International Year of Cooperatives
2025
Cooperatives Build a Better World

copac coop
Committee for the promotion and advancement of cooperatives

coop
International Cooperative Alliance

Building a Better World Together: Cooperative Contributions to the SDGs

Strengthening Global Partnerships for Sustainable Development

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 17, PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Underscores that achieving the 2030 Agenda requires an unprecedented level of cooperation among governments, the private sector, civil society, the United Nations system, and other stakeholders.[1] It calls for mobilizing resources, knowledge, technology, and collective action through multi-stakeholder partnerships that leverage the comparative strengths of all actors.[2] As civic space contracts and global crises intensify, the need for inclusive, democratic, and well-resourced cooperation has become more urgent than ever. By promoting policy coherence and capacity building, particularly in developing countries, SDG 17 serves as the framework that connects and strengthens all other Goals.

Recent data from the 2025 HLPF SDG 17 Factsheet shows that Official Development Assistance (ODA) fell to $212.1 billion in 2024, a 7.1% decrease from 2023 in real terms, ending a five-year upward trend.[3] Although ODA remains 23% above 2019 levels, the decline signals growing volatility in development finance, compounded by the disbandment of USAID and cuts in EU development budgets as donors redirect funds toward domestic and security priorities.[4] Without alternative and innovative financing, SDG progress, particularly in vulnerable countries, is at serious risk.

Global Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) reached $1.4 trillion in 2024, according to UNCTAD's World Investment Report 2025, yet SDG-related investments fell by 11%, revealing a widening disconnect between capital flows and sustainable development outcomes.[5] Remittances to low- and middle-income countries held steady at $648 billion in 2023 but could not offset record-high debt servicing costs of $1.4 trillion, deepening the $4 trillion annual SDG investment shortfall and threatening progress across multiple Goals.[6] This strain is heightened by proposals under the UN80 reform agenda, which, while intended to enhance coherence, risk weakening programmes in areas such as gender equality, education, and rural development.[7] Without safeguards and renewed political and financial commitment, these reforms could accelerate backsliding in fragile and conflict-affected settings, highlighting the need for a coordinated multilateral response to protect gains and reinvigorate global cooperation.

In response to these challenges, the ***Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4)*** convened in July 2025 in Seville, Spain. World leaders adopted the Sevilla Commitment and Platform for Action, setting out a renewed framework to unlock capital, address debt burdens, reform the financial architecture, and catalyze investment for the SDGs.[8] The outcome document explicitly acknowledged the role of cooperatives and the broader Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in advancing sustainable, inclusive development:

> “*We will invest in productive sectors, the creation of decent jobs at scale, and skills development to enable all people to benefit from inclusive, equitable, and sustainable economic growth. We will promote entrepreneurship, including social entrepreneurship—particularly among women and youth—and facilitate the growth of micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises, cooperatives, and the social and solidarity economy, as well as inclusive and sustainable industrialization. We recognize the contribution of culture and the creative economy in advancing sustainable development.*[9]”

This represents a meaningful policy shift, affirming cooperatives not only as beneficiaries but as key partners in development cooperation. With democratic governance, strong community roots, and a proven ability to mobilize resources for shared prosperity, cooperatives are well placed to bridge global ambitions and local realities.

1 UN News (2023). *Governments must seek win-win synergies tackling climate and SDG crises*. https://sdgs.un.org/news/governments-must-seek-win-win-synergies-tackling-climate-and-sustainable-development-crises
2 UN. *Revitalizing multilateral partnerships for the SDGs*. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/globalpartnerships
3 OECD. *Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Members*. https://www.oecd.org/en/about/committees/development-assistance-committee.html
4 UN. *2025 HLPF SDG 17 Factsheet*. https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/2025%20HLPF%20FACTSHEET%20SDG17.pdf
5 UNCTAD. *World Investment Report 2025*. https://unctad.org/publication/world-investment-report-2025
6 The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/
7 UN News (2025). *UN80 Reform Agenda*. https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/06/1164836
8 UN DESA (2025). *Seville Platform for Action – 4th Financing for Development Conference*. https://www.un.org/en/desa/global-leaders-launch-“sevilla-platform-action”-accelerate-financing-sustainable-development
9 Ibid.

