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# COOPERATIVES:

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THE POWER TO ACT FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



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A celebration of the 2016 United Nations  
International Day of Cooperatives | July 2016

This publication complements a photo exhibition organized at the United Nations in July 2016. The exhibition and this book were curated by the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC).

COPAC is a multi-stakeholder partnership of global public and private institutions that promotes and advocates for people-centred, self-sustaining cooperative enterprises, guided by the principles of economic, social and environmental sustainable development. Its members are:



International  
Labour  
Organization



International  
Co-operative  
Alliance



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations



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

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

**Goal 1.** End poverty in all its forms everywhere **Goal 2.** End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture **Goal 3.** Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages **Goal 4.** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all **Goal 5.** Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls **Goal 6.** Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all **Goal 7.** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all **Goal 8.** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all **Goal 9.** Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation **Goal 10.** Reduce inequality within and among countries **Goal 11.** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable **Goal 12.** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns **Goal 13.** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts **Goal 14.** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development **Goal 15.** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss **Goal 16.** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels **Goal 17.** Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

## Introduction

**E**stablished by the United Nations in 2002, the International Day of Cooperatives is celebrated annually on the first Saturday of July. The International Day serves to increase awareness about cooperatives, highlight the complementary objectives of the United Nations and the global cooperative movement, underscore the contribution of cooperatives to resolving the major problems addressed by the United Nations, and strengthen and extend partnerships between the cooperative movement and other actors, including governments.

The 2016 International Day of Cooperatives is a particularly important celebration, now that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is underway.

Mentions of cooperatives appear in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Financing for Development Action Agenda. Given this unprecedented recognition of cooperatives in UN development policy, cooperatives have an opportunity to show their value as partners in achieving sustainable development.

### How do cooperative enterprises contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals?





# COOPERATIVES

## HELP ERADICATE POVERTY

Cooperatives are enterprises created by and for people to serve their members' economic and social needs. Based on values such as self-help, democracy, equality, and solidarity, and guided by principles inspired by those values, cooperatives focus on long-term goals for the greater good, rather than short-term profits for a few.

Through a cooperative, disadvantaged people can create their own economic opportunities, participate in decision-making processes that concern them, and turn individual risk into collective risk.

Take the example of Olavo Aparecido Luciano, 46, who lives in Corumbataí do Sul in the Southern Region of Brazil (pictured). When his crops were destroyed by drought and hailstorms, he considered selling his land and moving with his family to a large city to find work.

Instead, he decided to join other smallholder farmers in the cooperative Coaprocor, and began producing passion fruit, oranges, and strawberries to salvage his business and earn a sustainable income. Today, Coaprocor has 800 members and has started exporting organic fruit to Germany.

Luciano's eldest daughter was able to pursue her studies and will be the first of the family to earn a college degree.





# COOPERATIVES

## PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

One of the seven principles to which cooperatives subscribe is “concern for community,” which includes the idea of environmental sustainability.

Cooperatives are often pioneers in ways to eliminate food losses and food waste along the supply chain, in addition to offering infrastructure to smallholder farmers to help minimize post-harvest losses and engaging in innovative recycling and reuse programs.

At the Brazilian cooperative Coaprocor, fruit seeds are dried and sold for the cosmetics industry. To dry the seeds, the cooperative reuses the infrastructure once used to dry coffee beans, no longer a sustainable crop for the land.

Coaprocor worker João Batista Campos produces fruit seeds for resale (pictured).





M. Crozet © ILO photo gallery

# COOPERATIVES

## PROVIDE DECENT WORK

Given their focus on people and their needs, cooperatives have proven to be resilient, and even recorded growth, during times of crisis.

They also generally place more emphasis than their corporate counterparts on job security, competitive wages, and additional income through profit-sharing.

Cooperatives are a source of decent work and increase inclusion of marginalized groups, such as youth and indigenous people, in the workforce.

At least 250 million people around the world secure their livelihoods through cooperatives, either through direct employment or by organizing their activities through a cooperative.

Being enterprises democratically controlled by their members, cooperatives also allow workers to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them.

In the opposite photo, a rural cooperative gathers women from the district of Lahore, Pakistan.





M. Crozet © ILO photo gallery

# COOPERATIVES

## CREATE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Being socially minded enterprises, cooperatives offer non-economic benefits to their members, which include education and training, one of the seven principles to which cooperatives adhere.

These educational opportunities can take the form of professional development training, management skills building, or adult education offerings.

The cooperative principle of “concern for community” means that cooperatives invest in the long-term well-being of the communities in which they operate.

