



**International Year
of Cooperatives**

Cooperatives Build
a Better World



Committee for
the promotion
and advancement
of cooperatives



Building a Better World Together: Cooperative Contributions to the SDGs

Build resilient infrastructure,
promote inclusive and sustainable
industrialization, and foster innovation

Make cities and human
settlements inclusive, safe,
resilient, and sustainable





RELIABLE INFRASTRUCTURE, VIBRANT INDUSTRIES, INNOVATION, AND WELL-PLANNED CITIES ARE ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS OF ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE.

They create jobs, connect communities, expand access to services, and open opportunities for people to thrive. Yet these benefits remain out of reach for millions around the world. Despite significant investments and international commitments, progress toward SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) is not advancing at the pace required. Large gaps in infrastructure, industrial development, access to technology, and urban services continue to limit opportunities, particularly for people in rural areas, low-income communities, and developing countries, which has made many remain excluded from the economic and social gains that resilient infrastructure, productive industries, and inclusive, sustainable cities can deliver.

The 2025 SDG 9 Progress Report by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) highlights both the progress made and the challenges that remain in building resilient infrastructure, advancing sustainable industrialization, and fostering innovation. Around the world, manufacturing output continues to grow, digital connectivity is expanding, and investment in research and development is increasing. Global manufacturing value added has reached a record US\$1,936 per person, up 17.3 percent since 2015. Today, 92 percent of the world's population is covered by 4G networks and more than half by 5G networks. Spending on research and development has also risen steadily, reflecting growing recognition of the importance of innovation in driving economic and social progress.¹

However, these positive trends tell only part of the story. The benefits of industrial growth and technological advancement are not being shared equally. Even though the manufacturing production has increased, it has not generated enough decent jobs. Manufacturing employment remains stuck at just 14.2

percent of global employment, raising concerns about whether current patterns of industrialization are creating opportunities for the people who need them most. Access to finance remains another major obstacle. Many small businesses and entrepreneurs continue to struggle to secure the resources they need to grow and innovate. Globally, only 31 percent of small-scale manufacturing enterprises have access to credit, and in Sub-Saharan Africa, that figure falls to just 18 percent.² Also, the technological progress remains concentrated in a relatively small number of countries, leaving many developing economies at risk of falling further behind. The digital divide is equally concerning. Although connectivity has expanded rapidly in recent years, millions of people and entire communities still lack reliable access to high-speed internet and advanced digital technologies. This limits their ability to participate in the digital economy, access new markets, and benefit from emerging opportunities. Meanwhile, the growing impacts of climate change make it increasingly urgent to invest in cleaner technologies, more efficient production systems, and infrastructure that can withstand environmental shocks.³

Similarly, progress towards SDG 11 remains insufficient despite rapid urbanization and growing recognition of the importance of sustainable cities. Today, more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas, and by 2050, nearly 70 percent of humanity is expected to reside in cities.⁴ Yet urban development is failing to keep pace with growing demand for housing, infrastructure, transport, and basic services. The global housing affordability crisis now affects up to 3 billion people, while more than 1.1 billion people continue to live in slums, informal settlements, or inadequate housing.⁵ Urban expansion is outpacing population growth in many regions, increasing pressure on land, infrastructure, and ecosystems.

Moreover, cities remain highly vulnerable to climate change, accounting for a significant share of global greenhouse gas emissions while facing increasing risks from floods, heatwaves, storms, and other disasters. Although many countries have adopted urban policies and disaster risk reduction strategies, implementation remains uneven and underfunded. Access to affordable housing, sustainable public transport, green public spaces, waste management, and climate-resilient infrastructure remains particularly limited in low- and middle-income countries.⁶ With only five years remaining until 2030, accelerating progress will require significantly increased investment in affordable and cooperative housing, sustainable mobility, resilient infrastructure, circular economy solutions, climate adaptation, and participatory urban governance.

