



International Year  
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Cooperatives Build  
a Better World

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# Building a Better World Together: Cooperative Contributions to the SDGs

End hunger, achieve food  
security and improved nutrition  
and promote sustainable  
agriculture





## WITH ONLY FOUR YEARS REMAINING UNTIL 2030, PROGRESS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 2 (ZERO HUNGER) REMAINS CRITICALLY OFF TRACK.

According to [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025](#), an estimated 673 million people, or 8.2 percent of the global population, experienced hunger in 2024, while 2.3 billion people faced moderate or severe food insecurity. Hunger has declined in parts of Latin America and southern Asia, but continues to rise sharply in Africa and western Asia, driven by conflict, climate shocks, and persistently high and volatile food prices. These trends have undermined access to healthy diets, disproportionately affecting low-income households, women, and children, and underscore the urgent need for systemic, locally grounded solutions that strengthen food system resilience and protect vulnerable populations.

Gender inequality remains a central driver of food insecurity. The FAO reports that women account for approximately 41 percent of the global agrifood workforce and play critical roles across production, processing, distribution, and household nutrition, yet they are disproportionately concentrated in informal, insecure, and lower-paid work. Structural barriers, including unequal access to land, finance, technology, and decision-making, continue to constrain women's productivity and incomes. Women farmers earn on average 22 percent less than men, manage smaller and less productive plots, and shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid care work. At the same time, agrifood systems remain a vital source of employment for young women, highlighting both the scale of exclusion and the untapped potential for inclusive transformation.

Cooperatives are uniquely positioned to address these challenges by strengthening collective bargaining power, improving access to markets, finance, technology, and extension services, and embedding women-led and family-based enterprises within resilient local food systems. Through democratic governance and shared ownership, cooperatives enable women to amplify their voice in economic decision-making, secure fairer market terms, and translate productivity gains into improved household nutrition and food availability. The [The UN International Year of the Woman Farmer in 2026](#) offers a timely opportunity for UN agencies, governments, and development partners to scale cooperative-based approaches that recognise and invest in women's contributions as a proven pathway toward Zero Hunger.

## THE COOPERATIVE DIFFERENCE: HOW COOPERATIVES FIGHT HUNGER AND STRENGTHEN FOOD SECURITY IN PRACTICE

Cooperatives build resilient and inclusive food systems by directly addressing the structural failures that drive hunger, such as fragmented production, weak bargaining power, post-harvest losses, and unequal access to markets, finance, and technology. As locally rooted, member-owned enterprises, cooperatives align economic incentives with food security outcomes, prioritising stability, affordability, and long-term community wellbeing over short-term profit extraction.<sup>5</sup> UN and FAO evidence consistently shows that diversified networks of small and medium food enterprises, particularly cooperatives, are better able to absorb shocks, stabilise supply, and rebalance power within agrifood value chains.<sup>6</sup>

In practice, cooperatives enable producers to aggregate output, jointly purchase inputs, access extension services, and invest collectively in storage, processing, and transport. These mechanisms reduce post-harvest losses, smooth seasonal supply, raise producer incomes, and improve the availability of affordable food in local markets. Across diverse contexts, from community-supported agriculture models in Europe to large-scale agricultural cooperatives in Brazil and farmer organisations in Africa and Asia, cooperatives have demonstrated their capacity to stabilise food supply, retain value locally, and support climate-resilient and sustainable production.

Crucially, cooperatives fight hunger not only by increasing production, but by improving how food systems function. By shortening supply chains, strengthening local and regional markets, and anchoring value creation within communities, cooperatives help ensure food remains accessible during economic, climate, or conflict-related shocks. This cooperative difference explains why the UN International Year of Cooperatives resolution recognises cooperatives as institutional solutions for improving global food security and calls on governments to strengthen their access to markets and finance. As highlighted by FAO's High-Level Panel on Resilient Food Systems, cooperatives are not peripheral actors, but key mechanisms for translating food system productivity into sustained.

