

## The General Union of Cooperatives of Maputo: An Alternative Production System?<sup>1</sup>

*Teresa Cruz e Silva*

### INTRODUCTION

The colonial economy of southern Mozambique had as its basis a peasant family economy that supported 1) agricultural production for supply of the internal market and for export; 2) industry and service sectors; and 3) the generation of foreign exchange through migrant labor to neighboring countries (O'Laughlin, 1981: 13–14). The economic policies introduced by the Mozambican government after independence (1975) aimed to transform the social relations of production and make Mozambique independent of the capitalist world system. The strategy consisted in constructing a socialist system where the cooperativization of peasant family agriculture, the resettlement of people in communal villages and investment in state farms would be the main motors of transformation (O'Laughlin, 1981; Coelho, 1998; Francisco, 2000). However, these economic measures turned out to be the least appropriate, and resulted instead in the marginalization of the peasantry in favor of the development of mechanized agriculture, thus destroying the system that had insured production for the internal market and for export.

The ensuing economic crisis was intensified by drought and flood, as well as by destabilization resulting from war. These processes, together with various political and economic transitions, implied social costs with consequences for the quality of life of the population, raising levels of poverty and exclusion. At the same time, and in response to this situation, they resulted in people's initiatives and alternatives in social and economic management.

Using the Maputo UGC—Maputo General Union of Agro-Pastoral Cooperatives (União Geral de Cooperativas Agro-Pecuárias de Maputo)—as a case study of a multi-sectoral project involving the interaction of various social and economic forms, this chapter examines the possibility of establishing alternatives for production in which the space created for democratic participation and for access to and control of economic and social resources

opens the way to several forms of power and to a change in gender relations. The question is whether this kind of project can stand as a viable and valid alternative in the context of an open economy.

My choice of the UGC confined the study to an urban social space, as the cooperatives that form the Union are part of the peri-urban and urban areas of Maputo,<sup>2</sup> and produce mostly in the city green belt, particularly in the Mahotas valley and, to a lesser extent, in the Infulene valley. An important part of the UGC production units operate in these areas.

The study is also confined to the south of Mozambique, an area with very specific socio-economic and political characteristics due its political and economic history, the relative availability of communications, access to markets and a well-developed marketing network, as well as recent economic changes.

#### AN ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM OF PRODUCTION OR AN URBAN AGRICULTURE "CAPTURED" BY A GLOBALIZING ECONOMY?

The question on which I initially focused was the extent to which the UGC might be considered the prefiguring of an alternative production system in an open market context. Could this mean an alternative to the capitalist form of production and distribution of goods and services? How did the UGC manage to survive, particularly after Mozambique joined the Bretton Woods Institutions and had to adjust to some of the hegemonic impositions of the market, while at the same time searching for alternatives?

If we agree that, through market hegemony, the capitalist world system fragments and permeates the political, cultural and social fields, it is also clear that its violence generates the emergence of alternatives not only at the economic but also at the social level, the linkages between these spheres being the prerequisite for both survival and success (Giddens, 1998; Santos, 1998; and Appadurai, 1999).

In his discussion of the legacy of the colonial period in contemporary Africa, Mahmood Mamdani argues for the specificity of the African experience without considering it in any way exceptional or exotic, while also stating the need to prevent its absorption into a theoretical corpus so broad that it becomes banal and routine (Mamdani, 1996: 13). Mamdani criticizes Goran Hyden's view of the specificity of the free African peasantry as still "uncaptured" by other social classes (Hyden, 1980), precisely because of Hyden's ignoring of the social relations through which the "free" peasantry is "captured" and reproduced (Mamdani, 1996:13).

Mamdani's critique led me to extend the problematic of the "captured" peasantry to my analysis of the UGC, whose experience, despite manifesting alternatives to the dominant forms and thus aiming to contribute to greater social inclusion, should not blind us to the fact that its survival depends

in part on its capacity to respond to the demands of the market. This straight-away implies modernization and its inclusion in the "global division of labor" (Giddens, 1998: 53), where cooperative members and UGC workers are necessarily "captured" by the potency of the globalizing economy and its division of labor.

Because the UGC is set in an urban environment, its study led me to rethink the meaning and breadth of the concept of peasantry in this context, as well as the problematic of an urban agriculture.<sup>3</sup> Without going into the debates about rural and urban spaces and urban agriculture that involve development planners and theoreticians (Tinker, 1995), it is fundamental to define the urban farmers who are the object of this study in order to situate the analysis.

In a context in which it is difficult to demarcate the urban from the peri-urban and in which these permeate the rural space, particularly due to the rapid and uncontrolled process of expansion of the cities, we need to take into account the weight of agricultural production in the supply of cities and its contribution to the income of families living in the capital city.

With a tradition that goes back to the colonial period, in which the reproduction of migrant workers—both to neighboring countries and from the country to the city—was partly guaranteed by family agriculture, the agrarian economy still has an important weight in the economic development of cities like Maputo. The production of the green belt supplies the city's markets with vegetables, fruits, small animals and other typical products of urban agriculture. At the same time, the production from small plots of land between the urban and peri-urban areas and in the city's periphery, as well as the production from its inhabitants' hometowns and from neighboring places, are an important contribution to the economic income of a considerable number of families.

The agricultural producers I will be focusing on are mostly women. Indeed, if we except the male agricultural laborers working on the farms that supply the cities, most agricultural producers in Mozambique are women. Originally working in subsistence agriculture, they come from the different cultural environments that characterize the city of Maputo. Some come from the geographical area in which the city is located, others migrated to Maputo a long time ago, and a few came in the 1980s and 1990s with the migrant waves that were a result of the war. Thus, we find many urban farmers who have not completely adapted to city life and whose economic situation compels them to maintain a connection with the rural environment, which for many is also associated with forms of sociability and the construction of cognitive and symbolic universes. But among them we also find younger people who are increasingly distant from these patterns.

The conception of the cooperative movement introduced in Mozambique after independence resulted from the experiences of the "liberated zones"

created during the armed struggle for national liberation. According to this conception, the cooperative was "an institution characterized by the socialization of the means of production and labor" (Muthemba, 1998: 22). but this process changed over the years in consonance with the wider political and economic transformations that took place in the country.