Achieving SDGs 9 and 11 by 2030 will require more than continued economic growth; it will demand targeted investments in infrastructure, technology, innovation, housing, and finance,

1 United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) 2025 SDG 9 Progress Report: <https://stat.unido.org/portal/storage/file/publications/sdg/2025/sdg9-report-2025.pdf>

2 UNIDO, Industrial Development Report 2024: Turning Challenges into Sustainable Solutions – The New Era of Industrial Policy, Vienna, 2024. <https://www.unido.org/idr/idr2024>

3 United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) 2025 SDG 9 Progress Report: <https://stat.unido.org/portal/storage/file/publications/sdg/2025/sdg9-report-2025.pdf>

4 UNDESA 2025 report on SDG 11: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/goal-11/>

5 UN-Habitat, World Cities Report 2024: Cities and Climate Action, Nairobi, 2024. The 1.1 billion figure for informal settlements appears in the UN-Habitat 2024 Annual Report; the World Cities Report 2024 provides the broader climate and urban inequality framing. <https://unhabitat.org/world-cities-report-2024> <https://unhabitat.org/annual-report-2024>

6 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, New York, 2019. <https://population.un.org/wup/>

particularly for underserved regions and communities, alongside policies that strengthen local industries, support sustainable urban development, create decent jobs, and ensure that women, youth, and marginalized groups are fully included in the opportunities generated by economic transformation.⁷

Cooperatives are uniquely positioned to advance this agenda by pooling resources, mobilizing local capital, and placing people and communities at the center of development. Across sectors, they help small producers, enterprises, and households access finance, technology, markets, infrastructure, and affordable housing that would otherwise remain out of reach. Housing cooperatives provide secure and affordable homes;

utility and energy cooperatives deliver community-owned services and infrastructure; worker and social cooperatives create employment and revitalize local economies; and multi-stakeholder cooperatives enable citizens, businesses, and public authorities to collaborate in planning and managing sustainable communities. Through democratic governance, community ownership, and a long-term commitment to social and economic value, cooperatives offer a proven model for fostering innovation, strengthening local economies, and building more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities and communities.

THE COOPERATIVE DIFFERENCE AND CASE STUDIES



@amul

Cooperatives Advancing SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Across the world, cooperatives are investing in infrastructure, expanding access to finance, fostering innovation, and supporting local industrial development. For example, in India, the dairy cooperative movement led by Anand Milk Union Limited ([Amul](#)), a dairy cooperative owned by Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation, transformed one of the world's largest agricultural value chains. Owned by millions of smallholder farmers, the cooperative has invested in cold-chain infrastructure, processing facilities, transportation networks, digital traceability systems, and market access platforms, enabling producers to participate in national and international markets. The model has strengthened rural industrialization while

generating livelihoods for millions of households.



@mwalimu national sacco

In **Kenya**, savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) have become a cornerstone of inclusive economic development and one of the country's most important sources of finance for small enterprises. Serving millions of members, SACCOs provide affordable credit for manufacturing, transport, agribusiness, housing, and digital entrepreneurship, helping to address financing gaps often left unmet by conventional banking institutions. A compelling example is [Mwalimu National SACCO](#), one of Africa's largest savings and credit cooperatives. Established in 1974 and owned by teachers and education-sector professionals, Mwalimu mobilizes member savings and reinvests them in productive sectors of the economy through affordable loans for small businesses, housing developments, education, and income-generating activities. The SACCO has also embraced digital innovation through mobile banking, online platforms, and agency banking services, expanding financial inclusion and improving access

to services for underserved communities. By democratizing access to capital and supporting entrepreneurship, job creation, and local investment, Mwalimu National SACCO demonstrates how cooperative finance can strengthen the financial infrastructure needed for inclusive industrialization, innovation, and sustainable economic transformation, thereby making a significant contribution to achieving SDG 9.