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1 The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/the-state-of-food-security-and-nutrition-in-the-world-2025>

2 Status of Youth in Agriculture: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/f9170607-f78c-4d6c-9275-68481hb08c46/content>

3 Kajsa Johansson, Vi Agroforestry & WeEffect, "Fair Food for All", 2020: [https://www.weeffect.org/app/uploads/2021/09/we\\_matrapporten\\_en\\_2021\\_web.pdf](https://www.weeffect.org/app/uploads/2021/09/we_matrapporten_en_2021_web.pdf)

4 The UN International Year of the Woman Farmer: <https://www.fao.org/woman-farmer-2026/en#:~:text=In%202021%20%20women%20made%20up,working%20conditions%2C%20and%20limited%20rights>

5 *Cooperatives: A key factor in eradicating hunger and fostering a sustainable future*: <https://www.fao.org/americas/opinion/detail/cooperativas-un-factor-clave/en>

6 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Cooperatives: A key factor in eradicating hunger and fostering a sustainable future* (FAO Americas, accessed at <https://www.fao.org/americas/opinion/detail/cooperativas-un-factor-clave/en>)

services, and invest collectively in storage, processing, and transport infrastructure that would otherwise be unattainable individually. In Brazil, agricultural cooperatives bring together more than one million rural producers, the majority of whom are family farmers, and account for a substantial share of national production in staple food value chains such as grains, dairy, and beans.<sup>7</sup> This scale allows cooperatives to influence production practices, reduce losses, and ensure that productivity gains translate into reliable food supply rather than market exclusion. In Rwanda, farmer cooperatives supported through structured market arrangements coordinated access to improved seeds, training, and guaranteed buyers, contributing to significant yield increases in maize production while reducing post-harvest losses and price volatility.<sup>8</sup> Similar outcomes are observed in many countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where dairy, grain, horticulture, coffee, and fisheries cooperatives stabilise food supply by pooling risk, negotiating fairer prices, and ensuring that productivity gains translate into affordable food rather than exclusion.

Cooperatives also strengthen food security by shortening supply chains and improving the functioning of local food markets. Community-supported agriculture (CSA) cooperatives in Germany illustrate how shared-risk models link producers and consumers directly: members make regular contributions in exchange for a share of seasonal harvests, providing farmers with predictable incomes while improving access to fresh, locally produced food.<sup>9</sup> Solidarity-based contribution mechanisms within these cooperatives help ensure affordability for lower-income households, demonstrating how cooperative governance can balance producer livelihoods with consumer access.

Beyond production and distribution, cooperatives contribute to food security by reducing food waste, promoting sustainable practices, and anchoring value within communities. In Portugal, multi-branch cooperatives illustrate how these mechanisms operate in practice. Cooperativa Rizoma, member of CASES, is a Portuguese multi-branch cooperative whose activities contribute to food security and community resilience, reaching more than 500 stakeholders. Through its Green Academy (Academia Verde), Rizoma delivers workshops on sustainable gardening, biodiversity and healthy eating, fostering food literacy and ecological awareness, while the Circulab initiative promotes community composting and waste reuse to reinforce circular food practices. The Open Garden (Horta Aberta) organises community-based activities and organic production, supplying the cooperative grocery shop and supporting neighbouring agroforestry systems. Complementing these initiatives, the Rizoma grocery shop supports more than 100 local producers,

reduces food waste and improves access to healthy, locally produced food, thereby strengthening short food supply chains and contributing to food security at local level. Similar approaches are observed across dairy, fisheries, horticulture, and consumer cooperatives globally, where pooled risk, fair pricing, and local market integration help stabilise food availability during economic, climate, or conflict-related shocks.<sup>10</sup>

Together, these mechanisms explain why cooperatives are increasingly recognised as institutional solutions for strengthening resilient food systems. By improving coordination, redistributing value more equitably, and linking productivity gains to affordability and nutrition, cooperatives translate food system performance into sustained progress toward SDG 2.