THE COOPERATIVE ADVANTAGE IN SDG 17 IMPLEMENTATION

With over 3 million cooperatives serving more than 1 billion people worldwide, the cooperative model is built on values of democracy, equity, and solidarity.[10] Their federated structure, spanning from local groups to national and global networks, enables both horizontal collaboration across sectors and vertical alignment with policy frameworks at every level. Whether operating in agriculture, finance, health, retail, energy, housing, or services, cooperatives are locally embedded and often serve those left marginalized populations that are underserved by traditional business or government models.[11] Their unique architecture makes cooperatives powerful agents for linking local action to national strategies and global goals.

Importantly, the ILO Guidelines on Cooperative Statistics acknowledge multistakeholder cooperatives—enterprises established through collective, needs-driven initiatives involving different actors from the same sector, and in some cases, across the public, private, and civil society spheres.[12] This recognition underscores the agility and adaptability of cooperatives, demonstrating how they can effectively address evolving challenges. Their flexible, needs-based approach is not only vital for advancing the SDGs but also for shaping inclusive development pathways in the post-2030 agenda.

10 International Co-operative Alliance. Cooperatives: Facts and Figures. https://ica.coop/en/cooperatives/facts-and-figures
11 International Co-operative Alliance. Guidance Notes on the Co-operative Principles. https://ica.coop/en/media/library/the-guidance-notes-on-the-co-operative-principles
12 ILO (2018). Guidelines concerning statistics of cooperatives. https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/guidelines-concerning-statistics-cooperatives

COOPERATIVES IN ACTION: SDG 17 IN PRACTICE

Cooperatives worldwide are advancing SDG 17 by forging inclusive, resilient, and community-driven partnerships. Their ability to link grassroots initiatives with broader development efforts demonstrates the potential of people-centered business models to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

East Timor – NCBA CLUSA (USA) partnered with Cooperativa Café Timor on a $10 million New Zealand-funded project to improve healthcare and household incomes through coffee and cocoa production. CCT, the country's largest private employer, also contributes to the organic fair trade supply chain.[13]

Philippines – AgriCOOP connected remote farmer cooperatives directly to urban markets during COVID-19, linking 1.6 metric tons of produce to 39,000 consumers and strengthening food security.[14]

Colombia – Coopcentral Bank and its network, supported by DGRV (Germany) and USAID, connected small solidarity finance institutions to national and international systems, expanding digital transactions and building crisis resilience.[15]

Malawi – The "Our Malawi Partnership" (2021–2027), led by the UK Co-operative College and Central Co-operative Society, strengthens agricultural unions while expanding trade and member education through the national apex MAFECO.

Switzerland / Burkina Faso – Fair trade enterprise Gebana shares 10% of product sales profits with 2,500 farmers in Burkina Faso, safeguarding jobs and food supply chains after a 2017 crisis.[16]

Tanzania & Mozambique – REGCOOP, led by Norges Vel, ICA-Africa, and local partners, supports sustainable farmer-owned value chains, empowers women producers, and improves the enabling environment for cooperative growth.[17]

Türkiye – Rural cooperatives are mobilizing local investments to strengthen agri-food competitiveness under the EU-funded IPARD programme ***(17.3)***, while women-led cooperatives in the Eastern Black Sea developed e-commerce platforms and secured geographical indication certifications with UN agency support ***(17.6)***. Energy cooperatives are also partnering with municipalities to expand local solar energy production ***(17.7)***.

Armenia – Farm Credit Armenia partnered with EIB Global through a €2.5 million loan to support youth and women entrepreneurs, contributing to the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Eastern Partnership.[18]

13 NCBA CLUSA. *East Timor Coffee and Cocoa Agribusiness Opportunities*. https://ncbaclusa.coop/project/east-timor-coffee-and-cocoa-agribusiness-opportunities-cacao

14 Ibid.

15 ICA–EU Partnership. *Economic Integration and Cooperation Among Cooperatives: Americas*. https://coops4dev.coop/en/node/15581

16 CA–EU Partnership. *Mind Our Business: Amplify the Power of Sustainable and Inclusive Business Models*. https://coops4dev.coop/en/node/15370

17 Norges Vel. *Regional Programme for Cooperative Development (REGCOOP)*. https://norgesvel.no/en/regcoop

18 Farm Credit Armenia. *EIB Global and Farm Credit Armenia sign cooperation agreement to enhance entrepreneurial growth in Armenia*. 15 November 2024. https://www.fca.am/en/news/news_1546.html

CASES (PT) & Lusophone countries

As current President and member of the executive body of the Cooperative Organization of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (OCPLP), CASES – Cooperative António Sérgio for Social Economy (PT) is fostering inter-cooperation among 31 cooperative federations from Portuguese-speaking countries. This is pursued through a range of initiatives, including the shared use of the training and capacity-building platform provided by OCB (a member of the OCPLP) and the promotion of bilateral partnerships, all aimed at strengthening the cooperative contribution to South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