@Copreci

In **Spain**, the [Mondragon Cooperative Corporation](#) demonstrates how worker-owned enterprises can drive innovation, sustainable industrialization, and competitiveness. Comprising more than 80 cooperatives across manufacturing, retail, finance, and knowledge sectors, Mondragon invests heavily in research and development, vocational training, and technological innovation while maintaining democratic ownership and quality employment. A notable example within the group is [Copreci](#), a worker-owned industrial cooperative and global manufacturer of components for household appliances, which

has strengthened its international competitiveness through continuous investment in advanced manufacturing, automation, research and development, and product innovation while expanding its production footprint across multiple countries. Together, Mondragon and Copreci demonstrate that democratic ownership and worker participation can reinforce industrial competitiveness, technological upgrading, and resilience, illustrating how cooperatives can advance SDG 9 by promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization, fostering innovation, and supporting quality employment.



In **Japan**, the agricultural cooperative network ([Japan Agricultural Cooperatives – JA Group](#)) has been strengthening rural infrastructure, innovation, and sustainable industrialization. Through its nationwide network, JA has invested in agricultural processing facilities, storage and cold-chain systems, logistics networks, digital advisory services, and renewable energy initiatives that connect millions of farmers to markets while improving productivity and resilience. Cooperatives such as [JA Zen-Noh](#), the national federation responsible for marketing and supply services, help farmers access modern technologies, quality inputs, processing infrastructure, and domestic and international value chains. By pooling resources and coordinating investments that individual producers could not undertake alone, Japanese agricultural cooperatives have modernized rural economies, reduced transaction costs, strengthened food processing industries, and supported innovation across the agricultural sector. Their experience demonstrates how cooperative enterprises can build resilient infrastructure, foster

technological upgrading, and promote inclusive industrial development while ensuring that economic benefits remain rooted in local communities.



@Natural Dream Park

In the **Republic of Korea**, iCOOP Korea developed shared industrial infrastructure that strengthens innovation, sustainable industrialization, and market access for small producers. Founded in 1997 to make safe, organic food affordable for consumers, iCOOP has grown into a federation of 100 consumer cooperatives representing more than 310,000 member households. Its flagship Natural Dream Park in Goesan is a cooperative-owned industrial and community complex that integrates food processing factories, shared logistics and warehousing, a food safety testing laboratory, a food technology research institute, renewable energy systems, and community facilities. By pooling resources across its cooperative network, iCOOP has created infrastructure that individual small producers and cooperatives could not have financed independently, enabling higher product quality, innovation, and more efficient access to markets. Located in a rural region outside the Seoul metropolitan area, the initiative also generates quality employment and supports balanced regional development, illustrating how cooperative investment can strengthen inclusive industrialization and directly contribute to SDG target 9.3 by expanding small enterprises' access to industrial services, technology, and markets.

These examples demonstrate how cooperatives help overcome structural barriers to industrialization by mobilizing local capital, pooling risk, expanding access to infrastructure, and ensuring

that the benefits of economic growth are distributed more broadly among communities. The UN Secretary-General has recognized cooperatives as important contributors to sustainable industrialization and innovation, noting their capacity to reach underserved populations with essential infrastructure and services.⁸

Cooperatives Advancing SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities



@Riksbyggen

Cooperatives are playing an increasingly important role in addressing the global housing crisis and advancing SDG 11 by providing affordable, secure, and community-controlled housing. In **Sweden**, housing cooperatives have been a cornerstone of the national housing system for more than a century. Organizations such as [HSB](#) and [Riksbyggen](#) have helped millions of people access affordable housing through member-owned cooperatives. Cooperative housing emerged in response to housing shortages and speculation, and today it remains one of the country's most important forms of housing tenure. Sweden's cooperative housing model demonstrates how large-scale, member-owned housing can provide long-term affordability while ensuring resident participation in management and decision-making.⁹

In **Germany**, housing cooperatives (*Wohnungsgenossenschaften*) play a vital role in providing affordable, secure, and community-oriented housing. The country is home to approximately 3,000 housing cooperatives that collectively provide more than two million homes to over three million members, with Berlin

8 United Nations Secretary-General, *Cooperatives in Social Development: Report of the Secretary-General*, A/80/168, New York, 2025, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4087029>.