This growing evidence base is increasingly reflected in global policy recognition and calls for scale. The UN's International Year of Cooperatives resolution recognises cooperatives' capacity to strengthen global food security and urges governments to improve their access to markets and finance,<sup>11</sup> while FAO's 2025 High-Level Panel on Resilient Food Systems affirms that cooperatives are institutional solutions capable of correcting coordination failures, redistributing value more equitably, and translating productivity gains into sustained progress toward SDG 2.<sup>12</sup> The Youth Declaration on Cooperatives in Agrifood Systems, launched at the 2025 World Food Forum, further underscores the central role of youth and women in cooperative-led food systems transformation, calling for investment in skills, recognition of unpaid care work, and expanded market access.<sup>13</sup> Building on this momentum, the UN International Year of the Woman Farmer in 2026 provides a timely opportunity to scale cooperative-based approaches that address women farmers' structural barriers to land, finance, markets, technology, and decision-making,<sup>14</sup> in line with the objectives of the UN Decade of Family Farming (2019–2028), ensuring that productivity gains translate into improved nutrition, food security, and inclusive development.<sup>15</sup>

**We Effect**, the cooperative development organisation of the Swedish cooperative movement, demonstrates how the International Year of the Woman Farmer can be operationalised through cooperative-based support. By combining organisational strengthening with business and production development under a consistent gender lens, We Effect supports women-led and gender-responsive cooperatives to promote climate-resilient agriculture, shorter and more transparent value chains, and improved nutrition outcomes.<sup>16</sup> By embedding women farmers at the centre of resilient local economies, such approaches help ensure that productivity gains translate into food security, poverty reduction, and social inclusion.<sup>17</sup>

7 Brazilian Cooperatives Yearbook: <https://somoscooperativismo.coop.br/anuario-ramos/agropecuario>

8 Rwandan farmers and private sector join forces to improve maize and soybean value chains for 4,000 smallholders: <https://www.ifad.org/en/w/news/rwandan-farmers-and-private-sector-join-forces-to-improve-maize-and-soybean-value-chains-for-4-000-smallholders>

9 Solidarische Landwirtschaft, Startseite, <https://www.solidarische-landwirtschaft.org/startseite/>

10 ICA-ILO: How large cooperatives can advance decent work and responsible practices across supply chains: <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/how-large-cooperatives-can-advance-decent-work-and-responsible-practices>

11 United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution A/RES/78/289 proclaiming 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives* (adopted 19 June 2024), available from the UN Digital Library (A/RES/78/289).

12 Committee on World Food Security High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE), Resilient Food Systems: More Evidence, Better Policies (FAO, 2025), Executive Summary, available from the FAO HLPE digital library. ([sfcfao.org](https://sfcfao.org))

13 Youth Declaration on Cooperatives in Agrifood Systems: <https://aciamicolas.coop/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Youth-Declaration-on-Cooperatives-in-Agrifood-Systems.pdf>

14 FAO launches International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026: <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/fao-launches-international-year-of-the-woman-farmer-2026-to-accelerate-gender-equality-and-women-s-empowerment-en>

15 UN Decade of Family Farming 2019–2028: Global Action Plan: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5479e317-17b9-428b-9963-ba88e681ff16/content>

16 Cooperatives: Empowering women farmers, improving food security: <https://www.fao.org/gender/insights/insights-detail/Cooperatives-Empowering-women-farmers-improving-food-security/en#:~:text=One%20of%20them%20is%20the,whose%20needs%20and%20concerns%20are>

17 Cameroon: Cooperatives Create Family Bonds and Foster Friendship for Displaced Women: <https://wfpusa.org/news/cameroon-cooperatives-create-family-bonds-and-foster-friendship-for-displaced-women/>

## CASE STUDIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



### Argentina: Expanding Affordable Food Access through Consumer-Owned Retail

One of Argentina's largest consumer cooperatives, [Cooperativa Obrera](#), contributes to SDG 2 by improving access to nutritious and affordable food for millions of people across the regions where it operates. As a consumer-owned enterprise, it prioritizes fair pricing, quality standards, and the reliable availability of essential goods, helping to strengthen local food security and reduce barriers for low-income households. The cooperative also addresses food insecurity through initiatives such as *Alimentos Solidarios*, which recovers food that is safe for consumption but no longer commercially sellable and redistributes it to community organizations, schools, and social programmes. By combining food-waste reduction with targeted social support, Cooperativa Obrera enhances nutrition outcomes while promoting more sustainable food-system practices, advancing progress toward Zero Hunger by 2030.