The Italian cooperative movement supporting people in Gaza

In July 2025, the Italian cooperative movement launched two humanitarian and solidarity partnerships as an emergency response in the Gaza Strip with two of the few field actors still having territorial presence. Legacoop raised over €100.000 from member cooperatives to organize the summer camps with socialization and educational activities for children in the Gaza Strip. Each month-long camp, realized by WeWorld-GVC with the support of the Swedish Akelius Foundation, will involve 60 to 70 children, including meals and school supplies.

Similarly, through the initiative #CoopforGaza, Ancc-Coop (National Association of Consumer Cooperatives) allocated €500.000 and launched a 2-month fundraising campaign through the Italian cooperative bank Banca Etica to support and strengthen Médecins sans Frontières' (MSF) work in 11 medical facilities in Gaza, including hospitals, field hospitals, and primary healthcare centers.

Visit to the Cooperativa Multiactiva de Piscicultores del Huila (Coopishuila)

Italy and Colombia for participatory governance

As part of the CO.LO.RES project, financed by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation and developed by Coopermondo e COSPE, several exchange missions took place between cooperatives in Putumayo and Cooperatives in other regions – including Antioquia, Huila in Colombia, and Emilia-Romagna in Italy. These missions involved grassroots organizations led by women, youth, and Afro-descendant or Indigenous populations, accompanied by key cooperative actors such as Coopermondo, Confcooperative, Confecoop (Colombian Confederation of Cooperatives), and ASOCOOPH (Association of Cooperatives and Solidarity Enterprises of Huila). From fishing to agri-food processing, from handicrafts to cooperative finance, the delegations were exposed to inspiring models of participatory governance, solidarity economy, and social impact. These experiences inspired participants to replicate virtuous models by adapting them to the Colombian context, with a tangible impact.

We Effect, HSB & Riksbyggen (SW) - *"Sustainable Housing – A Right for All"*

Among the few international organizations working with the right to housing, the Swedish cooperative development organization WeEffect has recently joined forces with two housing member organisations in Sweden – HSB and Riksbyggen to launch the "*Sustainable Housing – A Right for All*" program. This partnership is an innovative response to avert the negative impacts of Swedish aid cuts on housing rights in developing countries. The programme will support people's organizations and contribute to the construction of housing across East Africa and Latin America, while creating business opportunities for Swedish companies. The activities will see a multistakeholder action by cooperative companies, authorities, simultaneously bringing WeEffect closer to national housing policy and strengthening HSB and Riksbyggen's cooperative story with a global perspective.[19]

19 We Effect, HSB & Riksbyggen. *Programme Declaration: Sustainable Housing – A Right for All. October 2024.* https://www.housinginternational.coop/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Program-declaration-Oct-2024-WeEffect.pdf

Globally, the **ICA–EU Financial Framework Partnership Agreement** (#coops4dev🌍), a collaboration between the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) and the European Commission, now in its second renewed phase, supports policy dialogue, cooperative education, institutional strengthening, and capacity building for cooperatives across Africa, Asia-Pacific, the Americas, and Europe. To date, it has advanced cooperative policy engagement and capacity building in over 60 countries.[20] Implemented through ICA's regional offices, the partnership delivers targeted, decentralized actions that localize implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda and foster new, locally led partnerships. For example, capitalizing on IYC25, **Cooperatives Europe** and **ALDA Balkans** (regional chapter of the European Association of Local Democratic Agencies) hosted the online dialogue "#MondayTalk: Beyond business as usual – how to cooperatively advance a local democratic economy"," paving the way for a modern cooperative narrative in the Western Balkans that promotes democratic values and community engagement across sectors. Cooperatives Europe shared successful cooperative initiatives to address regional needs and misconceptions about cooperative formation, while ALDA Balkans strengthened its work on youth and locally led democratic entrepreneurship and created new engagement opportunities for its members and grantees.

