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Q8(b)

## **Discuss the challenges faced by the cooperative movements in India. Suggest measures to strengthen the movement at the grass-roots level**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Social Movements in Modern India

Social Movements in Modern India: Peasants and farmers movements; Women's movement; Backward classes and Dalit movement; Environmental movements; Ethnicity and Identity movements.

### **Core demand of the question**

- Discuss the challenges faced by cooperative movements in India
- Suggest measures to strengthen the movement at the grass-roots level

### **Revision summary**

Cooperatives face political capture, dominant-caste control, weak audit and market competition.

Sugar and credit societies often drifted from small-producer democracy.

Grass-roots repair needs real member votes, women and tenant shareholders, and local-language accounts.

Professional managers should serve elected policy, as in strong dairy federations.

Local resource control is the test of a living cooperative.

### **Introduction**

Cooperatives are member-owned organisations for credit, dairy, sugar, weavers, and housing. India's movement has national successes such as Amul and many local failures of capture, debt, and paperwork. Grass-roots strength means real member control, not only a registrar's file.

### **Body**

#### **Challenges**

- Political nomination of boards turns societies into party machines; A. R. Desai would read this as class and faction using a socialist form.
- Elite and dominant-caste capture of credit cooperatives repeats village hierarchy inside a 'democratic' body, which Srinivas's **dominant caste** predicts.
- Dual control by state registrars and now new union frameworks can stifle autonomy without stopping fraud.
- Poor audit, evergreening of loans, and low professional skill empty the surplus.
- Sugar and some dairy co-ops became sites of regional capital rather than small-producer democracy.
- Women's and Adivasi co-ops face collateral, literacy, and market-access barriers.

- After liberalisation, private retail and banks compete; weak co-ops cannot match logistics unless they federate.

### Grass-roots measures

- **Enforce one-member-one-vote in fact:** secret ballots, rotation, and seats for small producers and women, not proxy voting by a sarpanch.
- Operation Barga taught that recording the weak changes bargaining; record tenant and woman members as full shareholders, not as wives of members.
- Link primary agricultural credit societies to transparent digital accounts that members can read in the local language.
- Train local boards in audit, as Amul-style federations did through professional managers under elected policy, not instead of elections.
- Protect whistleblowers and make under-Rs-threshold disputes speedy at the taluka, not only in distant high courts.
- Use cooperatives for climate-era inputs, fodder, and solar pumps so the form meets a living rural need, in a Chipko spirit of local control of resources.
- **Yogendra Singh's modernization of tradition fits here:** a village society can be a modern firm of equals if caste honour is not the real by-law.

### What success looks like

- Regular meetings with quorums of small members.
- Surplus returned as price, not as a politician's purse.
- Federations that market without swallowing the primary society.

### Flow diagram

Caste party capture -> Weak cooperative  
 Poor audit dual control -> Weak cooperative  
 Recorded small members -> Grass-roots strength  
 Real elections readable accounts -> Grass-roots strength  
 Federation marketing -> Grass-roots strength

### Conclusion

Indian cooperatives are challenged by capture, weak audit, and dual politics. Grass-roots repair is recorded membership of the weak, real elections, readable accounts, and federated marketing. The form remains useful when it is a producer democracy, not a factional franchise.

### Facts & figures

#### Amul / GCMMF

Dairy federation often cited as professional management under a producer cooperative structure.

#### PACS

Primary agricultural credit societies; the grass-roots credit layer, uneven in health.

**97th Amendment**

Constitutional status for cooperatives; later partly read down, showing centre-state tension.

**Dominant caste**

Srinivas's local power that can capture boards and credit.

**Operation Barga lesson**

Recording the weak changes who can claim a collective institution.

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