9 Cooperative Housing in Sweden: <https://www.housinginternational.coop/co-ops/sweden/>

alone hosting around 100 cooperatives managing some 200,000 apartments. Through member ownership, residents purchase cooperative shares and gain long-term tenancy rights, benefiting from cost-based rents, democratic governance, and a strong focus on community well-being. Long-established cooperatives such as Berliner Baugenossenschaft have demonstrated how cooperative ownership can preserve housing affordability across generations while maintaining high-quality housing and services. Increasingly, housing cooperatives are being recognized for their potential to contribute to sustainable urban development and energy-efficient housing, with initiatives such as the [Solidarity City project](#) led by TU Berlin exploring how cooperatives can enhance energy efficiency, reduce emissions, and engage residents in decisions about sustainable housing renovations and maintenance.¹⁰

In **Canada**, housing cooperatives provide affordable homes to hundreds of thousands of residents through member-controlled governance and collective ownership. Many Canadian housing cooperatives operate mixed-income communities that combine affordability with social inclusion, helping to create stable neighborhoods while protecting residents from housing market volatility. The Canadian model has become internationally recognized for demonstrating how cooperative housing can deliver both affordability and strong community participation over the long term.¹¹

In **Chile**, the National Housing Cooperative (CONAVICOOP) has played a significant role in addressing the country's housing deficit for more than five decades. Since its establishment in 1974, the cooperative has delivered over 47,000 permanent homes, completed 8,599 home improvement projects, and rebuilt 1,312 homes following the 2010 earthquake, benefiting more than 70,000 families nationwide. Beyond providing affordable housing, CONAVICOOP

develops projects in well-connected neighborhoods with access to public transport, schools, healthcare, green spaces, and community facilities, fostering safer, more inclusive, and resilient communities. Its strong regional focus is reflected in the delivery of more than half of its housing projects outside the Santiago metropolitan area, including over 21,000 homes across the regions of Valparaíso, O'Higgins, Maule, Biobío, and La Araucanía. By expanding access to affordable, quality housing while supporting balanced regional development, CONAVICOOP demonstrates how housing cooperatives can contribute to sustainable urbanization and advance SDG 11, particularly target 11.1, which aims to ensure access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing for all.¹²



In **Egypt**, housing cooperatives have long played an important role in expanding access to affordable housing for middle- and lower-income households. The country's cooperative housing movement, supported by the General Authority for Construction and Housing Cooperatives, has facilitated the development of hundreds of thousands of housing units through collective ownership and member financing mechanisms. Housing cooperatives have helped address urban housing shortages by enabling citizens to pool resources and access land, finance, and construction services at lower costs than would be possible individually. The Egyptian experience demonstrates the potential of cooperative housing to complement public housing programmes and support inclusive urban development in rapidly growing cities.

The sector currently serves millions of members through thousands of housing cooperative societies across the country, making it one of the largest cooperative housing systems in Africa and the Middle East.¹³

Beyond housing, cooperatives contribute to many other dimensions of SDG 11. In **Uruguay**, the Federation of Mutual Aid Housing Cooperatives (**FUCVAM**) has enabled tens of thousands of low- and middle-income families to obtain affordable housing through collective savings, mutual labour, and democratic management. Widely recognized as a pioneering model of community-led urban development cooperative housing systems, FUCVAM has inspired similar initiatives across Latin America.¹⁴



Cooperatives also strengthen urban sustainability through service provision and community infrastructure. In **Brazil**, waste-picker cooperatives (catadores) have transformed the recycling sector by organizing and formalizing the work of informal waste collectors, increasing recycling rates, creating decent livelihoods, and reducing pressure on municipal waste systems. Since the late 1980s, waste pickers have organized into cooperatives that are now recognized partners in many municipal recycling programmes, helping to integrate social inclusion with environmental management. In cities such as Belo Horizonte, cooperatives have been formally incorporated into municipal waste systems through partnerships with local authorities, improving both recycling performance and income opportunities for workers. Waste pickers are estimated to collect nearly 90

