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**Social development: social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, persons with disabilities and the family**

## Cooperatives in social development

### Report of the Secretary-General\*\*

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [78/175](#), outlining key policies and actions that can assist cooperatives in realizing their full potential for supporting Member States to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development. The report provides highlights of the need for cooperatives to focus on strengthening democratic governance, investing in member education and expanding partnerships to scale their impact. With the Second World Social Summit due to convene in November 2025, the report provides an analysis of the role of cooperatives in poverty eradication through the creation of decent work and the advancement of social inclusion. The report also provides highlights of the activities being undertaken to mark the ongoing International Year of Cooperatives, 2025, and concludes with a set of recommendations that Member States may wish to consider in supporting sustainable growth and the development of cooperatives, including by reforming cooperative laws, integrating cooperatives into national development plans, providing targeted budgetary support to enhance capacity and collaborating with international bodies to track the impact of cooperatives and support their training, leadership development and market access.

\* [A/80/150](#).

\*\* The present report was submitted to the conference services for processing after the deadline for technical reasons beyond the control of the submitting office.



## I. Introduction

1. In General Assembly resolution [78/175](#) on cooperatives in social development, the important contribution and potential of all forms of cooperatives to the follow-up to the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development are recognized. In the resolution, the Assembly also recognized that cooperatives, in their various forms, promote the fullest possible participation in the economic and social development of local communities and all people, including women, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples, whose inclusion strengthens economic and social development, and contribute to the eradication of poverty and hunger.

2. Poverty eradication, full employment and social integration were the key outcomes of the World Social Summit that was held in Copenhagen in 1995, marking a pivotal moment in global efforts to address social development challenges. The Summit was highly significant because it was the first time that social development was placed at the centre of international policy discussions, emphasizing the need for people-centred development.

3. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development were adopted at the Summit in recognition of equitable development, social justice, social inclusion and human rights as essential components of social development, principles that remained central in the development of the Sustainable Development Goals. It was emphasized in the outcome document that community-driven economic models, social enterprises and inclusive economic structures were all important in implementing the Summit's outcomes. The Declaration laid the groundwork for policies into which cooperatives were later integrated as key actors in poverty reduction, decent employment generation and social inclusion.

4. With only five years left to achieve the Goals, only 20 per cent of measurable targets have been met or are set to be met by the deadline.<sup>1</sup> The Second World Summit for Social Development can elicit commitments to accelerating progress across the social dimensions of sustainable development by placing cooperatives high on the development agenda.

## II. Gaps in achieving the Copenhagen Declaration<sup>2</sup>

5. The 1995 Copenhagen Declaration established a global commitment to promoting social integration by fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and the participation of all people, especially persons and groups in disadvantaged and vulnerable situations. According to its Programme of Action, social integration is aimed at creating a society for all, in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play.

6. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development echoes this commitment to social integration through the promotion of social inclusion and in its central pledge to ensure that no one is left behind. It is aimed at achieving all goals and targets for all nations, peoples and parts of society, endeavouring to reach the furthest behind first.

<sup>1</sup> See [A/80/81-E/2025/62](#).

<sup>2</sup> This section is largely drawn from the 2025 report of the Secretary-General on implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development.

7. Three decades after the Copenhagen Declaration, income inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, has risen in many high-income and some middle-income countries. Overall, two thirds of the global population live in countries where inequality has increased.<sup>3</sup> Wealth is also increasingly concentrated at the top. The world's richest one per cent own more wealth than 95 per cent of humanity.<sup>4</sup>

8. Deep-rooted exclusion persists. Globally, 251 million children and youth remain out of school. In low-income countries, one in three young people lacks access to formal education.<sup>5</sup> Affordability remains a key obstacle: in low- and lower-middle-income countries, households finance nearly 40 per cent of education costs, often for essentials such as materials and uniforms.<sup>6</sup> While universal health coverage is improving, out-of-pocket health spending pushes over 1 billion people into poverty or deeper poverty every year.<sup>7</sup>

9. By concentrating wealth and opportunity, inequality weakens poverty reduction and marginalizes large segments of the population. It entrenches barriers for women, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and other groups. Social integration is further impeded when communities are excluded from progress, fuelling mistrust and division. Inequality ultimately threatens the values of social justice, human dignity and solidarity that the Copenhagen Declaration enshrines.

