who has done something wrong before the leader if he is ordered to do so. — The kopogeng or lieutenant, another military office, is the man who puts people in "jail". "Jail" is the term used for a portion of land to be cleared by a person who has been fined to do extra work. — A specific role common for a long time in felling trees cooperatives is the one of the gbela chille or cutlass man; he is the strongest man in the group who fells all the big trees. — An additional office is the one of the drummer, kiling ngali nuui who supplies the rhythm according to which work is done. — Some cooperatives have made the experience that "too many secretaries mean too much palaver".

Performance of work: In larger cooperatives, one work day is spent on each farm for each economic activity. If the group is small, two or three days may be needed. There is a certain work rhythm established, e. g. the cooperative works on Monday and Tuesday; on Wednesday, they either rest or do some other work; on Thursday and Friday, they work again; on Saturday, they either rest or do some other work; Sunday has generally become a day of rest. In some areas, members of a cooperative go to their farms very early in the morning, before work starts, and tap palm wine. If a person is late and brings a keg of palm wine, he is not fined for being late. Usually, people get up around 5.30 a. m. and meet on the farm site. There is a break around 10.30 when the main meal is taken; a second break is around 3 p. m. when they eat the remainder of the food. Work ends around 4.30. There is no special ceremony or activity at the end of the work; the members just quit and go home. One of the major elements determining the performance of work is competition which is used to increase labor productivity. The farm is divided up into plots of an average size of about 15 x 25 feet, each of them being assigned to two workers. The whole work group is divided into groups of two, this makes 8 groups if the cooperative is 16 members strong. These eight groups work against one another. The one who finishes first wins. It has a longer rest period than the others. When all of them have finished their work, they go over to the next plots. Praise songs are made on the winning parties, and derogatory songs on the losing ones. — In cutting bush cooperatives, the organization is somewhat different: The older members who are not strong enough to do the real hard work cut paths around the farm to mark the edge of the farm. The other men just line up and brush forward. The farm is not divided up into patches, and no formal competition is used, but "of course, you do not want to stay behind". While everywhere else brushing is a man's job, women in Sinyea are said to do brushing, too. — Work is often but not

always accompanied by music. The instrument most commonly used is the drum which is played by a man. If a drummer plays in a women's cooperative, the women may work for a day on the drummer's farm. In nearly all cooperatives, some sort of singing takes place, whether or not drums are played. In some cooperatives, a whistle or horn is blown in the morning to wake up the members. — Parties or feasts at the end of a work day are unusual. Only if people from another village come to work on somebody's farm, a party may be given at the evening before the workday.

Recompensation: No recompensation is given if people work on a member's farm. If the cooperative has decided so at the organizational meeting, the owner of the farm provides the food; but since everybody does this in turn, this is not a real recompensation. Often, people bring their own rice and the owner of the farm may or may not provide some fish or meat. Sometimes, the cooperative may work on an old or sick person's farm. No formal recompensation is given in such a case but it is customary to provide food and drinks (sugar cane rum, palm wine). In Palaquellie, cooperatives sometimes work on a chief's farm for food and drinks.

Hiring a cooperative: A proper recompensation is only paid if a cooperative is hired, either by a non-member as it is usually the case, or by a member who wants some extra work to be done on his farm.

Traditionally, no payment was made but only food and drinks were provided. The practice of hiring a cooperative was probably not very common because the majority of people were members. But recently, an increasing number of people have become active in other sectors of the economy and therefore have little time to join a cooperative; such a person may hire a cooperative for his rice farm. While at the beginning of the introduction of money, no formal payment was made but rather a "dash" of \$ 1. — or \$ 2. — plus food and drinks were given, it is becoming usual now to charge a certain amount per worker and day which is presently between 30 c and 50 c.

Rites and medicines: Although most medicines are used and most rites performed by individuals, there are a few existing in connection with cooperatives. Due to the still very strong control exerted by Poro, the main secret society in Western Liberia, it was not possible to check the validity of the informations for the whole Kpelle area; most data concerning rites and medicines were received in Sanoyea, a relatively modernized village where some young people, due to Christian and school education, are less reluctant to reveal such information, and in Thema Town. In cooperatives whose members are Christians prayers in the morning and in the evening have replaced the old ceremonies.

In a men's cooperative, one member cuts a vine in the morning and keeps it until the evening. If the workers are satisfied with the treatment received from the owner of the farm, the vine will be given to him and the wish will be expressed that the rice should grow well. If the members are not satisfied, they will keep the vine and make a certain medicine out of it which will prevent the rice from growing. Thus, the manifest function of this medicine is to make the rice grow or prevent it from growing respectively while its latent function is to make the owner of the farm treat the cooperative well.