At the UN level, several agencies are members of the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) and the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on the Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSE) as part of their efforts to actively collaborate with cooperatives to accelerate SDG achievement, particularly by reaching local and marginalized communities. For example, FAO supports agricultural cooperatives and producer organizations by promoting peer-to-peer, multi-stakeholder partnerships[21]; the ILO, through its dedicated Cooperative, Social and Solidarity Economy Unit (COOP/SSE), works to advance decent work and poverty eradication via cooperative models[22]; UNDESA is piloting a project with ICA-Africa in Tanzania, Malawi, and Botswana to build climate-resilient agricultural cooperatives for smallholder farmers.[23] Additionally, ITC has partnered with ICA to help African producer cooperatives access global markets in Europe, America, and Asia, ensuring fair wages and decent work for farmers.[24]

20 ICA-EU Partnership: https://coops4dev.coop/en/coops4dev#coops4dev
21 FAO partnerships with cooperatives: https://www.fao.org/americas/opinion/detail/cooperativas-un-factor-clave/en
22 ILO initiatives on cooperatives: https://www.ilo.org/topics/cooperatives
23 UNDESA pilot project with Agricultural cooperatives in Africa: https://capacity.desa.un.org/node/5193
24 ITC project on coop-to-coop trade: https://www.intracen.org/news-and-events/news/building-cooperatives-in-africa-for-resilience-and-sustainability

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATIVE IMPACT ON SDG 17

Despite their significant and growing contributions, cooperatives remain underrepresented in national and global SDG implementation and monitoring. This is not due to a lack of capacity or ambition, but to systemic barriers that continue to limit their full potential.

One of the most pressing challenges facing cooperatives is the **persistent lack of supportive legal and regulatory frameworks**. In many countries, cooperatives still operate under outdated or inconsistent laws that fail to reflect the distinct nature of the cooperative model. Where cooperative legislation does exist, it is often poorly implemented or overshadowed by commercial enterprise laws, leaving cooperatives at a disadvantage in competing for resources, recognition, and policy support.[25] The absence of tailored legal definitions and enforcement mechanisms hinders the formation, operation, and scaling of cooperative enterprises, especially in sectors critical to SDG delivery such as agriculture, energy, finance, and health.[26]

Access to finance presents another major constraint. Despite their track record in mobilizing local savings, promoting financial inclusion, and reinvesting in communities, cooperatives frequently face difficulties in accessing development finance and capital markets. Many financial institutions do not recognize the cooperative model or consider it high-risk due to misconceptions about its governance or scale. Furthermore, most development financing instruments are not designed to accommodate cooperative structures, thereby excluding them from funding opportunities available to other private sector or NGO actors. This financial exclusion undermines their ability to innovate, expand services, and participate in larger public-private partnerships aligned with SDG implementation.

Additionally, **data and visibility gaps** significantly limit the inclusion of cooperatives in national and global SDG reporting. Cooperatives are often not adequately captured in national statistical systems, and where data exists, it is rarely disaggregated to reflect their unique contributions. This invisibility means that cooperative efforts, particularly in informal or rural economies, are overlooked in policymaking and resource allocation.[27] Without data, there is little incentive for governments or development partners to engage cooperatives strategically or measure their progress in advancing the Goals.

Finally, widespread misconceptions about the dual nature of cooperatives—as both enterprises and civil society actors—often lead to policy and market failures. In some cases, cooperatives are created through top-down approaches, such as financing schemes, rather than through genuine bottom-up community initiatives. These so-called “fake/pseudo cooperatives” dilute the credibility of the movement, compromise resilience, and obscure the transformative potential of authentic member-driven cooperatives.

LOOKING AHEAD: OPPORTUNITIES

These challenges, however, also open avenues for action. With the right legal reforms, tailored financing mechanisms, stronger statistical systems, and a renewed emphasis on genuine member-driven models, cooperatives can significantly expand their contributions to SDG 17. Recognizing and addressing these barriers will not only unlock the potential of millions of cooperatives worldwide but also ensure that inclusive, democratic, and resilient business models are at the heart of sustainable development strategies.

At the 2025 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), 35 countries submitted Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports, with 19 explicitly recognizing cooperative contributions to areas like employment, financial inclusion, women’s empowerment, and climate resilience.[28] While promising, this recognition is often superficial—cooperatives remain largely absent from SDG planning, budgeting, and monitoring frameworks.[29]

Perhaps most significantly, cooperatives are still often excluded from policymaking spaces. Many VNR processes favor established private or civil society actors, limiting opportunities for cooperatives to influence national development priorities or advocate for supportive policies. Without a seat at the table, cooperatives cannot advocate for policies that reflect their values or showcase the scalable solutions they offer for sustainable, inclusive development.

25 Legal Framework Analysis and the ICA-EU Partnership: Acknowledging the specificity of the cooperative model and ensuring a level playing field for people-centred organisations: https://coops4dev.coop/en/node/15814.