The UGC is basically a union of cooperatives of multi-sectoral dimensions rooted in the poorest strata of society and describes itself as based on principles of self-management. Its growth strategy was designed to create the economic and social conditions that allow cooperative members, the majority of them women, to have access to and control of resources, empowering them to make decisions that can lead to their economic and social betterment.

This philosophy of the UGC leads us to the question of women's "empowerment" and its meaning in the context I am concerned with here. Empowerment in the UGC can be understood as an "individual and collective form of decision-making, control and transformation" (Osório, 1999: 21). which develops capacities that enable its members to change the course of events to their own benefit (Giddens, 1976). Access to resources such as land and credit, formal education, training in modern production technology, as well as increasingly democratic control of union activities, have contributed to the gradual increase of the power of women, who occupy the most important decision-making posts in the cooperatives, area unions and the general union, thus widening the field for their participation in public life.

Considering that this philosophy is based on the idea that cooperative members must develop a consciousness of their social condition and struggle for the resolution of their problems, and further that access to power should be utilized to overcome their difficulties, we can see this philosophy in terms of the development of feminist theories that argue for various forms and paths of empowerment, from the bottom up (Townsend *et al.*, 1999: 19–20). In my opinion, the fundamental aspect of the UGC strategy was that, throughout its development, it held on to the idea that access to power serves to learn, organize and remove obstacles—in short, to change life for the better.

It is also important to highlight the fact that the work orientations of the UGC, in addition to helping to solve its members' economic and social problems, giving them and their families means of survival and a social security program, have contributed to a gradual change in gender relations, with an impact on the family life of the communities involved in the movement.

#### THE CITY OF MAPUTO IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE CONTEXT

The available literature on the economic and social transition processes in Mozambique presents various interpretations of the stages of its evolution

between 1975 and 1984. However, whatever the standpoint used to point the finger of responsibility at Frelimo (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) for the crises suffered in this period (Saul, 1994: 6–7). it is clear that the socialist strategy of development that underlaid the collectivization of production was a failure. "Moral" incentives charged with voluntarism, with no social and economic alternatives for the improvement of the life of the peasantry, proved unsustainable and ineffective (Roesch, 1986: 234). In 1983, the Fourth Frelimo Congress recognized the failure of the existing strategy.

The reinforcement of "western hegemony" in the region (Saul, 1993: 19). the adherence of Mozambique to the IMF and the incorporation of World Bank policies from 1984 led to new political and economic transitions. In 1985 came the first steps of economic liberalization; in an attempt to invert negative economic tendencies through structural readjustment, a Program of Economic Reform (PRE) was introduced in 1987, modified in 1990 by the Program of Economic and Social Reform (PRES). which, as its title implies, tried "to attribute greater social emphasis" to the process (Francisco, 2000: 42). The economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s did indeed lead to some significant economic revitalization, but this by no means signified reduction in the indices of poverty. "Poverty understood as the absence of conditions enabling long life, education and an acceptable standard of living affects the vast majority of the Mozambican population" (UNDP, 1998: 81; Ministry of Planning and Finance, 1998: 3).

Mozambique is a country of wide diversity, which can be seen in the differences of economic and human development between the provinces, and between these and the capital (UNDP, 1999: 87–91). Although the capital itself produces 35 percent of the GNP and its human development can be characterized as of medium level (PNUD, 1999: 87–90) these data do not portray social differentiation, which would probably show very wide extremes. Mapping of the levels of development in the city would undoubtedly bring out areas marked by very high indices of poverty, particularly the peri-urban zones that expanded due to the migrations resulting from the post-independence war (concluded in 1992) and the impact of economic reform.

The explosive growth of Maputo city and the uncontrolled occupation of reserved areas led to other problems resulting from inadequate development, the overuse of urban soils and ecological imbalances in the city's environs (Araújo, 1990: 80). This process includes access to arable land, particularly the most fertile soils in the valleys surrounding the city, also known as green zones or the green belt. As in similar zones in other large cities, agricultural and livestock production of vegetables, fruit, eggs, poultry, and other animals is intensive, as is the production of wood fuel.

Maputo's environs contain soils and general agricultural potential that are particularly suitable for vegetables and fruit. Historical documents show that

already by 1930 the most productive vegetable producing region of the country extended from north of the town of Manhica, in the province of Maputo, along the Inkomati valley to Marracuene and toward the south via the Mahotas and Infulene valleys (Ministério da Agricultura, 1995). an area in which most of the cooperatives and production units of the UGC are now situated.

Before independence, Maputo's green belt was occupied by small- and medium-sized colonial agricultural holdings as well as numerous peasant families on small plots of land, all producing vegetables, fruit and livestock for the city's market (Ministério da Agricultura, 1995). After independence, most of the colonial properties were abandoned and occupied by peasant families; some were later turned into people's farms and nascent cooperatives under the direction of local political authorities such as the "Dynamizing Groups" (Grupos Dinamizadores-GD).<sup>4</sup> The lack of inputs and technical preparedness for agricultural production, added to the weakness of production based on voluntarism, resulted in low levels of production and income. This fact cannot be dissociated from the dependence of family income on their own production plots as well as on wage labor not compensated by relatively low and uncertain income levels from cooperatives (Ayisi, 1995; O'Laughlin, 1981).

At the end of the 1970s, the government launched a campaign for the rebuilding of agro-pastoral production in the green belt, aiming to create employment opportunities and to supply the cities with basic foodstuffs, particularly vegetables and small animals. To manage this process, in 1980, the government created the Green Zones Office (GZV), with the goal of imparting administrative and technical knowledge to cooperatives and private farmers in these zones. The Office was linked to the Maputo City Council as well as to the Ministry of Agriculture, the latter because of its role as the promoter of technical knowledge through its agricultural centers.

In the following years, the GZV extended the technical support it gave to the cooperatives to the private sector, and then entered into peasant farm training, the renewal or construction of small irrigation and drainage projects, promotion and development of producers' associations, marketing of agricultural equipment and inputs and construction of social infrastructures. It was in the work of the GZV and its links with agro-pastoral cooperatives that the beginnings of what later became the UGC are to be found.