### European Union: Building Resilient Agri-Food Value Chains at Scale

[Copa and Cogeca](#) are the united voice of 22 million farmers and 22,000 agri-cooperatives in the EU, guaranteeing food security for 500 million people throughout Europe. By placing long-term sustainability at the core of their model, ensuring a future to next generations of farmers, European agri-cooperatives address many challenges, including soaring production costs, climate-induced extreme weather, and the increasing power imbalance

throughout the agricultural value chain. Cooperatives improve farmers' access to markets, inputs, and processing and, by fostering price stability, fair incomes and reducing volatility, they help build resilient food value chains capable of withstanding economic and climate shocks.<sup>19</sup> Beyond primary production, European agri-cooperatives are vital suppliers of nutrient-dense food and high-quality proteins. They develop innovative food products that delight consumers and promote balanced, healthier lifestyles. In many instances, their research and innovation teams push the boundaries of science and technology to build a more sustainable future for agriculture. Furthermore, they strengthen the social fabric by combating rural poverty and creating stable employment. Ultimately, the cooperative model in the agri-food sector is a cornerstone in preserving Europe's farming heritage and ensuring food security both at home and abroad, thereby contributing to the achievement of SDG 2, 'No hunger'.

### Japan: Reducing Input Costs to Protect Smallholder Incomes and Productivity

In 2015, [Japan's agricultural cooperative federations](#) launched a systematic input cost reduction program to address declining farm incomes amid rising production expenses. The initiative consolidated agricultural inputs through collective purchasing and standardized specifications across 496 primary cooperatives serving 3.89 million farmer members. Fertilizer brands were reduced from 550 to 24 through unified formulations and advance ordering, lowering manufacturing costs. Direct-to-farmer pesticide packaging expanded container sizes to serve up to 4 hectares, reducing logistics expenses. Cardboard specifications were standardized to pallet dimensions, and agricultural machinery costs decreased 10–30% through planned joint procurement of function-specific equipment. The program operates through prefectural and national federation networks that coordinate bulk orders and negotiate producer specifications. By reducing input costs while maintaining

production capacity, the system protects smallholder incomes and ensures stable domestic food supply—Japan's cooperatives account for 50% of national farm output (USD 39 billion, 2022). This institutional model demonstrates how cooperatives can leverage collective bargaining and standardization to advance SDG 2.3 (agricultural productivity and small-scale farmer incomes) and SDG 2.4 (sustainable production systems) in high-cost agricultural economies.



### Republic of Korea: Integrated Cooperative Systems for National Food Security

Founded in 1961, the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) represents approximately 2.1 million farmers nationwide in South Korea. Facing climate shocks, rural depopulation, and declining food self-sufficiency, NACF launched the Nongshim Cheonsim ("Farmers' Heart is Heaven's Will") movement in 2025 to strengthen food system stability through cooperative integration. Nongshim Cheonsim functions as an integrated framework coordinating cooperative retail networks (including the nationwide Hanaro Mart chain), domestic food consumption campaigns, rural regeneration initiatives, and the diffusion of affordable smart farming technologies. The framework also links 308 rural labor intermediary centers, thereby stabilizing agricultural labor supply during peak farming seasons and reinforcing production continuity in vulnerable rural areas. By collectively owning logistics infrastructure and retail channels, NACF enables smallholder farmers to access markets and improve farm income stability. The Nongshim Cheonsim movement demonstrates how large-scale cooperative integration can overcome food system coordination failures beyond individual producers' capacity, contributing to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and strengthening domestic food system resilience.