26 egal Framework Analysis and the ICA-EU Partnership: Elements Supporting an Enabling Environment for Cooperative Enterprises: https://coops4dev.coop/en/node/15816.

27 ILO,COPAC, CIRIEC publication on cooperative statistics: https://www.ilo.org/publications/statistics-cooperatives-concepts-classification-work-and-economic.

28 Voluntary National Reviews: https://hlpf.un.org/countries?f%5B0%5D=year%3A2025.

29 Cooperatives: Present but Not Visible Evidence from Voluntary National Reviews: https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/10.36830-IJCAM.202010Singh.pdf.

RECOMMENDATIONS: SCALING COOPERATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO SDG 17

The cooperative model holds significant untapped potential to close implementation gaps and revitalize global partnerships. Realizing this requires deliberate policy, financial, and institutional measures through joint action by governments, development partners, and the cooperative movement.

1. Strengthen policy frameworks and institutional inclusion

Governments should embed cooperatives more systematically into national development plans, sectoral strategies, and SDG frameworks. Update and harmonize cooperative legislation in line with international standards, recognize their dual economic and social roles, and ensure legal clarity to distinguish genuine cooperatives from inauthentic entities.

2. Increase visibility in voluntary national reviews (VNRs)

Document cooperative contributions in VNRs and involve cooperative representatives in consultations to validate their role, promote peer learning, and ensure diverse perspectives are reflected. Japan's 2025 VNR, with over 60 references to cooperative impact, illustrates meaningful inclusion.[30]

3. Expand access to development finance

Create financing tools suited to cooperative governance and ownership structures, including guarantee schemes, blended finance, and impact investment frameworks. Strengthen national cooperative finance institutions and link them to the broader development finance ecosystem.

4. Invest in capacity building and digital transformation

Enhance cooperative leadership, systems, and digital tools to boost agility and resilience. Support peer learning, digital platforms for democratic participation, and training in youth engagement, gender equality, and climate adaptation. Initiatives such as the African Cooperative Leaders' Study Tour[31] and the #Coops4Dev programme demonstrate the value of regional exchange.[32]

5. Promote international partnerships & global advocacy

Cooperatives can scale their impact through formal collaboration with UN agencies, governments, and civil society to amplify advocacy and accelerate delivery. The International Year of Cooperatives 2025 demonstrates the power of such partnerships and should be carried forward, with the Second World Social Summit providing a platform to launch a global commitment plan. Continued engagement in forums like COPs, BRICS, G7, and G20 is key to embedding cooperatives in international policymaking.

As the global community prepares for the 2025 Second World Social Summit in Doha, there is a unique opportunity to position cooperatives as core partners in sustainable development. Recognition in the FFD4 Sevilla Declaration affirms their role in building equitable, people-centred economies, and this must now be matched with concrete action. Cooperatives are not merely beneficiaries of development but co-creators of it, bridging policy and practice, global frameworks and local realities, and economic growth with social inclusion. Scaling cooperative-led solutions will accelerate the SDGs and help rebuild trust in multilateralism at a time of deep uncertainty and fragmentation. The time to act is now.

30 2025 Japan's VNR Report: https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/sdgs/vnr/vnr2025en.html.

31 African cooperative leaders explore the diverse businesses of Japanese cooperatives: https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/african-cooperative-leaders-explore-diverse-businesses-japanese.

32 ICA-EU FPA initiatives highlights: https://coops4dev.coop/en/highlights.

This brief is part of the Building a Better World Together: Cooperative Contributions to the SDGs series, produced by the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) and the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), together with its regional organizations and relevant sectoral associations, in support of the UN International Year of Cooperatives 2025 (IYC 2025). Under the theme "Cooperatives Build a Better World," IYC 2025 raises awareness of how cooperatives drive progress across all 17 SDGs. With over one billion members worldwide, cooperatives are fostering economic inclusion, social equity, and environmental resilience.

Established in 1971, COPAC is a multi-stakeholder partnership supporting people-centered, self-sustaining cooperative enterprises. Its members include the ICA, UNDESA, ILO, FAO, UNRISD, and ITC.

copac coop Committee for the promotion and advancement of cooperatives

International Cooperative Alliance

United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNRISD United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

International Labour Organization

International Trade Centre

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

This publication has been co-funded by the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the International Co-operative Alliance and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

#coops4dev

International Cooperative Alliance | Co-funded by the European Union