### **Weakening social cohesion and declining trust**

10. Widespread mistrust and eroding social cohesion are increasingly undermining progress towards the core commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration. Social cohesion, anchored in trust, solidarity and a shared concern for equity, is fraying across many societies. Today, over half the global population reports little or no trust in its government, with youth expressing particularly low confidence. Interpersonal trust is also fragile: fewer than one in three people believe that others can be trusted.<sup>8</sup>

11. Increasing income inequality is weakening both interpersonal and institutional trust. It fosters resentment, reduces empathy and weakens cooperation.<sup>9</sup> Inequality signals State failure to fulfil redistributive functions, further eroding public confidence. Among the affluent, distrust may lead to disengagement from public systems and increased reliance on private services, diminishing their willingness to pay taxes and participate in collective action, thus reinforcing weak institutions and social fragmentation.

12. Technology is accelerating the erosion of social cohesion and trust. While digital platforms expand connectivity, they can spread disinformation and hate speech. Algorithm-driven content often reinforces echo chambers. The World Economic

<sup>3</sup> See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Social Report 2025: A New Policy Consensus to Accelerate Social Progress* (2025).

<sup>4</sup> See Jackson Gandour, Rebecca Riddell and Nabil Ahmed, "Multilateralism in an era of global oligarchy: how extreme inequality undermines international cooperation", media briefing (Oxfam International, 23 September 2024).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/25: Leadership in Education – Lead for Learning* (Paris, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, *Global Education Monitoring Report 2021/2: Non-State Actors in Education – Who Chooses? Who Loses?* (Paris, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization and World Bank, *Tracking Universal Health Coverage: 2023 Global Monitoring Report* (Geneva, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> *World Social Report 2025*, based on World Values Survey, wave 7 (2017–2022).

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2011).

Forum has identified societal polarization, fuelled by disinformation and increasing hostility, as one of the most pressing global risks.<sup>10</sup>

13. Cooperatives are people-centred organizations jointly owned and democratically controlled by and for their members to realize their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations. Their dual nature as economic enterprises and autonomous associations, guided by cooperative values and principles, is improving the socioeconomic conditions of their members and their local communities over the medium to long term. Cooperative enterprises thrive on member participation, thereby building trust and a sense of community.

### III. The cooperatives way

14. Cooperatives are a special type of enterprise aimed at balancing commercial viability with the imperative of providing goods and services that addresses the concerns of its members and the communities within which they operate. They share some of the characteristics of conventional enterprises, such as conducting economic market activities on a commercial basis. However, their unique characteristic is in serving the needs of user members who jointly own and democratically control the organization. Cooperatives therefore often adopt fair practices, such as providing their services at cost to member clients, buying their inputs at a fair price from member producers, or creating jobs and offering good working conditions to member workers, all having priority over generating a profit.<sup>11</sup>

15. Cooperatives can also play a crucial role in the economy, contributing to the stabilization of markets by addressing market failures, as many of them are formed as a result of markets failing to meet members' demands. They can be a countervailing force towards concentrated market powers, internalizing social costs.

16. Cooperatives offer a compelling, community-driven solution to social, economic and environmental challenges. Globally, it is estimated that over 760 million people are members of cooperatives, many of which operate in low-income communities where traditional businesses and State services are absent.<sup>12</sup> However, these estimates are typically based on ad hoc studies done in a limited number of countries covering a limited set of industries. To verify these numbers, a larger study collecting internationally comparable quantitative data is required. The most recent international survey on cooperatives was published by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2014, and it is now time to conduct another survey to facilitate the adoption of evidence-based policies for the growth and development of cooperatives.<sup>13</sup>

#### A. Poverty eradication

17. On a local or smaller scale, providing opportunities for generating income is one of the most direct and measurable ways in which cooperatives contribute to poverty reduction. By pooling resources, cooperatives enable members – often small-scale producers or informal workers – to gain access to markets, reduce input costs and increase their bargaining power. This collective approach allows members to

<sup>10</sup> World Economic Forum, *The Global Risks Report 2025*, 20th ed. (Geneva, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.un.org/development/desa/cooperatives/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2019/04/Bouchard-final.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> International Cooperative Alliance, *World Cooperative Monitor 2022*.