In a women's scratching farm cooperative, a similar practice is found. The first worker of such a cooperative is called *galli chillei* = hoe giant. Before work starts, she takes a little bit of soil and keeps it. In the evening, she either gives it to the owner of the farm who throws it on the farm to make the rice grow, or, if they are not satisfied, she keeps the soil to make medicine out of it which spoils the rice. — While scratching, the cooperative goes occasionally to a certain spot and says: "The hoe has held the root." Before moving from there, the owner of the farm has to give them 2 c or 5 c.

In a tree felling cooperative, the most important role is played by *gbela chille*, the strong man with the cutlass. Around his waist and legs, he wears a string with pieces of a certain dried bark, called *djunju*. It makes noise while dancing, and it also makes the man stronger and enables him to cut a bigger farm. When the clearing bush season is

over, djunju is kept in the so-called rice kitchen where the rice is stored until the next season. While dancing with the djunju, gbela chille sings a song called dùmèllé = to make a big noise. In this song, he names a big tree in the bush towards which he dances. When he arrives at the tree, everybody brings his cutlass, puts it on the ground and the cutlass man dances on it. He takes a certain medicine kul pàlà paa (= cutlass sore cure) made out of a leaf with the same name and rubs it on the cutlasses to prevent the members of the cooperatives from hurting themselves with the cutlass. This medicine is also used for curing a cutlass wound. The cutlass man also rubs some other medicine on his chest and under his feet and eats some which is called tii sale = working medicine, also made from a leaf. After this, all start dancing while the drum is beating. They cut palm leaves which they rub against the tree. The cutlass man then shakes the tree and finally cuts it down.

Protection against witchcraft is one of the main functions of medicines. Often natural events are considered as influenced by witchcraft. So, if somebody wants to disturb the cooperative work on somebody's farm, he takes a small sheep or goat horn and fills it with a certain medicine. He then visits the farm where the cooperative work is done and looks out for a stump near the place where the rice is cooked. He takes some medicine out of the horn and puts it on the stump. Shortly after, rain will start so that work has to finish for that day. Against every medicine, there is an antidote. Thus, if somebody expects that a person is going to "play witch on him" and makes rain during a work session, he asks a certain person in the cooperative who is a medicine specialist called dunii té zoi = rain-send-away-doctor, to fix a medicine against the rain. This medicine man makes the medicine and puts it in the fire on which the rice is cooked. He is not allowed to drink any water that day. This keeps the rain away.

In a cooperative where several groups compete with one another, one group may decide to use witch-medicine in order to make the people in one of the other groups hurt themselves. Putting potash on the cutlass or using a certain leaf protects one against witchcraft as well as against being hurt.

After a farm is burned, the owner takes a few burned sticks and carries them to the fork of the road where the farm road deviates from the main path. These burned sticks show that the farm is burned and now ready for scratching and it also makes it impossible for a witch person to cross that road to get to the farm. After that, a clay pot with a special medicine inside is carried on the farm and set under a stump. Some seed rice is sprinkled around the stump and scratched under the ground. This indicates that the farm is ready for sowing and makes the rice grow.

As a protection against witchcraft, a certain medicine is put on the fork of the road where the burned sticks are and at the end of the farm. If a witch person now comes to the farm to destroy the rice, he either steps on the burned sticks or on the medicine on the farm. He then turns into a ground hog or another bush animal. If a hunter kills such an animal, the person who changel into it will die, too. Another possibility is to make a trap for such witch persons in case they are not killed by a hunter. If they catch an animal and shoot it, the person who previously turned into that animal will die. While the spirit of such a person is in the animal, his body, as described in many books about African religion, will be lying asleep in his house. After the animal is shot, the human body gets sick, and just before dying, the person will confess to be a witch. If a witch is not trapped or shot, another medicine can be used. The effect of this is that a person's stomach swells after having eaten rice on the owner's farm (eating or spoiling another person's rice on the farm is considered one of the activities of such witches); then, the person confesses and eventually dies.

Although each member in a cooperative may use these medicines, they are still considered the individual's and not the cooperative's responsibility.

There is a widespread belief that there is a close connection between some persons and

some animals, without witchcraft being involved. So, it may happen that some members of the cooperative behave like those animals with which they are connected because it is believed that this transfers the animal's strength to them.

Change: Cooperatives adapt to changing conditions. While scratching of rice farms is done exclusively by women's cooperatives among the Kpelle and never by men, a Kpelle community (Vangekor) was found on Vai territory where men joined the women's cooperatives or even formed their own cooperatives for scratching; this is an adaptation to Vai culture where men do the scratching. — While labor cooperatives were traditionally working within the subsistence economy, they are now producing rice or other crops for sale, thus adapting to the market economy. — Specific cooperatives have been set up to carry the agricultural products to the market, while others, e. g. rice saving cooperatives, have in many instances become marketing cooperatives. However, such marketing cooperatives have only been able to serve near-by markets and would need technical aid to expand marketing to more distant local and to export markets. — Saving in kind cooperatives have changed into saving in cash cooperatives. — There are instances of a kind of industrial cooperatives in the sense that e. g. cooperatives are formed for collecting and processing palm-nuts and marketing the so manufactured palm-oil. Such activities could be extended considerably. — Communal farms are set up to fulfill the village's obligation to the government. — Such changes hazardly taking place at present could be guided and directed by experts to be supplied by development agencies.