#### THE GENERAL COOPERATIVE UNION: AN ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM OF PRODUCTION?

In addition to the structural problems that led to the failure of the socialization of the countryside, a project in which cooperatives were to play a fundamental role, the cooperative movement also ended up being affected

by the consequences of the instability that was felt throughout most of Mozambique until the peace agreements signed between Frelimo and Renamo (Resistência Nacional de Moçambique) in 1992.

The post-independence economic decline worsened in the 1980s (Francisco, 2000: 7-39) and was certainly aggravated by the deteriorating military situation. While it is true, as some authors affirm (e.g., O'Laughlin, 1981), that the problem of access to land in this period was not a real basis for justifying the promotion of the cooperative movement, the war and migration from rural areas to the city coupled with the consequent struggle for access to fertile soils, such as those of Maputo's green belt, changed this situation to a certain extent. The concentration of population in and around the capital city led to uncontrolled pressure for access to and use of the most fertile soils and intensive agriculture, and thus to the increase of demographic pressure on ecological systems, creating imbalances with long-term consequences. Due to the specific context in which it grew, the process of cooperativization in the green zones of Maputo thus turned into a struggle for access to land.

The first nucleus of the UGC emerged from the relations established between cooperatives of the green zones and the Green Zones Office in 1980, as well as around a group of peasant women who came together to coordinate cooperative affairs (Casimiro, 1999) with the support and encouragement of Father Prosperino Galliponi.<sup>5</sup>

Taking into account internal factors, i.e., the level of the UGC's development, and external factors such as the varying impact of national social and economic transformations, my analysis of the UGC is divided into three periods: 1) 1980-1987: origins, evolution, and challenges of the UGC; 2) 1987-1990: the cooperative movement in the new economic scenario; and 3) 1990-2000: consolidation of the UGC—problems and prospects.

#### Origins, evolution and challenges of the UGC, 1980-1987

Because it created a political and administrative space for the organization of poor peasants in Maputo's green belt, the GZV is associated with the history of the cooperative movement. It should be stressed, however, that this movement later assumed specific features and experienced a kind of growth that gave rise to the creation of the nascent UGC in 1980 (UGC, 1998).

In its initial phase, because of the policies aimed at the construction of socialism, the UGC was connected to the "Dynamizing Groups" representing the party in power (Frelimo) as well as to the OMM (Organization of Mozambican Women), a league of women in Frelimo, since most cooperative members were women. The growth of agro-pastoral cooperatives and the need to solve their problems made it imperative to decentralize power and

promote the effective participation of its members in decision-making and the control of resources, which were hampered by the forms of operation and control of both the GDs and the OMM. The UGC ended up detaching itself from the party organizations, assuming an emancipatory process full of difficulties given the political and economic context in which it took place.

In its initial phase, the movement was formed mostly by unemployed women with little formal education or technical training, a social profile generally characteristic of the cooperatives (UGC, 1998). It was, therefore, a great challenge.

The initial objective of the incipient UGC was to create a platform enabling the production of supplementary foodstuffs and additional income to offset the needs of family groups. Owing first to the crisis in the supply of consumer goods that the country was then experiencing, and, second, to the growth of the parallel market and the rise in prices of basic products, the establishment of this platform required not only the introduction of basic technical training but also the creation of infrastructures to ensure the food supply of cooperative members and their families (Tickner, 1992). Thus, a mobile shop was instituted to supply the cooperatives, and gradually other social benefits were introduced, such as crèches where children could be accommodated while the women were working and, later, an embryonic community health service, with the hiring of a nurse in 1986 (Kirchney *et al.*, 1987).

The considerably increased adherence to the cooperatives of the UGC between 1981 and 1986—from twenty-four cooperatives and 1,177 members in 1981 to 194 cooperatives with 10,500 members in 1986 (Kirchney *et al.*, 1987)—was the result of access to consumer goods, implements and production factors, as well as to the growing social benefits available to members, particularly after the delinkage in 1981 of the cooperatives from their former politico-administrative mentors (Kirchney *et al.*, 1987; Casimiro, 1999).

The various testimonies collected in the UGC cooperatives in the Mahotas valley, particularly among the oldest of the members, confirm the relation between the origin of the UGC and the “people’s farms.” For example, here are the words of Lúcia C., about 60 years old, from the Alberto Cassimo cooperative:

The majority of the members began to work in the people’s farms, where we had to put up with a lot until the cooperatives were formed. In 1980, we began with this cooperative. We had to clear the bush and the valley bottoms.<sup>6</sup> The difficulties and low production led many women to leave.<sup>7</sup>

This testimony is not much different from that of other women, who spoke of the hunger of 1978–79, of the poor production of their fields, or the low wage that they received upon the distribution of the income from their

collective labor. They were unanimous in saying that the money from the sale of products remained under the control of the GD and OMM, and that the cooperatives had no say in the distribution of profits. Luísa M., 48 years old, of the UGC Flower Production Unit, referred to the relations between cooperatives and the political structures of the neighborhoods:

I began working here in 1976, in the people’s farms, where it was possible to earn at least a little; but in the cooperatives the money went to the GD. When in 1980 we joined the movement organized by Prosperino, then we could see the earnings being distributed. At that time, the function of the UGC was to help organize the cooperatives, but it was the cooperatives that supervised production.<sup>8</sup>

In the search for better forms of organization and marketing of produce, dialogue among members and between them and their elected leaders led to the reformulation of work methods in the cooperatives and the introduction of democratic forms of supervision and decision-making, a process that helped develop the relations between the cooperatives and the UGC. In 1982, during the first General Assembly of the UGC, the problems of the cooperatives were discussed and the first collective decisions were made. This was the beginning of a process that would continue to evolve.

In the process of diversifying production for the market and improving the members’ diet, pig raising was introduced and, later, in association with this, the production of bio-gas was started—an alternative energy source for crèches and other social services of the cooperatives.

The embryonic UGC proceeded to enlarge the scope of its activities with the sale of seeds and insecticides and with the organization of the marketing of cooperative production. In this process, they had the advantage not only of an aggressive leadership, but also the fact that the production units were mostly located in areas with good communication facilities as well as access to a market with the capacity for a rapid uptake of their produce.

The diversification of activities promoted by the UGC and the growth of the cooperative movement required an efficient and transparent management, hence the formal and technical training of cooperative members. With the creation of the first training center at Mahotas in 1981, conditions were also created for literacy and adult education courses, and for technical training in animal husbandry and management, to which were gradually added other courses on leadership, organization and cooperativism. In 1986, the UGC had four training centers for the fifth and sixth grades, and later a secondary school was started, thus affording ingress at this level to the children of cooperative members.