10 Housing cooperatives in Germany: <https://www.housinginternational.coop/co-ops/germany/>

11 Housing cooperatives in Canada: <https://www.housinginternational.coop/co-ops/canada/>

12 Conavicoop: <https://www.housinginternational.coop/members/conavicoop/>

13 General Authority for Construction and Housing Cooperatives in Egypt: <https://chc-egypt.com/en/chc-projects/>

14 South-South Cooperation: international transfer of the FUCVAM model of mutual aid housing cooperatives: <https://world-habitat.org/awards/winners/south-south-cooperation-international-transfer-of-the-fucvam-model-of-mutual-aid-housing-cooperatives/>

percent of all recycled materials in Brazil, demonstrating their critical contribution to the country's circular economy and environmental goals. These cooperative models not only reduce waste and greenhouse gas emissions but also provide economic opportunities for marginalized communities and strengthen urban resilience.¹⁵



In **Japan**, the Seikatsu Club Consumers' Co-operative Union demonstrates how cooperatives can advance sustainable urban communities through responsible consumption, community-led environmental action, and renewable energy development. With approximately 420,000 members across 33 consumer cooperatives, Seikatsu Club promotes local and organic food systems, reusable packaging, waste reduction, and citizen participation in environmental decision-making. In 2022, it established the Seikatsu Club Energy Business Association to accelerate the transition to a 100 percent renewable-energy society through community-owned renewable-energy projects, electricity supply initiatives, and local energy partnerships. Building on nearly four decades of advocacy and investment in renewable energy, the cooperative has supported the development of wind and solar power facilities while strengthening economic solidarity between urban and rural communities. By combining sustainable consumption, renewable energy generation, and citizen engagement, Seikatsu Club contributes to more resilient, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable cities and communities.¹⁶



In **Saudi Arabia**, the [Al-Baha Housing Cooperative Society \(CAF-HB\)](#) has helped in expanding access to affordable, quality housing while promoting sustainable urban and regional development. Established in 2020 in response to Saudi Vision 2030, the cooperative was created to address long-standing housing shortages in the Al-Baha region by developing high-quality, competitively priced homes through a partnership with the Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and Housing. Beyond improving access to homeownership, the cooperative creates local employment, supports innovative construction methods that reduce costs and accelerate delivery, and stimulates regional economic growth. Its flagship developments, including the Tilaal Al-Baha 1 housing project, delivered through the national Sakani platform, alongside the mixed-use Alia Al-Baha and Town Square projects, combine residential, commercial, and tourism infrastructure, demonstrating how cooperative housing can foster more inclusive, resilient, and economically vibrant communities while advancing SDG target 11.1 on access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing.

Transport cooperatives also contribute to SDG 11 by providing safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable mobility services, particularly in communities underserved by conventional public or private transport operators. Through member ownership and democratic governance, they help connect rural and peri-urban populations to jobs, education, healthcare, and other essential services while reducing transport inequalities and social exclusion. In **Rwanda**, transport cooperatives have played a significant

role in improving urban mobility, creating employment, and formalizing transport services. The Rwanda Federation of Transport Cooperatives (RFTC) and the Fédération Rwandaise des Coopératives de Taxi-Moto have organized tens of thousands of transport operators into cooperative structures, including bus, taxi, and motorcycle-taxi services. The motorcycle taxi federation alone represents tens of thousands of riders through a nationwide network of cooperatives and has helped improve governance, safety standards, professional training, and service coordination in a sector essential to daily mobility, particularly in Kigali. By providing affordable, accessible transport services, connecting residents to jobs, education, healthcare, and markets, and creating employment opportunities for low-income workers, transport cooperatives contribute directly to SDG 11's goal of ensuring access to safe, affordable, and sustainable transport systems for all. Their role in organizing informal transport operators into accountable, member-owned enterprises also strengthens social inclusion and supports more sustainable urban development.¹⁷

These examples demonstrate that cooperatives are not merely housing providers or service enterprises; they are institutions for community development. By mobilizing local resources, fostering democratic participation, and reinvesting benefits locally, cooperatives help cities become more affordable, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable. Whether through housing, renewable energy, waste management, transport, or community services, cooperatives provide practical and scalable solutions to many of the challenges identified in SDG 11. As governments seek effective pathways to achieve the 2030 Agenda, cooperative models offer a proven approach to building cities and communities that place people, rather than profit, at the center of development.

