



Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030

Cooperative contributions to SDG 4

This brief is part of the Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030 series produced by the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC). Through a series of 17 briefs, one for each Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), COPAC hopes to raise awareness about the significant contributions of cooperative enterprises towards achieving the 2030 Agenda in a sustainable, inclusive and responsible way, and encourage continued support for their efforts.

This brief focuses on SDG 4 – ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

About the Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by world leaders in September 2015 during a historic summit at the United Nations. The SDGs set out a vision for countries to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

For more information, visit www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment.

About cooperatives

Cooperatives are defined as 'autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise'.¹

All cooperatives subscribe to a set of values and principles that support the social and people-focused nature of their activities. They are operated democratically by their members. Whether customers of the business, workers or residents, members have an equal say and a share of the profits.

Cooperatives are a powerful economic and social force, present in most countries of the world and in most sectors of the economy. The cooperative movement counts more than a billion members.

¹ International Co-operative Alliance, Statement on the Co-operative Identity (Manchester, 1995). Available from <https://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>

The cooperative difference

A quality education and investment in human capital are essential foundations to improving quality of life and achieving sustainable development. Despite considerable gains in education enrolment over the past 15 years, worldwide, the adjusted net enrolment rates were 91 per cent for primary education, 84 per cent for lower secondary education and 63 per cent for upper secondary education in 2014. Most recent estimates indicate that about 263 million children and youth were out of school, including 61 million children of primary school age. Disparities in education by gender, residential area (rural/urban), race/ethnicity, or socio-economic status still constitute a major challenge. Achieving inclusive and equitable quality education for all will require increasing efforts, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia and for vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities, indigenous people, refugee children and poor children in rural areas.²

As member-owned, value-driven enterprises, cooperatives have always put education at the core of their guiding principles. Education, training, and information is one of the seven cooperative principles adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA). Cooperatives directly provide or facilitate access to education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and workers, as well as the members of larger communities so they can contribute effectively to the development of the cooperatives and communities. These can range from affordable early childhood care and education (ECCE) and primary and secondary education for members' children; technical, vocational and tertiary education for youth; and skills training for youth and adults. In many countries, cooperatives of people in the vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees, and indigenous and tribal peoples have been instrumental in providing them with literacy training and employment or life skills training and promoting inclusive and equitable education.

With regards to ECCE and primary and secondary education, cooperatives can also play a key role by eliminating child labour and helping girls and boys go to school, with their extensive networks and strong presence in economic sectors where child labour is found such as agriculture. Cooperatives can address child labour in their own functions and in the communities they operate by: improving the members' livelihoods; providing vocational training and awareness raising sessions on the child labour issue; or facilitating access to education for the community members.³

Moreover, the cooperative model has increasingly been used by teachers and other workers who provide educational services, in order to secure their jobs, bring democratic governance to their workplaces and ensure quality education for children. Teachers' cooperatives have been formed in countries during times of austerity with cuts in public spending in education and other basic services.

A good way to understand the cooperative difference is to learn from cooperatives making change happen in their communities. Here are a few examples of their contributions to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

² UN, Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Report of the Secretary-General (11 May 2017). Available from <http://undocs.org/E/2017/66>

³ ILO (2017), Cooperatives and the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work: Cooperatives and child labour. Cooperatives and the World of Work Series No. 7. Available from: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/publications/WCMS_556151/lang-en/index.htm

From the field: How cooperatives contribute to facilitating access to quality education

The UPAVIM, a handicraft cooperative formed by women in informal settlements and poor neighbourhoods of Villa Nueva, Guatemala, started a Children's Centre Programme to provide child care and preschool with its members in 1994. In addition to funds accumulated by sales of their fair trade handicrafts, it was made possible with financial contributions from donors and technical supports from other partners for training of care staff members on Montessori Method. The cooperative now has six trained members who work with around 70 children from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m. The parents pay a monthly fee, with UPAVIM members paying reduced fees compared to non-members.⁴

Rah-e-Roshd is the first and largest cooperative school in Teheran, Iran. It was founded as a kindergarten in 1985 by seven mothers who were concerned about the privatization of state-run schools and educational inequalities and wanted to secure quality education for their children. It has grown into an educational complex serving students from kindergarten to high-school levels and provided education to over 2,400 students in the past three decades. Among its 163 members, 70 per cent are teachers employed at the cooperative and 80 per cent are women. As one of the leading women's cooperatives in the country, Rah-e-Roshd has increasingly engaged in gender equality and women's economic integration issues through diverse social projects in partnership with other women's cooperatives. The surplus from the school operation will be re-invested to improve educational activities.⁵