4 Conclusions and Summary:

1. In many African tribes, traditional cooperatives play an important role in the economy.
2. Traditional cooperatives have adapted to some extent to modern economic conditions; often, new types of cooperatives have come into existence through contact with the modern economy, without any outside help.
3. Traditional and changing cooperatives among the Kpelle in Liberia are already serving a number of economic functions which are also served by modern cooperatives:
 - a) The function of common labor and of increasing labor productivity is served by labor cooperatives on rice farms, sugar-cane farms and on other farms, by palm-nut cutting cooperatives, spinning cooperatives, load-carrying cooperatives.
 - b) The transport function is served by the load-carrying cooperative.
 - c) The function of marketing is served by palm-oil saving cooperatives, load-carrying cooperatives and today by most rice-saving cooperatives.
 - d) The function of production is served by the so-called government farm.
 - e) The function of saving is served by cooperatives saving in kind, saving in primitive money and saving in modern money.
 - f) The function of credit is served by saving and credit cooperatives.
4. Traditional cooperatives have a number of economic problems which they either cannot solve at all or which they could solve only in a long-drawn out process.
5. Through technical aid traditional cooperatives could be modernized, i. e. they could be transformed into modern cooperatives. At the same time, they could serve as a channel for the introduction of modern agriculture.
6. Modernizing traditional cooperatives instead of importing modern cooperatives from abroad saves money, time and expert personnel.
7. We would like to suggest to development agencies like Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst, United States Agency for International Development and others to include the modernization of traditional cooperatives in their programs of agricultural development in African countries.

5 Zusammenfassung und Schlußfolgerungen

1. In den meisten afrikanischen Stämmen gibt es ein weit verbreitetes traditionales Genossenschaftswesen.
2. Dieses hat sich in vielen Fällen bis zu einem gewissen Grad an die modernen Wirtschaftsbedingungen angepaßt; oft sind im Kontakt mit der modernen Wirtschaft neue Genossenschaftstypen ohne Hilfe von außen entstanden.
3. Traditionale und im Wandel befindliche Genossenschaften erfüllen bei den Kpelle in Liberia bereits eine Reihe von Funktionen, die auch in modernen europäischen Genossenschaften wahrgenommen werden:
 - a) Die Funktion gemeinsamer Arbeit und der Erhöhung der Arbeitsproduktivität wird von Arbeitsgenossenschaften auf Reis-, Zuckerrohr- und anderen Feldern, von Palmnuß-erntegenossenschaften, Spinnerei- und Transportgenossenschaften wahrgenommen.
 - b) Die Transportfunktion wird von Transportgenossenschaften erfüllt.
 - c) Die Vermarktungsfunktion findet sich bei Palmöl-Spargenossenschaften, Transportgenossenschaften und heute bei den meisten Reisspargenossenschaften.
 - d) Die Produktionsfunktion wird in sogenannten Regierungsfeldern (kommunale Felder, deren Produkte für Steuern und Abgaben verwandt werden) wahrgenommen.
 - e) Die Sparfunktion wird von Spargenossenschaften wahrgenommen, die in Naturalien, vormünzlichen Zahlungsmitteln und neuerdings in modernem Geld sparen.
 - f) Die Kreditfunktion wird von Spar- und Kreditgenossenschaften erfüllt.
4. Das traditionale Genossenschaftswesen hat technische und wirtschaftliche Probleme, die es aus eigener Kraft nicht oder erst nach längerer Zeit zu lösen imstande ist.
5. Durch technische Hilfe könnten diese traditionellen Genossenschaften modernisiert, d. h. in moderne Genossenschaften überführt werden; gleichzeitig können sie als Kanal für die Einführung der modernen Landwirtschaft benützt werden.
6. Es ist billiger und spart Zeit und Personal, traditionale Genossenschaften zu modernisieren und auf ihnen ein modernes Genossenschaftswesen aufzubauen, als dieses zu importieren.
7. An Institutionen der Entwicklungshilfe wie das Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, den Deutschen Entwicklungsdienst, United States Agency for International Development and sonstige richten wir die Empfehlung, in ihre landwirtschaftlichen Entwicklungsprogramme für Afrika die Modernisierung traditionaler Genossenschaften aufzunehmen.