<sup>13</sup> See <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/2014/coopsegm/grace.pdf>.

retain a greater share of the value they create, directly addressing local needs and reducing poverty.

18. In Kenya, agricultural cooperatives have helped smallholder farmers to gain access to markets, credit and training on the most productive agricultural practices, improving yields and incomes. The Kenya Cooperative Coffee Exporters, for example, has enabled over 100,000 farmers to reduce their inputs costs and gain direct access to markets, increasing their incomes by up to 30 per cent.<sup>14</sup> In India, the Amul dairy cooperative is transforming rural communities and empowering over 3.6 million milk producers, many of them women, by guaranteeing fair prices for their output and providing access to veterinary care, cattle feed and training opportunities on more efficient production processes.<sup>15</sup>

19. Cooperatives are particularly effective in reaching groups that are often excluded from mainstream economic systems, such as women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities. In Nepal, women-led savings and credit cooperatives have empowered thousands of rural women to start businesses, send their children to school and participate in local governance. In Brazil, the Landless Workers' Movement has established agricultural cooperatives that provide landless families with livelihoods, education and healthcare. In Canada, Indigenous cooperatives such as Arctic Co-operatives Limited support economic self-determination in remote northern communities, offering services ranging from retail to telecommunication.<sup>16</sup> By centring equity and participation, cooperatives help to dismantle the structural barriers that perpetuate exclusion and inequality.

20. In India, the Self-Employed Women's Association was founded as a trade union in 1972 that organizes women working in the vast informal economy of India. As of 2024, the Association had grown into a national movement with over 3.2 million members across 18 Indian states, and its operations are based on cooperative principles. It has facilitated the formation of over 100 women-led cooperatives in sectors such as dairy, agriculture, crafts and finance. In 1992, the Association established the Gujarat State Women's Cooperative Federation of the Association, the first women's cooperative federation in India, which now includes 106-member cooperatives and serves more than 300,000 women.<sup>17</sup>

## B. Decent work

21. The cooperative model is a proven engine for job creation, especially in sectors where formal employment is scarce or precarious. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), cooperatives provide employment or work opportunities to over 280 million people worldwide, either directly or indirectly.<sup>18</sup>

22. At the heart of the cooperative model is employee ownership, which gives workers a direct stake in the enterprise, its strategic focus and decision-making. Members, in many cases also the employees, participate in setting wages, creating the working conditions and thereby promoting democracy in the workplace and job

<sup>14</sup> See <https://www.kencaffee.coop/>.

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.amul.com/>.

<sup>16</sup> See <https://arctic-coop.com/>.

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.sewa.org/>.

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.ilo.org/publications/cooperatives-and-world-work>.

security. Research shows that worker cooperatives tend to offer more stable employment and lower wage dispersion than conventional firms.<sup>19</sup>

23. The authors of a study analysing data across worker cooperatives in the United States of America concluded that the median pay ratio in cooperatives was 1.5:1, indicating a highly equitable wage structure. More than half the respondents reported having earned more at their cooperative job than in previous employment and having greater job stability and autonomy.<sup>20</sup> This finding is also confirmed in countries as diverse as Kenya, Peru, the Philippines and Poland, where members of cooperatives often enjoy more stable employment, fairer wages and access to training and education and often enjoy higher household incomes, greater access to financial services and improved food security compared with non-members.<sup>21</sup>

24. In Argentina, worker cooperatives emerged as a response to economic collapse in the early 2000s. Thousands of workers took over bankrupt factories and businesses, converting them into cooperatives. These enterprises not only preserved jobs but also introduced democratic workplace governance.

25. In Italy, the Emilia-Romagna region is home to one of the world's most successful cooperative economies. Cooperatives in this region of Italy account for 30 per cent of gross domestic product and employ hundreds of thousands of people in sectors ranging from construction to healthcare.<sup>22</sup>

## C. Rebuilding social cohesion and trust

26. In the Copenhagen Declaration the importance of social integration, trust and solidarity is emphasized. Cooperatives, by their very nature, foster these values. Democratic governance ensures that all members, regardless of background, have a voice. The sections below of the present report are focused on social integration while demonstrating that cooperatives working in these areas are providing productive employment and decent work and contributing to poverty alleviation. They also show how the three core pillars of the Copenhagen Declaration – ending poverty, providing decent work and social integration – are complementary.

