

Speaking points

COPAC side event to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

“Choose cooperatives, choose equality: Paths to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Conference Room 5, UN Headquarters, New York

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- FAO is very pleased to join with other COPAC members today – the United Nations, through its Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) and the World Farmers’ Organisation (WFO) to showcase the critical role of cooperative enterprises in advancing equality to help ensure sustainable development for all.
- Indeed, equality for all needs to be at the center of efforts to achieve global food security and nutrition, eradicate poverty and promote sustainable agricultural development. Today however, many women, youth and marginalized groups, particularly in rural areas, lack the resources they need to be fully productive. Collective action, through agricultural cooperatives and producer organizations, is key to helping small producers, including women and young people, to overcome the barriers they face.
- Most of the world’s poor and hungry – about 70 percent – live in rural areas. The majority of them are family farmers who depend directly on farming, fishing, forestry and livestock for food and income. It is these smallholder and family farmers that manage most of the world’s agricultural land and produce most of the world’s food. This was recognized in the 2014 UN International Year of Family Farming, which highlighted that the potential of family farming can be unlocked through collective action in the form of cooperatives and producer organizations. However, they still face many challenges and inequalities that reduce their own capacities to become food secure.
- Women as farmers, workers and entrepreneurs make crucial contributions in agriculture. Nevertheless they face a gender gap: they have less access than men to opportunities and productive resources such as land, technology and education. They also do not participate equally in decision-making processes. Closing this gender gap would mean important gains for the agriculture sector and the broader society.
- Rural youth are the future of food security, yet they suffer from disproportionately high levels of unemployment, underemployment and poverty. They have unequal access to knowledge, information, land, financial services and green jobs and markets. Often, their voices are not heard in policy processes that affect them.
- FAO recognizes that effective and inclusive cooperatives and producer organizations can empower their members economically and socially. They can create sustainable employment opportunities for all. Inclusive cooperatives and producer organizations offer small agricultural producers – including marginalized groups such as women and young people – opportunities and a wide range of services. These include improved access to

markets, natural resources, information, technologies, education and finance. They also facilitate their members' participation in decision-making at all levels and can provide for the social and environmental needs of their communities, which they might not otherwise have.

- The leadership and participation of women and youth in agriculture and rural areas can be encouraged through agricultural cooperatives and producer organizations. The FAO Dimitra project for example, builds the capacities of rural populations through information dissemination and the exchange of experiences. It promotes the leadership and voice of the most marginalized, women and youth in particular, to improve their livelihoods, including through their own organizations.
- In Niger, FAO supports the development of effective and equitable rural producer organizations and cooperatives through the CoOPEquity approach. These organizations are supported to enhance their internal capacities for governance, participation and gender equality.
- In Mali, FAO is supporting the government's efforts to unleash the capacities of young women and men to effectively participate in the modernization of the agricultural sector, including through producer organizations. In this way, rural youth can gain access to land, markets and financial services as well as better quality jobs, which are all essential to enhancing the resilience of the largely rural population and reducing poverty.
- With 795 million people in the world still suffering from hunger, we cannot afford to be complacent. FAO's global challenge to end hunger and malnutrition is clearly reflected in the Sustainable Development agenda, with agriculture being placed at the centre of many of the goals. FAO values its collaboration with agricultural cooperatives and producer organizations as important partners and strategic allies in achieving its mission. As the international community looks ahead to implementation of the Goals, cooperatives and producer organizations will have a major role to play in contributing to a food-secure and more equitable world.