## Poland: Reducing Food Waste through Cooperative-Led Policy Reform

In 2019, Poland enacted the Act on Counteracting Food Waste following advocacy by the [National Cooperative Council](#), which submitted legislative proposals to Parliament addressing food insecurity among low-income and care-dependent populations. The law removed legal barriers preventing the transfer of near-expiration food and unsold fresh products from retail and wholesale operations to social welfare centers, orphanages, canteens, and food banks. Agricultural and food cooperatives—particularly dairy, meat-processing, and bakery cooperatives—developed tailored logistics and storage systems to manage short-shelf-life products and processing waste. Dairy cooperatives addressed spoilage-prone products through optimized transport and inventory management, while meat-processing cooperatives redirected byproducts to fur farming

operations as animal feed, in compliance with regulations. The cooperative sector's institutional capacity to coordinate waste-reduction mechanisms across production, distribution, and social service networks contributed to decreased food waste and improved nutritional access for vulnerable groups.



## Somalia: Strengthening Food Security in Fragile and Climate-Vulnerable Contexts

In Somalia's fragile and climate-vulnerable context, agricultural cooperatives play a critical role in advancing SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). With support from FAO and local

authorities, the [Somalia Union Cooperative Movement \(UDHIS\)](#), established in 1973 as the national umbrella body for cooperatives, promotes climate-smart and sustainable agriculture through training in good agricultural practices, crop diversification, irrigation rehabilitation, shared access to inputs and machinery, and collective marketing. These interventions have contributed to more predictable harvests, year-round food availability, improved dietary diversity, and higher household incomes. At national level, nearly 50 cooperatives involving over 5,000 farmers have strengthened production capacity and resource management, with yields targeted to increase two-to-three-fold.<sup>18</sup> The resulting gains have supported rural employment, access to savings and credit, and greater resilience to climate shocks, while strengthening women's leadership and economic participation, particularly through women-led cooperatives in Lower Shabelle linked to Village Savings and Loans Associations.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

"No farmers, no food, no future" captures the core threat to global food security: deepening power imbalances across agrifood value chains continue to squeeze farmers' margins and undermine the economic viability of food production.<sup>20</sup> While cooperatives offer one of the most practical and scalable pathways to advance SDG 2, their impact is constrained by persistent structural barriers. Addressing these challenges also presents clear opportunities to scale cooperative contributions to Zero Hunger.

**Enabling legal and policy environments.** In many countries, outdated or fragmented cooperative laws, registration procedures, tax regimes, and land-use policies limit cooperatives' ability to operate across value chains, attract investment, and participate fully in national food security strategies. Modernising cooperative legislation, simplifying administrative processes, and aligning fiscal and land policies with contemporary agrifood markets would enable cooperatives to scale, diversify, and contribute more systematically to SDG 2 implementation.

**Access to finance and infrastructure.** Many cooperatives lack access to long-term finance for cold storage, logistics, processing facilities, and digital systems that are essential for reducing post-harvest losses and price volatility. These constraints, compounded by rising production costs and climate-induced

extreme weather, erode farmer incomes and weaken food system resilience. Cooperative-friendly financial instruments, blended finance mechanisms, and targeted public investment can unlock capital-intensive infrastructure and stabilise food supply and availability. Expanding access to climate insurance, including coverage for cooperative-owned infrastructure, is also critical to protect producers against extreme events and ensure continuity of production and faster recovery following shocks.

**Capacity, governance, and market integration.** Gaps in management skills, governance, market intelligence, and data systems undermine cooperative performance, particularly among small and emerging organisations. At the same time, limited access to formal markets, quality standards, and buyers leaves many cooperatives unable to compete with large agribusiness actors. Expanded technical assistance, leadership development, digital tools, peer learning, and integration into structured value chains, including public procurement and school feeding programmes, can secure demand, improve margins, and incentivise investment in nutrition and quality.