These developments required organized accounting as well as investments, especially in the construction of social infrastructures and in the production

sector. Apart from the financial and technical aid received from non-governmental organizations, access to credit for investment and technical support for training in bookkeeping was obtained from the People's Development Bank (Banco Popular de Desenvolvimento-BPD), in Mozambique.<sup>9</sup>

Begun in 1983, the process of officializing the UGC was completed in 1984. It was mainly women who supported the initial project of the UGC and assumed most of the leadership posts. In 1986 they represented 95 percent of the total membership (Kirchney *et al.*, 1987). A statistical analysis made by Anneke Mulder of the social composition of the cooperatives shows an average of 20–60 members per cooperative, with an average age of 39 in 1983 and 35 in 1986 (Kirchney *et al.*, 1987).

The growth of the cooperatives and the need for coordinated action to resolve their problems and relate with the UGC led to the creation of area unions, to which are elected representatives of a group of cooperatives of a particular area. These representatives attend the General Assembly of the UGC, which meets every month to discuss activities and make the most important decisions. In 1986, there were already ten such area unions, representing 194 cooperatives and about 10,500 members (Kirchney *et al.*, 1987).

The 1980s was indeed a decade of experimentation. Democratic forms of control and the improvement of living standards and working conditions was a learning process for all. However, in addition to the economic aspects, particular importance was given to social initiatives, a result of the special need for attention to ordinary human concerns arising from the particular conjuncture of the UGC's formation.

In general terms, the median indices of production in this period are considered low. The majority of the cooperatives were weak, with an excess of labor. It is important to notice, though, that the UGC report for 1984 noted: 1) a growth of 60 percent of total production of the agro-pastoral cooperatives of Maputo in relation to the previous year; 2) an improved level of training and activity of members, with the specialization of the labor force in the cooperatives and at management level, imparting a more aggressive attitude, accompanied by greater capacity to assess developments and problems with a view to further improvement; and 3) the introduction of new services (supply, marketing, accounting, construction, social initiatives and crèches, pig breeding, nurseries, mechanization, and transport) in response to the growth of the cooperatives (UGC, 1985; Kirchney *et al.*, 1987).

Despite the difficulties, the growth of the UGC between 1981 and 1986 led to its acceptance in Maputo's markets: it became one of the main suppliers of meat and green vegetables to Maputo and its environs (UGC, 1998), with reliable means of transportation for marketing. The buoyancy of the market for meat allowed by 1986 the establishment of a factory for the

processing of pork products, and there were also plans to open an animal feed plant.

The rhythm of the UGC's development thus led to a more organized phase of production and the consequent growth of its income. Means of production were no longer donated to cooperative members, the income from their sale reverting to a rotating fund for supporting the cooperatives, area unions or the UGC. In this period the modernization of the cooperatives was also begun, with the installation of water pumps, wells, electrification of areas where the cooperatives and production units were established, and other infrastructures, leading to the improvement of quality and profitability of production.

If the initial objective of the UGC was to ensure supplementary foodstuffs and wages to family groups, in this phase it was possible to pay a monthly wage to members; this was slightly higher than the minimum wage and, moreover, was guaranteed income, ensuring greater family economic stability and thus a certain self-confidence among its members about the growth of the cooperatives. Family groups were also supported through access to cooperative land demarcated for their own cultivation, to technical advice for such family plots through rural extension, and to technical training and to UGC jobs, preferentially filled by relatives of cooperative members.

However, the considerable investment made by the UGC in its social infrastructures and the low indices of production in the cooperatives, coupled with a heavy dependence on external aid, raised questions about the UGC's efficiency and survival prospects in this first period.

The adherence of Mozambique to the World Bank and IMF in 1984 resulted in the introduction in 1985 of the first measures of price liberalization of foodstuffs such as fruit and green vegetables. After 1987, the introduction of the Structural Readjustment Program brought systematic and wide-ranging "liberalization of commerce, and agricultural and industrial production units were privatized" (Francisco, 2000: 7–42).

The UGC now had to face an increasingly competitive market. Devaluation of the currency and the flooding of the market with products similar to those produced by the cooperatives and associated production units were the first problems to be confronted, with new strategies to adjust to pressures emanating from the new hegemony.

#### The cooperative movement in the new economic scenario, 1987–1990

After the surge in the cooperative movement experienced in the previous period, and despite the problems of readjustment, the UGC nevertheless managed to achieve considerable growth in qualitative and quantitative terms. Its activities were concentrated on its two main components: 1) the

Union itself, with its headquarters for the administrative and financial management, technical support services, and the training sector and production units (economically independent from the cooperatives); and 2) the cooperatives.

This period represents a mature phase of the Union's history, in which its survival as an alternative depended on the way its development strategy adjusted to the new pressures brought by the market. It was a difficult period, requiring a certain reaffirmation of its initial philosophy and principles. Indeed, soon after the introduction of economic reforms and the consequent liberalization of prices, the UGC began a process of reconsidering the role of cooperatives in this new context.

The difficulties of placing its products in the market and the consequences of the devaluation of the Mozambican currency—price inflation of agricultural inputs and implements, animal feed and other products—had profound consequences on the UGC economy, including the demobilization and desertion of its members. Membership dropped by about half, from 11,000 to 5,500 in 1987 (UGC, 1987), the explanation for which can be found in the vulnerability of the poorest families to the economic reforms. The most immediate, though not necessarily most secure response of many families to declining income, was for the women to leave the cooperatives and join the informal sector (Cruz e Silva, 2000: 29; Andrade *et al.*, 1998: 60).