15 From informal to integrated: Lessons from Brazil on building inclusive waste systems: <https://www.thecirculateinitiative.org/from-informal-to-integrated-lessons-from-brazil-on-building-inclusive-waste-systems/>

16 Seikatsu Club Consumers' Co-operative Union. (2022). *Seikatsu Club Consumers' Co-operative Union establishes the General Incorporated Seikatsu Club Energy Business Association*: <https://jccu.coop/eng/news/2022/09/seikatsu-club-consumers-co-operative-union-establishes-the-general-incorporated-association-seikatsu.html>

17 Public transport report in Rwanda: *Rwanda Federation of Transport Cooperatives (RFTC) and the Fédération Rwandaise des Coopératives de Taxi-Moto*: https://www.ssatp.org/sites/default/files/publication/Kigali_vf.pdf

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite their demonstrated contributions to sustainable infrastructure, inclusive industrialization, innovation, and resilient cities and communities, cooperatives continue to face significant structural barriers that limit their ability to operate at scale and maximize their impact on SDGs 9 and 11.

One of the most persistent challenges is the inadequacy of legal and regulatory frameworks. In many countries, cooperative legislation remains outdated or poorly aligned with contemporary economic realities, failing to recognize the diversity of cooperative models operating in sectors such as housing, transport, energy, digital platforms, manufacturing, and urban services. Housing cooperatives are often disadvantaged by land tenure, zoning, and property laws designed around individual or corporate ownership. Worker cooperatives in industry and construction frequently encounter labour regulations that do not adequately accommodate democratic worker ownership, while platform and multi-stakeholder cooperatives often operate in legal grey areas that limit investment, innovation, and growth. These barriers constrain cooperatives' ability to contribute fully to infrastructure development, sustainable industrialization, and urban resilience.

For instance, the findings of the ICA's International Legal Research and Analysis Initiative (ILRAI) on cooperative housing identified persistent barriers in many countries, including inadequate legal recognition, limited access to land, the absence of tailored financing instruments, weak integration into national housing policies, and insufficient data collection on cooperative housing. These constraints limit housing cooperatives' ability to scale their impact despite strong democratic governance and proven social outcomes. The ILRAI findings, therefore, highlight a significant opportunity for governments to modernize legal frameworks, integrate cooperative housing into national development and urban planning strategies, and expand access to long-term finance, enabling cooperatives to play a much larger role in addressing housing shortages, infrastructure gaps, and the transition toward more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities.¹⁸

Access to finance remains another critical constraint. Achieving SDGs 9 and 11 requires substantial investment in infrastructure, affordable housing, transport systems, renewable energy, digital connectivity, and industrial modernization. Yet cooperatives frequently struggle to access patient, long-term capital suited to their ownership structures and social objectives. Conventional lenders and investors often favour investor-owned enterprises, while many public investment programmes and development finance instruments are not designed to support cooperative enterprises. As a result, cooperative-led solutions that could effectively reach underserved communities remain underfinanced despite their proven social and economic value.

The accelerating digital transformation of economies presents both opportunities and challenges. Digital technologies can enhance cooperative governance, improve productivity, strengthen supply chains, facilitate market access, and support innovation across sectors. However, many cooperatives, particularly those serving rural, low-income, or marginalized communities, continue to face significant barriers related to digital infrastructure, connectivity, affordability, and digital skills. Without targeted investments in digital inclusion, there is a risk that technological advances will deepen existing inequalities and exclude many cooperative members from the benefits of the digital economy.¹⁹

Climate change and environmental pressures add another layer of complexity. Cooperatives operating in urban areas increasingly face risks associated with extreme weather events, heat stress, flooding, and infrastructure damage, while industrial and agricultural cooperatives must adapt to changing environmental conditions, resource scarcity, and rising energy costs. At the same time, the transition to low-carbon and circular economies creates both financial and operational challenges for smaller enterprises. Ensuring that cooperatives have the resources and policy support needed to invest in climate adaptation, resilience, and green technologies will be critical to achieving both SDG 9 and SDG 11.