### 1. Type B social cooperatives in Italy: inclusive employment and sustainable development<sup>23</sup>

27. Type B social cooperatives in Italy are a legally recognized form of social enterprise that promote inclusive employment for persons with disabilities and other groups in situations of disadvantage. Mandated in Law 381/1991, these cooperatives must employ at least 30 per cent of individuals from groups with recognized disadvantages, including people with physical, intellectual and sensory disabilities, as well as former prisoners, individuals recovering from addiction and the long-term unemployed. The cooperatives provide sheltered and supportive work environments

<sup>19</sup> Virginie Pérotin, "Worker cooperatives: good, sustainable jobs in the community", in *The Oxford Handbook of Mutual, Co-Operative, and Co-Owned Business*, Jonathan Michie, Joseph R. Blasi and Carlo Borzaga, eds. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> See <https://democracy.institute.coop/how-economic-democracy-impacts-workers-firms-and-communities>.

<sup>21</sup> See <https://ocdc.coop/initiatives/what-difference-do-cooperatives-make>.

<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.ilo.org/publications/cooperatives-and-world-work>.

<sup>23</sup> This section was compiled through the use of Microsoft Copilot using the following source documents: "Social cooperatives law in Italy: adjustment of an existing cooperative law to support social enterprise development", available at [betterentrepreneurship.eu](https://betterentrepreneurship.eu); and "Social enterprises and their eco-systems", available at [sipotra.it](https://sipotra.it).

tailored to individual needs, fostering both economic participation and social integration.

28. The cooperatives operate across a diverse range of industrial and commercial sectors, including agriculture, catering, industrial cleaning, recycling, environmental services and manufacturing. The sectors are selected for their accessibility, market potential and capacity to generate sustainable income while offering meaningful employment opportunities.

29. Government support plays a crucial role in the viability of type B cooperatives. In addition to legal recognition, they benefit from exemptions on social security contributions for disadvantaged workers and are eligible to compete for public procurement contracts that include social clauses. National and regional governments also provide tax incentives and funding programmes to support cooperative development and operations.

30. Italy's entrepreneurial ecosystem further strengthens these cooperatives through cooperative consortiums, national federations and access to European Union and regional development funds.

## **2. Youth-led development in Africa: the case of Emerging Leaders Foundation Africa and Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability and Professionalism Africa<sup>24</sup>**

31. Emerging Leaders Foundation Africa (ELF Africa), headquartered in Kenya, is a youth-led organization dedicated to empowering young people across the continent through leadership development, civic engagement and economic empowerment. Founded with a mission to foster ethical, values-based leadership, the organization operates in seven African countries: Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

32. The work of Emerging Leaders Foundation Africa spans multiple sectors aligned with the Goals, including education, governance, gender equality, clean energy and decent work. In 2024, ELF mentored 624 young people and collaborated with 80 youth-serving organizations. Its flagship programme, the iLEAD Fellowship, equips youth with tools for civic consciousness, professional growth and community transformation. Financially, ELF Africa is supported by philanthropic partners and international donors, and while detailed financials are not publicly disclosed, its annual reports reflect a growing operational footprint and programmatic reach.

33. Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability and Professionalism (LEAP) Africa, based in Nigeria, is another leading youth-focused non-profit organization that has had an impact on over 50,000 youth and entrepreneurs across 26 Nigerian cities and Ghana since its founding in 2002. Its core areas include education, entrepreneurship, employability, active citizenship, and health and well-being. Through initiatives such as the Social Innovators Programme, the Youth Enterprise Fund and the Nigeria Youth Futures Fund, the organization supports youth-led enterprises and civic initiatives.

## **3. Indigenous Peoples' cooperatives**

34. In Peru, Coopain Cabana is a cooperative of over 500 Indigenous Aymara and Quechua smallholder farmers in the Puno region of Peru. It specializes in the production and export of organic quinoa. The cooperative has enabled its members to gain access to international markets, increase their incomes, and preserve traditional

<sup>24</sup> This section is sourced from: the Emerging Leaders Foundation (ELF) Africa annual report 2024; the Catalyst 2030 profile of ELF Africa; Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability and Professionalism (LEAP) Africa annual reports; the World Economic Forum profile of LEAP Africa; and the Impact Investors Foundation report on LEAP Africa.

agricultural practices. Coopain also promotes gender equity and environmental sustainability. The cooperative directly benefits over 500 families and supports community development through fair trade practices.