As was confirmed by several cooperative members of the Infulene valley, the immediate cash return for the sale of small quantities of consumer goods on the informal market attracted many cooperative members away from agricultural production in the cooperatives.<sup>10</sup> Other informants from the Mahotas valley spoke of the difficulties experienced by the cooperative movement, which led to many members leaving. For example, Delfina M. of Alberto Cassimo cooperative told us:

There were about eighty members in Alberto Cassimo in 1980. There were problems and many women left the cooperatives. Many of them want to come back today, but after going through such hard times, we are not letting them back easily: they ate and clothed themselves thanks to the cooperative [...] got where they are today thanks to the cooperative. Of those original eighty members, there are now only fifteen left.<sup>11</sup>

Another member, Lurdes M. of Ngungunghana cooperative, told us of the difficulties faced by members:

I began working on the people's farms in 1980. Ngungunghana cooperative was formed in 1982 with the help of the local Agricultural Center. At that time we had no tools to speak of. Everyone brought what they could to dig and water the soil. At first I worked in the higher land, where we

planted cassava and sweet potato, but it produced very little. Helped by the GD we got some land in the lower part of the valley. With seeds donated to use, we improved our harvest. The most difficult period was between 1984 and 1985, when the number of cooperative members became quite small. At that time, the Agricultural Center collapsed, but we managed to solve our problems with UGC aid. Today we plant cabbage, carrots, peppers, lettuce, onions and tomatoes in the cool season, and maize and pumpkins in the summer. We also have chickens.<sup>12</sup>

The UGC's rethinking process resulted in new strategies for the development of the cooperative movement through 1) foreign exchange saving; 2) provision of low cost services within the movement; 3) an agrarian renewal program with different cash crops and animal production; 4) modernization of the cooperatives and production systems; and 5) introduction of market production units, which improved the UGC's ability to compete in the market.

The UGC analysis of its strategies also emphasized the positive achievements of the movement, drawing attention especially to 1) the importance of its support of the peasant sector through cooperatives and unions; 2) its having been able to survive the crisis brought about by economic reform without selling off its property to national or foreign buyers and without laying off workers; and 3) the average income of its members being 1.5 times that of the national minimum wage, despite the majority of its members having little formal education and many being relatively old (Casimiro, 1999: 199; UGC, 1997: 8). The creation of a unit for the management of administration and finance, of production units and the provision of services is also evidence of its growth and determination to respond to challenges and problems by improving its efficiency. The profits from the production units enabled the UGC to create capital for investment in the cooperatives and social sectors.

After the initial crisis, the UGC began to reestablish its plans in 1989. Pig raising, which had declined in productivity due to feed and marketing difficulties, was replaced by the production of chickens, which have a more rapid reproductive cycle and easier marketability. Indeed, chicken production came to be part of a chain involving UGC production units, cooperatives and the marketing sector. The whole cycle includes chicken hatchery units, egg production units, incubators, a slaughterhouse, a feed factory (PRODAG) and marketing, as well as training of UGC and cooperative members to work or give technical assistance in the different phases of the work process. Chicken production is thus a modern system, in which all waste is reused either in the production of proteins for animal feed or as fertilizers in agricultural production.

Chicken production was one of the most important foci for the economic recuperation of the UGC. Because chicken production was undertaken not



only in UGC production units but also in the cooperatives, in social sectors and by individual cooperative members, it enabled the improvement in the incomes of each individual member as well as the economic independence of the social support units. Cooperatives had access to a credit system and to technical assistance by the UGC, the latter also being available to the families.

Even in the context of structural readjustment, the UGC maintained investment in social infrastructure, continuing its initial project of supporting poor peasants and maintaining a humanitarian dimension (Depelchin, n.d.: 6).

#### 1990–2000: Consolidation of the UGC—problems and prospects

The 1990s saw the UGC at the crossroads of qualitative and quantitative development of the previous ten years. "Dedication, good will and courage were not enough" for its survival and development; it now needed to construct a sophisticated modern organization to face the future (Celina Cossa, n.d.).

Registered as a company on 2 March 1990, the UGC is now a cooperative enterprise composed of 185 cooperatives, twelve area unions, 5,500 members and listed assets that must generate income to remain economically viable. Its organizational structure includes a General Assembly, Board of Directors, Board of Control, Board of Management, and Board of Supervision, all democratically elected (Casimiro, 1999; UGC, 1999).

Having started its activities in the green areas of the city of Maputo with seven cooperatives and 500 members (UGC, 1999), the UGC today has production units and cooperatives in several areas of the province of Maputo. Its diversified activities include 1) poultry raising; 2) animal feed (PRODAG); 3) agriculture; 4) arts and crafts; 5) a transport fleet; 6) a marketing sector for produce, live and processed (frozen) chickens; 7) construction; 8) cattle raising; and 9) assistance services for production units and cooperatives.

Projects such as the introduction of fruit trees as alternative cash crops are still recent and have not yet produced results. The beginning of flower and cashew production in 1998 is part of a long-term project that aims not only to create more jobs for cooperative members and their families but also to overcome economic difficulties by increasing competitiveness without turning to external aid. The union is thus seeking to become competitive within the international market, particularly in the region of southern Africa.<sup>13</sup>

The UGC is also studying the possibility of extending cashew cultivation and constructing factories for cashew processing, while introducing at the same time an industry of decortication based on domestic treatment of the fruit by cooperative members and their families, which are given small machines for processing cashew. If this project takes off, the UGC should be

prepared to face such competitive markets as those of India and Brazil. Government policies for agro-industry in the near future, particularly concerning the development of the cashew-nut processing industry, as well as the performance of the market will certainly play a decisive role in the evolution of this project (PNUD, 1998: 77–78).

The UGC has other projects in the pipeline for the improvement and diversification of fruit production and of agricultural production in general, the success of which will be dependent on the introduction of new technology, including efficient irrigation and drainage, new high-yield, low-cost seeds, as well as improvement of members' training. Since Mozambique is part of the of southern African region, the UGC has to be prepared to compete at the national as well as the regional level. South Africa can become either its largest market or its main competitor, depending on the quality and competitiveness of UGC products.

The UGC functions today as a holding company, where its 5,500 members represent shareholders. In 1997, it established an internal non-governmental organization, UGC/AD—Aid to Development, which acts as a savings and credit union (Casimiro, 1999; UGC, 1999; interviews with P. Galliponi, 20 July 2000, and 27 April 2001). Despite the growth of the UGC and the fact that it has managed to survive economic reforms by readjusting its form and objectives, it continues to depend partially on external financial aid and bank loans for its survival. Even so, the UGC is able to finance small projects for support of the cooperatives and has an efficient credit system, as already stated.