Yet the opportunities for cooperative action are equally significant. Around the world, cooperatives are demonstrating innovative approaches to addressing infrastructure gaps, strengthening local industries, and building more inclusive and sustainable communities. Housing cooperatives are expanding access to affordable and energy-efficient housing; transport cooperatives are improving mobility and connectivity; renewable energy cooperatives are accelerating community-led energy transitions; and worker-owned enterprises are creating quality jobs while fostering innovation and local economic development. Emerging models such as platform cooperatives, community land trusts, circular-economy cooperatives, and cooperative urban agriculture initiatives further illustrate how democratic ownership can contribute to resilient and sustainable development.

The growing recognition of cooperatives and the social and solidarity economy at both national and international levels presents significant opportunities to scale their contribution to sustainable development. The adoption of the 2025 United Nations General Assembly resolution on cooperatives in social development, which calls for the celebration of an International Year of Cooperatives every ten years, reaffirms the vital role of cooperatives in the global economy and their potential to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.²⁰ Similarly, the recognition of cooperatives and the social and solidarity economy in the Declaration of the Second World Social Summit, together with the momentum generated by the International Year of Cooperatives 2025, has elevated the visibility of the cooperative model as a practical

18 Research and Analysis Initiative of the International Cooperative Alliance – The Law on Cooperative Housing: <https://www.housinginternational.coop/resources/research-and-analysis-initiative-of-the-international-cooperative-alliance-the-law-on-cooperative-housing/>

19 International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Facts and Figures 2025, Geneva, 2025. <https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/Pages/PR-2025-11-17-Facts-and-Figures.aspx>

20 UNGA resolution on cooperatives in social development: <https://ica.coop/en/newsroom/news/historic-united-nations-resolution-proclaims-international-year-cooperatives-every>

and people-centered approach to sustainable development.²¹ These developments create important opportunities to strengthen partnerships among governments, cooperative movements, development finance institutions, UN agencies, and civil society organizations, while encouraging the integration of cooperative solutions into national strategies for development, industrialization, housing, infrastructure, and urban development.

In addition, advances in digital technology, green finance, impact investing, and blended finance mechanisms offer new avenues for cooperative growth. If appropriately designed, these instruments can help cooperatives mobilize capital, adopt innovative technologies, expand infrastructure investments, and participate more effectively in green and digital transitions. Cooperative federations and apex organizations are also increasingly developing shared services, pooled financing

mechanisms, data platforms, and advocacy networks that strengthen the capacity and visibility of individual cooperatives.

As emphasized in the ICA's Position Paper on the Sustainable Development Goals, cooperatives are uniquely positioned to advance sustainable development because they combine economic participation, democratic governance, social inclusion, and concern for community within a single enterprise model.²² By empowering people to collectively own and manage resources, cooperatives help build the infrastructure, industries, services, and communities needed for a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future. Unlocking their full potential will require supportive policies, enabling legal frameworks, targeted investment, and stronger partnerships that recognize cooperatives as essential actors in achieving SDGs 9 and 11 by 2030 and beyond.

CALL TO ACTION

With only a few years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda, governments, development partners, international organizations, and the cooperative movement must take decisive action to scale cooperative solutions for resilient infrastructure, sustainable industrialization, innovation, and inclusive urban development. Cooperatives have demonstrated their capacity to deliver affordable housing, expand access to transport and essential services, create decent jobs, strengthen local industries, and build resilient communities. Unlocking this potential requires a shift from recognizing cooperatives as stakeholders to treating them as strategic partners in implementing SDGs 9 and 11.



