



# Chipukizi Voice of Drama

USAID Cooperative Development Program  
Cooperative Leadership, Engagement, Advocacy & Research (CLEAR)



CHIPUKIZI VOD MEMBERS  
PERFORMING AT THE 2019 HANDS  
ON THE FUTURE KENYA SKILLS SHOW

## BY THE NUMBERS



30

Members



2019

Registered Cooperative



21

Average Member Age



46%

Women Members

### YOUTH CREATING THEIR OWN JOBS

Youth employment is not a laughing matter – unless you are a member of Chipukizi Voice of Drama (VOD). With 30 members aged between 18 and 30, Chipukizi is a cooperative that packs a lot of punch into a small group. These young people are not only creating their own business, but they are also among the pioneers of the worker owned cooperative model in Kenya.

The story begins with a group of Cooperative University of Kenya students who formed a youth club. They have a passion to perform, and use their joy-filled gifts in drama, dance, and song to perform skits at events and ceremonies, most of them organized by their own university. Their work is distinguished by an active social commitment to issues that have a significant impact on society, such as unemployment, crime, and social injustice. It's rewarding work, but tough going. Members initially struggled to find space and opportunity to perform, and if they did, they barely made a buck.

Nevertheless, they saw opportunity ahead. The entertainment and media revenue in Kenya<sup>1</sup> is expected to grow to 2.96 billion U.S. dollars in 2023. Not only in Kenya, but they see the potential of the global entertainment and media market which is expected to reach approximately USD 6,709.4 billion globally by 2030<sup>1</sup>. They believe in the role of performing arts in driving culture and societal norms, along with economies.

### EVERYTHING IS COMING UP ROSES

Chipukizi registered as a performing arts worker-owned cooperative in 2019. Now that they are a cooperative business, members find that the larger community is more interested in their work. Their scope of work has widened beyond the university, with new clients hiring them to enliven conferences through their skits. The work is a rewarding creative outlet, with members writing screen plays and collectively deciding on which ones they will perform. It's also profitable. The cooperative earns revenue, primarily from ticket and concession sales, memberships and sponsorships which sustains ongoing operations.

No longer an informal youth club, the cooperative has grown to include university alumni in addition to students. The cooperative is also exploring allowing others not affiliated with the university to join, thus increasing membership, talent, and income. With all these achievements, it's no surprise that the cooperative has received a number of requests for press interviews and has been featured in publications as a social model for youth.

### COOPERATIVES ARE SERIOUS BUSINESS

Transitioning to a worker cooperative was not an easy journey for the members. The lack of recognition and information on worker cooperatives in Kenya posed a challenge for Chipukizi during their transition from a youth club. Chipukizi, however, was focused on building a unique cooperative—their own collective skills and services. Worker cooperatives provide a democratic governance structure of member-worker-owners, where decisions are made by those directly involved in the enterprise, with increased flexibility and collaboration among workers.

Due to the changing needs of work, worker cooperatives provide an important organization model that can especially be adopted by youth who face unemployment despite their rich education and skills. Yet as a relatively new model, there was a steep learning curve. Chipukizi is managed by the members with guidance and mentorship from Cooperative University of Kenya and Global Communities' CLEAR program.

Chipukizi members wanted to perform, not do bookkeeping. However, as they grew as a cooperative business, they learned the value of maintaining responsible management and accurate financial records. With technical support from Global Communities, Chipukizi transformed into a sustainable business as inaugural participants of the USAID/CLEAR program. Chipukizi learned record-keeping, but also that as members invested in a cooperative business, they have the right to information on their cooperative's financial records and governance practices.

Cooperatives also need good governance and management structures, and with CLEAR's help, Chipukizi is on its way to developing those. Since incorporating in 2019, Chipukizi has established 7 committees with nominated members who have a range of skills and interests. The cooperative is establishing a board that will play a 'hands on role' and lead operations, focusing on long-term sustainability of the cooperative. As of today, the cooperative does not have any staff and depends on volunteerism by members to achieve outstanding administrative tasks.

Day-to-day operations are dynamic and include a wide range of tasks, from training non-members, to participating in various capacity building activities, to advertising on social media and booking events. These activities are managed by committee leads, most of whom are alumni of the university and have more time to dedicate to cooperative activities. The alumni each contribute about 10-15 hours of volunteer time per week.

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***"Sometimes it takes a long time for decisions to be made since it is a collective process, and some members become non-responsive to issues– the cooperative is working to ensure full participation by all members."***

*– Ali Njenga, Board Member*

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## YOUNG PEOPLE PAVE THE WAY WITH NEW MODELS FOR GROWTH

Internet user growth in Kenya has provided an opportunity for Chipukizi to diversify to digital consumers. Chipukizi now markets their content and make people aware of them, driving more people to their social media pages to watch their content. This transition was especially important during the COVID-19 period when conferences and in-person events were halted. The group even created several videos on COVID safety and encouraging best practice to curb the spread!

Chipukizi is also growing their own talent. Each member pays a one-off fee of USD10. Students who are interested in performing are taken in by the cooperative as attaches and are trained by the existing members, with the chance to perform during various plays and performances based on their various strengths and talents. This mentorship helps grown membership and teaches employable skills to young people. The cooperative is also committed to inclusive growth. Women are treated equally and are assured of an opportunity to voice their thoughts and ideas during meetings. The majority of the committees, including welfare and marketing, are led by women.

## CONCERN FOR THE COMMUNITY

Chipukizi members have demonstrated that the cooperative benefits the community too. Through their performances, they have been able to create compelling content to advocate for the cooperative model for youth. They also produce dramas to sensitize youth against crime. Their emergence has aided in the advocacy of youth participation in cooperatives. Chipukizi is also working towards building and strengthening partnerships with other local schools. The objective is to develop a regular schedule of events and performances to creating opportunities for students to learn and promote the arts and cooperative model.

Chipukizi, as a startup worker cooperative, has been able to gather many lessons that will prepare them for future growth. They have learned that they will need to scale up and diversify their revenue streams to meet the cooperative's growing needs; that community engagement is critical, particularly through volunteer opportunities and partnerships; and that they will need to explore strategies to retain and nurture performing arts members. Increased personal connections by the community members to cooperatives is critical to their success. These connections have strengthened the business and brought about increased awareness. Chipukizi hopes those connections will help them retain the joy and energy with which they launched their unique and youth focused business.



*Chipukizi presents during a discussion on gender.*

Special thanks to the contributors to this case study:

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