

Cooperatives, Women, & Gender Equality

The Issue

Twenty years have passed since 1995's World Beijing Conference on Women placed a focus on closing the gender gap; however, deeply-rooted gender-based inequalities have continued beyond the 2015 target. Women are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes; suffer from lack of access to decent, fair-waged, safe employment; and are more likely to work informal and unpaid labour. Given this reality, United Nations Member States have agreed to prioritise gender equality and women's empowerment by creating a standalone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for the issue.

The members of COPAC consider that cooperatives – through their values of self-help, equality and equity, and principles of

voluntary and open membership and democratic control – are well-placed to address many of the issues that negatively impact women. In response, they have launched an initiative to take stock of the progress of the cooperative movement on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Phase I of the study involved surveying responses of 600 cooperative stakeholders, and Phase II is an in-depth assessment of the contributions of cooperatives to gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the Post-2015 Development Framework. This briefing introduces some of the high-level themes that have emerged.

Phase I: Research Findings

From a survey conducted in 2015, 75% of respondents feel that women's participation in cooperatives has increased over the past 20 years.

Additionally, access to employment is being indirectly facilitated by cooperatives in fields such as housing, healthcare, childcare, and eldercare, which provide women with affordable and

accessible services that enable them to work.

Data gathered from the respondents also revealed that there seemed to be growing attention to gender issues, movement of women into leadership roles, and the increasing development of women-owned cooperatives.

Phase I: Conclusions

1. Cooperatives have an increasingly positive impact on women and their inclusion in the labour force and formal economy.
2. Cooperatives can enhance their ability to empower women by collaborating with civil society and gaining government recognition.
3. Cooperatives can continue to develop policies that support women from within.

How Cooperatives Contribute to Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment

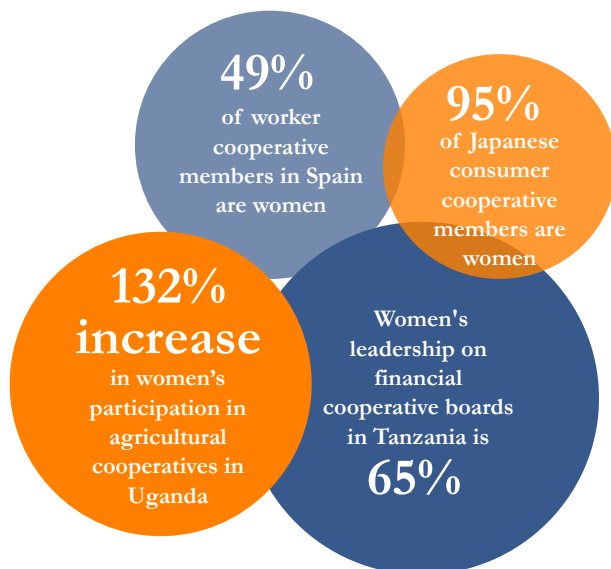
Equal access to paid work
Transition opportunities to the formal economy through cooperation
Access to business capital, financing, and market places
Access to opportunities to gain skills and knowledge for economic activity
Economic development in rural areas

Improved work conditions

Fair and adequate earnings / equal pay for equal value of work
Decent work in safe working conditions
Collective bargaining power
Increased levels of participatory democracy in the workplace

Social empowerment

Learning opportunities such as technical skills improvement and management training
Affordable and accessible goods and services
Improved self-esteem and confidence



Women in Cooperatives: Facts and Figures

Cooperatives contribute to the SDG for gender equality by increasing women's access to resources and economic opportunities. Globally more women join SACCOs (savings and credit cooperative organisations) giving them increased access to financial resources. In South Africa, women make up 60% of the cooperative members from almost all sectors. In Japan women are now 95% of cooperative members in consumer cooperatives and are in key governance positions. Nearly 40% of female worker cooperative members in Spain are in leadership positions. In Italy high-yielding fashion cooperatives are made up of 95% women members. Women-only cooperatives are being formed in the Arab States and Sri Lanka, furthering their economic opportunities and increasing social inclusion.

Gender equality within Paraguay's Manduvira Sugarcane Cooperative

This fair-trade sugar cooperative has seen an increase in the participation of women members and leaders. Manduvira is a multiservice cooperative with two types of operations:

- (1) organic, fair-trade sugar production and commercialisation, and
- (2) savings and credit.

In both of its operations, Manduvira adheres strongly to the principle that men and women should be treated equally.

Manduvira is an example for other cooperatives of how women can succeed in leadership positions historically held by men in Paraguay. It has a higher

percentage of women in leadership roles which has resulted in stronger, more stable cooperatives.

Female members are also playing an important role in increasing production levels. The inclusion of female farmers can fill supply gaps caused by a variety of factors, such as a rise in demand for food, higher rates of migration, and decreasing interest in agriculture among younger generations. Cooperatives need to recognise the potential of female farmers to be reliable and successful suppliers of agricultural products. By recruiting women, Manduvira has been able to

achieve the numbers they need to scale up.

Additionally, women are early adopters of new technologies. According to several cooperative leaders and staff members in Manduvira, female members are in general more likely than male members to apply what they learn in trainings and adopt new farming techniques.

And finally, Manduvira leaders have reported that the participation of both men and women in the cooperative results in having a diversity of perspectives that strengthens the business overall.

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The members of COPAC:



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations



United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for Social Policy and Development