1. Create enabling legal and policy environments for cooperative development

Governments should review and modernize cooperative, housing, land, infrastructure, and procurement legislation to ensure that cooperatives can effectively develop, own, finance, and manage housing, transport systems, energy projects, digital platforms, and other forms of community infrastructure. National legal frameworks should explicitly recognize housing, worker, platform, energy, transport, and multi-stakeholder cooperatives and provide mechanisms to protect cooperative assets and long-term affordability. In line with ILO Recommendation No. 193 and the UN resolutions on Cooperatives and on the Social and Solidarity Economy, governments should integrate cooperative development into national SDG implementation plans, industrial strategies, and urban development policies.



2. Expand access to finance for cooperative infrastructure, housing, and innovation

Governments, development finance institutions, multilateral banks, and donors should establish dedicated financing windows for cooperative enterprises engaged in housing, infrastructure, manufacturing, renewable energy, transport, and digital innovation. Public investment programmes should explicitly include cooperatives as eligible beneficiaries, while blended finance, guarantees, concessional loans, and impact investment mechanisms should be adapted to cooperative ownership structures. Support should also be provided for cooperative investment funds, cooperative banks, and credit unions that can mobilize long-term patient capital for community-led development.



3. Position cooperatives as partners in sustainable cities and industrial transformation

National and local authorities should formally include cooperatives in urban planning, housing delivery, industrial policy, and infrastructure development processes. Governments should establish targets and incentives for cooperative housing, community energy, sustainable transport, and circular economy initiatives within national development frameworks. Public procurement policies should also create opportunities for cooperative enterprises to participate in infrastructure projects, public service delivery, construction, recycling, care services, and local economic development programmes. Recognizing cooperatives as implementation partners can help accelerate progress toward more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable communities.

21 Closing of International of Cooperatives during the World Social Summit: <https://ica.coop/en/newsroom/news/world-social-summit-doha-host-closing-ceremony-international-year-cooperatives>

22 International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), Cooperatives: Key Partners in Realising the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (Position Paper), Geneva, 2023. <https://ica.coop/sites/default/files/2023-10/Position%20Paper%20for%20UN%20SDG%20Summit%20Declaration.pdf>



4. Invest in digital transformation, innovation, and data systems

To ensure that cooperatives can participate fully in the digital economy, governments and development partners should invest in affordable digital infrastructure, connectivity, and digital skills development, particularly in underserved rural and peri-urban areas. Support should be provided for cooperative-led digital innovation, including platform cooperatives, shared digital services, data platforms, and enterprise management systems. At the same time, national statistical systems should strengthen the collection of cooperative data to improve visibility, inform policymaking, and better capture cooperative contributions to SDGs 9 and 11.



5. Accelerate cooperative participation in the green and just transition

Climate action, energy transition, and urban sustainability strategies should explicitly recognize cooperatives as key actors in building low-carbon, resilient, and inclusive economies. Governments should support cooperative-led renewable energy projects, energy-efficient housing, sustainable transport systems, waste management and recycling initiatives, and climate adaptation investments. Particular attention should be given to worker, social, housing, transport, and environmental

cooperatives that help ensure that the costs and benefits of the transition are shared equitably, while creating decent jobs and strengthening community resilience.



6. Strengthen cooperative ecosystems, partnerships, and knowledge sharing

Cooperative federations, apex organizations, research institutions, and international organizations should expand collaboration to share knowledge, scale successful models, and strengthen cooperative ecosystems. Greater investment is needed in cooperative education, leadership development, research, and technical assistance, particularly in emerging sectors such as digital platforms, renewable energy, sustainable construction, and circular economy enterprises. International cooperation and South-South exchanges should be leveraged to replicate successful cooperative innovations and strengthen cooperatives' global contribution to sustainable development.

Achieving SDGs 9 and 11 will require scaling proven solutions that combine economic viability with social and environmental impact. Cooperatives already demonstrate how this can be done. The challenge now is to provide the policies, partnerships, and investments necessary for these solutions to flourish and contribute fully to building resilient infrastructure, sustainable industries, and inclusive cities and communities by 2030 and beyond.



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 [Cooperative Housing International \(CHI\)](#).

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 Co-operative 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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