

## **Why the world needs cooperative enterprises in order to achieve equality**

2015 International Day of Cooperatives

4 July 2015

The 2015 International Day of Cooperatives is a particularly important observance for cooperative enterprises. It marks twenty years since the first International Day in 1995, the World Summit for Social Development and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for gender equality and women's empowerment. This year will also see the adoption of a post-2015 development agenda by UN Member States, in order to take forward the work begun by the Millennium Development Goals.

In light of these milestones, the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) seizes the opportunity of the 2015 International Day to stress the necessary role of cooperatives in achieving equality. The Sustainable Development Goals to be adopted by the UN this year will need to include all sections of the population to succeed. Cooperatives are a key partner to deliver the Goals, by providing a people-focused business model that allows all individuals a dignified and sustainable way to make a living.

Though the world has made strides towards equality, the fact remains that only a small portion of the population enjoys prosperity. Meanwhile, many endure poverty, food insecurity, unequal access to education and employment opportunities, disease, conflict and harsh living conditions.

As ethics-based enterprises created by people for people, cooperatives provide a remedy for persisting inequalities. Equality counts among the six guiding values for cooperative enterprises, and open and voluntary membership, regardless of gender, social, racial, political or religious background, is one of the principles to which cooperatives subscribe. By bringing economic resources under democratic control, cooperatives serve their members by working towards the wellbeing of all rather than the financial gain of a few. They can empower their members economically and socially, helping to bring about the sustainable development of the communities in which they operate.

One of the challenges to achieving equality is the need to include everyone in our social fabric. Cooperatives, being deeply rooted in local issues and engaged in rural communities, are well-placed to ensure that the needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations are met, and in a way that respects our natural environment. Cooperatives also have a positive impact on the livelihoods of women and youth through access to employment, decent work conditions and participation in leadership and decision-making. They can provide social benefits, including through supporting improved nutrition, health and education outcomes within households and communities. In rural areas, where 70 percent of the world's poor live, cooperatives are critical to helping small producers overcome the barriers they face to improving their livelihoods and to a more equitable and food-secure world.

Beyond economic opportunity, cooperatives are actors for equality by providing access to basic resources, such as water, sanitation and energy. They are essential in many remote communities where providers have been unwilling to invest in infrastructure to connect rural households. Through the cooperative model, people are able to organise themselves and jointly invest in

infrastructure to meet their own needs.

Given these contributions and the impressive potential of cooperatives to do even more to enhance people's wellbeing everywhere and ensure equality for all, COPAC encourages the international community to "choose cooperatives, choose equality". **Cooperative enterprises are a well-suited model to deliver the post-2015 development agenda**, given their proven commitment to economic, social and environmental sustainability.

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*The Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) is a multi-stakeholder partnership of global public and private institutions that champions and supports people-centred and self-sustaining cooperative enterprises as leaders in sustainable development. Its current membership includes the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Farmers' Organisation (WFO).*