In the opposite photo, children arrive at a cooperative school in Rwaza, Rwanda.





# COOPERATIVES

## EMPOWER WOMEN

With open and voluntary membership as one of their basic principles, cooperatives expand women's participation in local and national economies and increase their access to resources and opportunities.

Greater inclusion of women in their activities also means that cooperatives tend to have greater gender parity in their leadership than other kinds of businesses.

Agustina Pinto (pictured) is the first person in Timor Leste to grow vanilla bean seedlings, a laborious but lucrative crop. She raises and distributes the seedlings through the National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International's USDA-funded Agriculture Diversification Project to 300 farmers in the Cooperativa Café Timor (CCT), to help them diversify their crops for the eastern regions of the country that cannot grow coffee.

Agustina built her nursery and shade structure from scratch and is one of the most productive seedling growers in the region. Before her nursery business, she was barely making ends meet with a couple of fruit trees across the street from her family home.





# COOPERATIVES

## IMPROVE FOOD QUALITY

Being located in remote, rural areas, small agricultural producers face many challenges related to access: to markets, information about food prices and market trends, high-quality inputs (equipment, seeds, fertilizer), loans to purchase those inputs, and transport, storage, and other infrastructure.

The cooperative model helps individual producers benefit from the power of the collective while maintaining their autonomy. Cooperatives offer their producer-members a variety of services such as group purchasing, group marketing, and skill building to help them innovate and adapt to changing markets.

Thanks to these advantages, cooperatives help producers contribute to the food system in a more sustainable and efficient way.

The farmers of the Cooperativa Café Timor (CCT) are diversifying their products, including starting a cassava flourmill. By introducing cassava flour, which is a substitute for expensive imported wheat flour, CCT is providing both more jobs and a guaranteed market for farmers.

Bags of dried cassava root are piled in the CCT warehouse outside Dili, Timor Leste (pictured).





# COOPERATIVES

## BUILD STRONG RURAL COMMUNITIES

In rural areas, cooperatives serve as a means for producers to secure their livelihoods, increase agricultural productivity, diversify the local food supply, and bring wealth to their communities.

Cooperatives in rural communities go beyond agriculture. They also operate in the fishing, mining, education, and water and sanitation industries.

For example, the Albarka Women’s Group in Iguefane village in the Tillabéri region of Niger contributes to a more resilient community. Through the National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International’s REGIS-ER project, the group learned to farm nutritious and diverse produce, which they can then use to feed their families and sell in the market. Business skills training helped the farmers reinvest revenues into small loans for its members.

In the opposite photo, a member of the Albarka Women’s Group holds a ledger detailing the sales of produce from their Oasis Garden.





# COOPERATIVES

## PROVIDE CLEAN ENERGY

Because they respond to people's needs, community-based energy supply cooperatives offer access to energy in regions and areas that may not be covered by public schemes, and not be seen as profitable by private investors.

Cooperatives can also foster the buy-in for more sustainable energy sources, since they prioritize long-term goals like environmental protection.

The Baywind Energy Co-operative's wind farm at Harlock Hill in England (pictured) generates renewable energy that Co-operative Energy, part of The Midcounties Co-operative, purchases as part of its low carbon energy supply to members and customers.



# COOPERATIVES

## OFFER SOLUTIONS IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The cooperative model is an option for people to make a living when political turmoil, economic crisis, displacement, or violence disrupts their lives. The self-help approach of cooperatives helps people find their own solutions to problems and can contribute to rebuilding societies.

Through participatory governance, members can also have their voices heard and strengthen their interpersonal and intergroup relationships.

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, for example, women's cooperatives produce food to generate extra income. Pictured are members of a women's cooperative in Arraba preparing and canning olives to be sold with other foods.





# COOPERATIVES

## SUSTAINABLY MANAGE OUR LIMITED RESOURCES

Cooperatives can provide a forum for people to engage in finding local solutions to environmental change: defining their property and user rights, managing natural resources, and diversifying economic activities to embrace greener ventures.

Cooperatives also support practices that combat the effects of resource degradation.

For example, drought conditions created by El Niño affect the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the Afar Region of northeastern Ethiopia. The Eneb Animal Feed Producers Cooperative sells multi nutrient blocks to help feed affected animals and secure their own incomes.

Pictured are cooperative members producing feed blocks.

## What now?

Learn more about cooperatives and their contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals. Visit [copac.coop](http://copac.coop) or contact us at [copac@copac.coop](mailto:copac@copac.coop).







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