In the ranking of the 100 largest companies in Mozambique made by KPMG (KPMG Moçambique, 2000), which took into account the 1999 volume of trade, the UGC was in ninth position among a set of fifteen food and beverage companies. Considering the 100 largest companies from a total of 191, it was ranked 49th (KPMG Moçambique, 2000).

In the social sphere, the UGC has continued to extend benefits to its members, and, as well as paying regular wages, also has a social security fund. Older women members thus have a guaranteed retirement pension of half of the wage paid in the production sector. Having started by supporting the services of a nurse, today the UGC has health posts and offers free medical assistance through public health programs to its members and their families (UGC, 1999: 17).

The number of crèches for members' children has kept pace with growing needs, and today many of them are no longer financially dependent on the UGC for their survival. The education sector has also grown gradually; besides the already mentioned primary and secondary schools, it currently has a trade school and an institute that provide technical and vocational training courses, and some of its workers have been given scholarships for college (UGC, 1999).



The growth of the cooperative movement showed the need to extend existing experiments to other parts of the country. Thus, in 1993, UNAC—National Union of Peasants (União Nacional de Camponeses) was created, congregating the Mozambican peasant associations that are not connected to the UGC. The UGC maintains relations at several levels with similar national and international organizations, and is a member of UNAC. The president of UGC, Celina Cossa, is also the president of UNAC.

It is easy to see that, during its twenty-one-year history, the UGC has overcome many of its main problems. Those that continue are the dependence on external financing and credit and the low productivity of some of the cooperatives that need to be modernized, but which also have a majority of older, illiterate women, and in which change is that much more difficult. The UGC is preparing a retirement program for older women, being aware that it needs to modernize its cooperatives in order to face the competition of an open market.

The problems of growth encountered by the weaker cooperatives can also be explained, partly at least, as the result of the competition between the UGC and the cooperatives for the best workers. Effectively, the UGC's most important sectors are strengthened by the most active and dynamic members, who are transferred to production units and pilot cooperatives, to the detriment of the weaker cooperatives. This situation can probably be explained by the fact that there is a need to reinforce the most profitable sectors of the UGC while attempting to find alternatives for the cooperatives in crisis.

Throughout our fieldwork, we met women with extraordinary management and organization skills occupying positions of leadership in the UGC production units or in the most important cooperatives. At the same time, we observed that in other cooperatives membership was a question of survival with few prospects for the future. Some testimonies follow.

Eugénia N. is 56 years old and responsible for a fruit tree nursery; after being in the Marien Ngouabi cooperative, she has worked for the UGC for seventeen years. She is responsible for forty-two workers, thirty-eight of them women. The function of this team is to grow trees such as cashews through the process of grafting in order to produce a more economically viable plant. Eugénia is married with children, two of whom work in the UGC, one of them in the mechanics training school. This is her story:

I began to work in the people's farms in 1979, but was not happy because there was no personal income. After one year, Mister Prosperino appeared and assembled the women, helping us organize in cooperatives and teaching us above all to produce a variety of things. We needed to make an agricultural center and have our own organization. We learned new ideas, about new crops, how to make flowerbeds and irrigation ditches and how to use

water more economically. At the start, we had to make a small contribution to hire transport to take our products to market. We received a very small amount from the sale of our products, but we had the great comfort of the production of foodstuffs for our families. Little by little we learned to use the bank to deposit our savings. Later we started to raise pigs. But when we realized that pig raising took time, requiring at least two years to see the results of our investment, we switched to chickens. It was much easier, we could see results after only 45 days, and at the same time improve our agriculture. The UGC opened a slaughterhouse, and the majority of the women who went to work there came from the cooperatives. The best members went to work for the UGC production units. The cooperatives were left weaker but, on the other hand, the work of the Union improved.<sup>14</sup>

The Che Guevara cooperative is a pilot cooperative, which has tractors and an irrigation system powered by a motor pump, where the UGC makes investments because of the quality and quantity of its work. The cooperative has about twenty-five hectares of land, although not all of it is cultivated. For most of the year, vegetables are grown, with other seasonal crops. There are thirty-eight people working here, only ten of whom are not members of the cooperative; eleven retired members have a pension paid by the UGC. Apart from agriculture, which here includes the produce of 800 cashew trees and a plan for the development of citrus fruit, the cooperative has a chicken production unit with a capacity of 4,000 chicks per year. The members of the cooperative are satisfied with the results of their work:

We began our work in 1980. During the time of the GD, we cleared the bush and formed the cooperative. We are not afraid of hard work. The coop has twenty-five hectares, and we grow cabbage, lettuce, tomato, sweet potatoes, green beans, and peppers. In the hot season we produce peppers, green beans, tomatoes and maize. We have a production plan made in conjunction with the UGC. There is a truck that comes regularly to the cooperative to take our goods to market. The bookkeeper registers our production. The profits of sale are deposited in the UGC account and are entered to the credit of our cooperative to pay off the loans we have made. Once a month we have a meeting to discuss the work completed and to be done. We are represented in the General Assembly of the UGC, but there are annual meetings to analyze the work of the coops and it is there that the future is decided.

Some members are taken from the cooperatives to work in the UGC, this to strengthen the Union in certain production units. We think this important, because the UGC guarantees our survival. For women who are heads of families, the cooperative is a source of support for feeding the family, mainly because we can cultivate a little land to produce for ourselves.<sup>15</sup>

To give the other side of the picture, that of the weaker cooperatives, we chose the Marien Ngouabi coop, where, of the fifty founding members, only seven were left, of which two had been redirected by the UGC to other tasks the day before. Its president had been ill for six months, and the remainder were elderly women. The cooperative has a marked lack of labor force. Under the direction of a temporary president proposed by the UGC, E. Moiane, 48 years old, cultivation is undertaken through mutual help, supplemented with the labor of other non-cooperative women who receive in return a portion of land where all the produce is their own. The cooperative's small chicken coop had collapsed in a gale six months previously. The members were not able to say anything about the possible recovery and viability of the chicken coop, as the colleague responsible for this activity was not present. Questioned about their future, they could only say that they did not know whether fruit trees could constitute an alternative to improve their income, and that they remained connected to the cooperative only because they could use a portion of land for their own family production since their income was very small.<sup>16</sup>