**Gender, youth, and social inclusion.** Women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and small-scale producers continue to face systemic barriers to land, finance, leadership, and technology adoption, limiting the transformative potential of cooperatives. These challenges are compounded by demographic pressures, including ageing farming populations in many regions.

18 Somalia Agriculture Technical Group, *Role and Revival of Agricultural Cooperatives in Somalia*: <https://www.satg.org/role-and-revival-of-agricultural-cooperatives-in-somalia/>  
 19 <https://farmersclimact.eu/#>

20 Copo-Cogeca campaigns: <https://cpo-cogeca.eu/campaigns>

**Data, visibility, and risk management.** Weak data on cooperative contributions to food security limits their recognition in policy design, investment planning, and crisis response. In parallel, limited access to climate insurance constrains cooperatives' ability to manage increasing climate-related risks. Strengthening national data systems, integrating cooperative indicators into SDG monitoring, and expanding climate insurance coverage for both producers and cooperative-owned infrastructure would enhance accountability, resilience, and continuity of food production.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

To unlock the full potential of cooperatives as drivers of hunger mitigation, stakeholders should take coordinated action to strengthen cooperative-led food systems.



### 1. Institutionalise cooperatives within food security and SDG 2 frameworks

Governments and international organizations should formally recognise agricultural, food, and consumer cooperatives as delivery partners within national food security strategies, SDG 2 roadmaps, humanitarian–development–peace nexus responses, and economic stabilisation efforts. This includes systematically embedding cooperatives in public procurement, school feeding, social protection, and emergency response mechanisms, particularly in contexts affected by climate shocks, conflict, and market volatility.



### 2. Establish enabling legal, policy, and regulatory environments for cooperative-led food systems.

Member States should modernise cooperative laws, fiscal regimes, and administrative procedures to reflect contemporary agrifood markets, enabling cooperatives to operate across value chains, mobilise member capital, own shared infrastructure, and innovate. Policy reforms should balance transparency and accountability with flexibility, removing structural barriers that limit cooperative scalability and long-term contributions.



### 3. Scale patient and blended finance for cooperative infrastructure and services

Development banks, donors, and governments should expand cooperative-friendly financing instruments, including long-tenor concessional loans, blended finance facilities, and risk-sharing mechanisms, to support investments in cold storage, logistics, local processing, and digital systems. Priority should be given to infrastructure that reduces post-harvest losses, stabilises food supply and prices, strengthens local and regional food systems, and enhances climate resilience.



### 4. Strengthen cooperative capacity, innovation, and market integration with a gender-transformative focus

Targeted investment is needed to strengthen cooperative governance, business management, data systems, digital-enabled services, and market access, enabling producer organisations to aggregate supply, negotiate fair prices, meet quality standards, and access higher-value markets. Support programmes should integrate gender-transformative approaches, particularly during the International Year, to expand women's leadership, access to land, finance, technology, and decision-making across agrifood systems.



### 5. Build evidence, accountability, and partnerships to scale cooperative impact

UN agencies, governments, and cooperative organisations should strengthen data collection and reporting on cooperative contributions to food security, nutrition, incomes, and resilience, and integrate cooperative indicators into SDG monitoring and national statistical systems. Multi-stakeholder platforms should be mobilised to align policy, investment, and innovation pipelines, ensuring that cooperative-led solutions are scaled, replicated, and sustained across regions.



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 and sectoral organizations: [Cooperatives Europe](#), [ICA Africa](#), [ICA Americas](#), [ICA Asia Pacific](#) and [International Co-operative Agricultural Organisation \(ICAO\)](#).

This series aims to raise awareness, promote growth, and inspire leadership in the cooperative movement. This series explores how cooperatives drive progress toward the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by fostering economic inclusion, democratic participation, and social solidarity for over one billion members worldwide.

Established in 1971, the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) is a multi-stakeholder partnership that champions and supports people-centered and self-sustaining cooperative enterprises. Its current members include the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Trade Centre (ITC).

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