In the UK, hundreds of cooperative schools have been set up since the enactment of the 2006 Education and Inspections Act which enabled a school to own its own assets, employ staff directly and set its own admission arrangements through an independent trust with weaker links to local authorities. Based on the internationally shared cooperative values and principles, the cooperative schools aim to provide quality education through a multi-stakeholder governance model which includes parents, staff, students, and other local community actors as members. The Schools Cooperative Society, an apex organization of the cooperative schools, works with teachers' trade unions such as the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) to promote good employment and governance practices in the cooperative schools.⁶



⁴ ILO and WIEGO (2018), Cooperatives meeting informal economy workers' child care needs. Available from: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/publications/WCMS_626682/lang-en/index.htm

⁵ ILO, "Rah-e-Roshd: The first cooperative school working to advance inclusive and quality education in Iran". Available from: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/news/WCMS_577533/lang-en/index.htm

⁶ Linda Shaw, "A quiet revolution: Cooperative schools in the UK". Available from <http://stories.coop/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Cooperative-schools-in-UK-case-study.pdf>



The Coopérative Agricole Kavokiva du Haut Sassandra (CAKHS) in Côte d'Ivoire is a cocoa and coffee marketing cooperative made up of around 5,800 members. With support from the International Labour Organization (ILO), since 2010 it has prevented and withdrawn over 1,800 children from hazardous child labour and provided them with basic education and vocational training. CAKHS has also set up kindergarten centres and school facilities hosting children withdrawn from hazardous child labour.⁷

The Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union (KNCU) in the northern Kilimanjaro Region of Tanzania has designed a seven year scholarship programme (2006-2012) that meets secondary educational expenses of orphans and vulnerable children of its members affected by HIV/AIDS. The programme was financed through premium revenues gained from sales of members' fair trade coffee products.⁸

The Y's Owl Maclure Co-operative Centre in Ottawa, Canada has provided services and supports to persons living with developmental and intellectual disabilities for over 35 years in partnership with the community. The cooperative's central mission is to promote a person's right to become a fully participating member of the community. It serves approximately 300 people and offers a wide range of services and opportunities including vocational and life skills training, a community-based programme to help them access to existing services, a comprehensive employment programme to support them find and maintain paid employment, internships and/or work experience, and a social café projects where they can practice their skills and engage with local people in a fully supported environment.⁹

The Mondragon Corporation is a federation of worker cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain which in 2017 employed 80,818 workers across 266 subsidiary companies and cooperatives in four business areas: finance, industry, retail and knowledge. In the knowledge area, the Corporation has the Mondragon University, a cooperative university established in 1997 to offer 15 Doctor's degrees and 14 Master's degree programmes in engineering, humanities, business studies, and food science. The Corporation also has 15 research and development (R&D) centres to promote innovation, cooperation and social development in the cooperatives and their communities. For instance, one of the R&D centre, Innovation in Advanced Business Services (ISEA S. COOP.) has provided business opportunities for unemployed youth through technology-based entrepreneurial projects called Etorkizuna Elkarrekin Eraikiz (which means Building Future Together in Basque language). People's training

⁷ ILO (2017), *ibid.*

⁸ ILO (2009), *Fair trade – fair futures: The Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union scholarship programme for children made vulnerable by AIDS*. Available from https://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_117874/lang-en/index.htm

⁹ <http://www.ysowlmaclure.org/>

Want to see more examples of
how cooperatives contribute to SDG 4?
Visit the Coops for 2030 campaign at
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and education have always been part of the cooperatives and they have allocated 10 per cent of the surplus to FEPI (Inter-Cooperative Promotion and Education Fund) for their professional training, social-cooperative education and R&D.¹⁰





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About COPAC

COPAC is a multi-stakeholder partnership of global public and private institutions that promotes and advances people-centred, self-sustaining cooperative enterprises, guided by the principles of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – in all aspects of its work. In addition to WFO, the Committee's current members are the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Co-operative Alliance and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

For more information, please visit
www.copac.coop.