In a collective interview made with members of the Alberto Cassimo, Ngungunhana, Manuel Pinto da Costa and José Eduardo dos Santos cooperatives, we found a group of women of various ages, all of whom were engaged in production but who were also uninformed as to future developments, and conformed to a situation in which the most important thing was the struggle for survival, which they could at least manage within the cooperative. C. Tchaúque, 60 years old, of the Manuel Pinto da Costa cooperative, told us:

In the 1980s, when we founded the cooperative, there were forty members. The number gradually diminished until now there are only nine members left. We raised pigs and later chickens, which gave rapid earnings because it was possible to produce at least three times a year. At first it was profitable, but lately we have many debts. The great problem is the bills we have to pay because of the losses we incur. Even so, we are not giving up our work, because we are used to it. We receive very little. The income is not enough to live on and send our children to school. We lose a lot of money producing greens because the market is full of the same produce, but at least we can feed the family, for each member has land to cultivate within the cooperative. We have a project with fruit trees and we are working hard on it, but we don't know if it will lead to improvements.<sup>17</sup>

Speaking of the UGC rehabilitation project for these cooperatives, Lurdes, Rosalina, and Ruth told us that the project involved five cooperatives, but that they did not know if their standard of living would improve, even with the fruit trees and the UGC's help. They are hopeful, but uncertain. They

are also in debt. Half of the chicks they received on credit died, and the debts are difficult to pay off. Other younger members of the cooperative also expressed little hope for a better future. We gained the impression from these interviews that few of the women who make up these poorer cooperatives believe that the changes will alter their lives.<sup>18</sup>

Consideration of the testimonies we have mentioned leads us back to the question of the viability of the UGC as an alternative in the context of a competitive market. We put together some of these testimonies and a summary of the results of our work, and subsequently organized an interview with Prosperino Galliponi, whom we asked to analyze the present situation:

In 1990 it was necessary to mobilize people, to check always in a cooperative which people were the best, the good, the average and the bad, that is, the most intelligent, open and critical. The best were less than 10 percent, the good around 20 percent and the bad about 50 percent. At that juncture, we developed a strategy and began to make a selection to improve the levels of good and above. After 10 years we have 10 percent of people who qualify as best.

Advanced age is an important factor among our women, with implications for training. The leadership is involved in the training process, but we should not expect a revolution!

One of the most important things for the cooperative members is to receive a wage. By 1987 all members of cooperatives received wages. Then came the rise in wages and all the problems associated with PRE (Economic Reform Program).

Chicken was the economic solution after pig production, but today it is not the whole answer to our problems: there is a lot of competition in the production of chickens. In agriculture there are farms that support some wages but don't answer all needs. We are looking for new solutions with the entry of the UGC into micro-credit, which has to be associated with the cooperatives. There are 1,400 members who need to have access to micro-credit to begin their work. The average credit is between 1 million and 1.5 million meticaís, with an upper limit of 3 million meticaís. This could be the solution to revitalize the cooperatives, since one cannot survive without wages. The savings cooperative is already registered as an NGO. The UGC has already introduced a social security system: members of the cooperatives pay into the fund from their income. But young people don't want to join the cooperatives; they don't see a future in them.

The main objective of the UGC is to help women to think for themselves and make their own decisions.<sup>19</sup>

The balance between strengths and weaknesses that characterizes the UGC is based above all on its capacity to create conditions that eliminate the basic

constraints that affect most of its members, the majority of whom are women. By giving them access to education, technical training, land, credit and employment, the way for the creation of spaces of liberty is opened. The decentralization of power through the gradual development of democratic methods of decision-making at all levels among cooperative members also plays an important part in this process.

This is thus a privileged field for the emergence of a break with a socially restricted and fragmented citizenship (Casimiro, 1999: 112). as well as for the emergence of "emancipatory elements,"<sup>20</sup> which create new relations not only in the public sphere, but especially within the family, since "one part of women's productive life takes place outside the institution of the family" (Casimiro, 1999: 203).

The autonomy achieved by female cooperative members in the struggle for access to and control of resources and decision-making led to their gradual empowerment, and this has made an impact on the family and the community. If we consider that gender relations are power relations, and that relations within the family and society are constructed on the basis of an androcratic model that has no place for women protagonists, it becomes clear that this is a gradual and permanent process, in which the struggle of women to become historical subjects implies first of all the valorization of their consciousness as citizens and the permanent vindication of their rights.

In the struggle for access to power, the change must come from within, and cooperative members have to participate in it. It cannot be imposed from the outside, through imported models. It has to go beyond the exercise of formal citizenship, consented to by the system. It implies the gradual construction of new attitudes and values. "If power is given, it can also be withdrawn: it is only when power is conquered that it is truly one's own" (Townsend *et al.*, 1999: 24).

### CONCLUSION

Based on the case of the Maputo UGC, this study has sought to consider the possibility of establishing alternatives for production that might be viable in the context of an open economy.

The search for solutions to its problems, within the context of its emergence and development, has led the UGC to find alternative forms of production, first as a response to the strategies of the socialization of the countryside introduced by Frelimo after independence (in which cooperatives were to play a leading role). and then as a response to the introduction of neoliberal policies in Mozambique which led to the hegemony of the market.

The history of the UGC also shows us that its growth philosophy took the form of linking investment in social as well as economic sectors, rooted

as it was in the principle of creating economic and social conditions to enable its members to decide how to improve their lives.

Analyzing its impact in the social area, the UGC sees the following as positive aspects 1) the payment of a monthly wage above the minimum to cooperative members; 2) the creation of employment "through jobs generated in common undertakings and in the structures of the UGC," thus benefiting members of the Union and their families (UGC, 1998); 3) the provision of primary healthcare services to members and their families; 4) education: crèches, primary and secondary schools, and technical education, available to family members; 5) encouragement of individual production (horticulture and chickens) among cooperative members, with access to micro-credit, as a means of promoting small-scale rural family enterprises, later extended to some poor families outside the cooperatives (UGC, 1998).

Our conclusions on the UGC's activities take into account that 1) the income of families in urban areas such as Maputo very much depends on the contributions of various family members, in which the importance of wages is high; 2) the economic reform of the 1980s and 1990s reduced opportunities for wage labor; 3) a majority of women have difficulty in finding paid employment because of their age and lack of education; 4) access to resources such as land and credit, and the linking of social and economic initiatives created conditions for the emergence of collective management through participatory methods of decision-making; 5) in addition to helping women to find survival alternatives, the UGC seeks to facilitate activities that generate funds. From this viewpoint, the UGC's experience has been positive, both in making women aware of their citizenship and thus giving them access to power and in contributing to changes in gender relations in the family and society (Casimiro, 1999).

In the 1980s and 1990s the UGC advanced qualitatively and quantitatively from its embryonic phase. The information presented above shows the UGC today as a cooperative enterprise, in which income does not depend so much on its agricultural cooperatives as on its production units. Indeed, we are faced with a situation in which many cooperatives are involved in a struggle for survival due to their difficulty in competing in the market.

As the UGC is organically linked to the cooperatives, its efforts have been to find alternatives to offset "some of the inefficiencies of collective production, particularly in the agrarian sector, without diminishing support structures, especially logistical support and extension activities" (UGC, 1998). The UGC is thus seeking to contribute to the emergence of rural enterprises, while reinforcing at the same time those initiatives that enable the Union as a whole to be self-sustainable.

Where then is the alternative?

Because it cannot escape the global dimensions of the division of labor, the UGC is tending to modernize its capital in order to adjust to market

pressures. In the current economic context of Mozambique, the search for solutions to the cooperatives' problems, rather than being directed toward the emergence of a counter-hegemonic alternative, is more a search for survival that seems to be leading women increasingly toward participation in the market and to their proletarianization (Townsend *et al.*, 1999).

Hegemonic forms invariably produce alternative responses that may not be exclusively economic, but which also may present a social dimension. It was precisely in this area that the UGC has managed to achieve forms of social inclusion, particularly in the case of women. Thus, the history of the UGC shows how it is possible to construct a path that gives its members the role of subjects in a transformation. Democratic forms of management and decision-making were the lever that has determined that transformation and that has permitted the construction of a solidary knowledge. In order for the economic alternatives of this project to remain viable and maintain the investment in the social area, the UGC will have to follow through with its planned projects, modernize its cooperatives and production units—in order to become competitive at national and international levels—and create systems so that its different initiatives rapidly become self-sustaining. Since the State has not shown any signs of support for this kind of undertaking, neither at the local nor national level, the General Union of Cooperatives will have to strengthen its cooperatives and production units, on whose initiative its development depends.

#### Notes

- 1 The production of this text was made possible only through the kind collaboration of Father Prosperino Galliponi and his colleagues at the UGC, whom I would like to thank, particularly Marta Nhancale, a teacher at the UGC, and Mr. Camões, technical agronomist in charge, who introduced me to the production units and cooperatives of the Mahotas valley. I would also like to thank all those who agreed to be interviewed. The help of Hilário Diuty, research assistant at the Center of African Studies, was fundamental during the fieldwork, as was that of students of the Social Science Training Unit of Eduardo Mondlane University, Isabel Tembe and Ana Maria David, in library research in the Ministry of Agriculture, Mozambique Historical Archive, and the Maputo Green Zones Office. I would also like to thank all colleagues of the Mozambique work team for suggestions and comments. Part of the information contained in this text was collected during separate research financed by the Ford Foundation and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians, whom I would like to thank.
- 2 It is difficult to establish sharp divisions between urban and peri-urban areas, especially when the extension of cities leads to the absorption of

rural areas (as was the case of Maputo). and rural, urban and peri-urban spaces interpenetrate each other.

- 3 By urban agriculture I mean not only horticulture and forestry (for collection of firewood). but also apiculture, pisciculture and cattle-raising for milk production, as well as sheep and lambs (Egziabher *et al.*, 1995).
- 4 The base-level political structure introduced by Frelimo in residential areas and the workplace, normally directed by Frelimo members on a voluntary basis. The necessity of creating a structure with a more administrative character in the residential areas to carry out municipal functions transformed many of these "Dynamizing Groups" into representatives of the administration at the local level, a function they still continue to fulfil in many places where formal local administrative bodies have not yet been instituted.
- 5 Prosperino Galliponi, a Catholic priest, has worked in Mozambique since the 1950s. As a result of his political position during the colonial period, he was expelled from the country, returning only after independence. Appointed by the government in 1980 to work in the Green Zones Office, he was a central figure in the creation of the UGC, with which he is still associated, playing an important part in its development.
- 6 The heavy soil in these areas was normally used for cultivation of greens and other vegetables and fruit.
- 7 Collective interview conducted with members of Alberto Cassimo, Ngungunhana, Manuel Pinto da Costa and José Eduardo dos Santos cooperatives, by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty, Maputo (14 June 2000) (free translation).
- 8 Interview conducted by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty, at the Flower Production Unit, Maputo (February 2000).
- 9 Now the Southern Bank (Banco Austral).
- 10 Interviews conducted by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty in 1999 in the Infulene Valley cooperatives.
- 11 Collective interview conducted by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty with members of Alberto Cassimo, Ngungunhana, Manuel Pinto da Costa, and José Eduardo dos Santos cooperatives (14 June 2000) (free translation).
- 12 Collective interview conducted by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty with members of Alberto Cassimo, Ngungunhana, Manuel Pinto da Costa, and José Eduardo dos Santos cooperatives (14 June 2000) (free translation).
- 13 Interview with Prosperini Galipoli (27 April 2001).
- 14 Interview conducted by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty (31 May 2000).
- 15 Collective interview conducted by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty at Che Guevara Cooperative (10 June 2000) (free translation).

- 16 Collective interview conducted by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty at Marien Ngouabi Cooperative (June 2000).
- 17 Collective interview conducted by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty at Alberto Cassimo, Ngungunhana, Manuel Pinto da Costa and José Eduardo dos Santos cooperatives (14 June 2000) (free translation).
- 18 Collective interview conducted by Teresa Cruz e Silva and Hilário Diuty at the José Eduardo dos Santos, Ngungunhana and Manuel Pinto da Costa cooperatives (13 June 2000).
- 19 Interview with Prosperino Galliponi, by Teresa Cruz e Silva (20 July 2000).
- 20 In "Political Power and Women's Leadership," included in the first volume of this collection, Conceição Osório discusses the issue of women's access to power, and refers to situations that can be related to those experienced by women cooperative members and their emancipatory struggles.

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