35. Cooperativa Tosepan Titataniske<sup>25</sup> was founded in 1977 as a federation of cooperatives in Sierra Norte de Puebla, Mexico. It serves over 35,000 members from the Nahuatl and Totonac Indigenous communities, operating in multiple sectors, including sustainable coffee and honey production, ecotourism, microfinance, housing and education, and is considered one of the most successful Indigenous cooperatives in Latin America. It places a strong emphasis on environmental and cultural sustainability.

36. The cooperative Mujeres Mayas Kaqchikeles, based in Sololá, Guatemala, is operated by Indigenous Kaqchikel Maya women engaged in traditional weaving and textile production. The cooperative empowers women economically and socially while preserving cultural heritage through the making of artisanal crafts. It operates under fair trade principles and has established partnerships with international fair trade organizations to support market access.

37. The Arctic Co-operatives Limited<sup>26</sup> is one of the largest and most comprehensive Indigenous cooperative networks in Canada. It serves and is owned by over 32 community-based cooperatives located in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. Collectively, these cooperatives have more than 23,000 individual members across the Arctic regions of Canada, primarily Inuit, Métis and First Nations Peoples. Services include retail operations, hotels, cable television, fuel distribution, and arts and crafts marketing.

#### 4. Cooperatives supporting older persons in the Asia-Pacific region

38. Older people's associations are community-based groups across Asia that are intended to improve the well-being and social inclusion of older persons. Typically formed and managed by older persons, they are multifunctional, and their activities include home visits and health education sessions to improve access to healthcare and promote healthy ageing. They also provide access to microcredits and mutual support networks to reduce isolation. Older people's associations are known by different names in different countries.<sup>27</sup> A comprehensive study examined older people's associations in East and South-East Asia, highlighting their role in promoting health, economic security and social harmony. It was found in the study that successful older people's associations often have strong community support, capable leadership and activities tailored to local needs.<sup>28</sup>

39. In Japan, the Seikatsu Club Consumers' Co-operative Union has programmes specifically aimed at supporting older persons as part of its broader community-based welfare services. This programme includes care services, home visits and employment opportunities for older persons. The Union is committed to building a

<sup>25</sup> See <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/latest/-/story/mexico-s-indigenous-cooperative-model>.

<sup>26</sup> See [https://arctic-coop.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Arctic\\_Co-op-2024\\_Annual\\_Report-FIN-WEB.pdf](https://arctic-coop.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Arctic_Co-op-2024_Annual_Report-FIN-WEB.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> In Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka, the Older People's Association; in India, the Self-Help Group; in Bangladesh, the Older Citizens' Monitoring Group; in Thailand, the Elderly's Club; in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Older People's Group; in Myanmar, the Older People's Self-Help Group; in the Republic of Korea, the Older People's Community; in the Philippines, the Older People's Organization; and in Viet Nam, the Intergenerational Self-Help Club.

<sup>28</sup> See <https://www.helppage.org/>.



people-centred welfare system that empowers older adults to remain active, connected and supported within their communities.<sup>29</sup>

#### IV. International Year of Cooperatives, 2025

40. The United Nations proclamation of 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives under the theme “Cooperatives build a better world” reaffirms their importance in tackling global challenges. As stated in my message to cooperatives at the official launch of the International Year in New Delhi, cooperatives demonstrate the importance of standing together to forge solutions to global complex global challenges and advance the Goals.<sup>30</sup> The United Nations will continue to call upon governments to recognize the critical work of cooperatives through national budgets and development plans.

41. Indications of the global interest in the International Year of Cooperatives include the following: there have been 44,855 unique visitors to its website<sup>31</sup> from more than 50 countries; 97 events have been submitted and published on the global events portal of the International Year; 930 entities have requested to use the logo of the International Year in 124 countries across all regions; and many countries have officially nominated government focal points for the International Year of Cooperatives.<sup>32</sup>

42. Consistent with the theme of the International Year, cooperatives are building a better world and are demonstrating the determination to continue to do so. Leaders from the world’s largest cooperative and mutual businesses have set up the Cooperatives and Mutuals Leadership Circle, a collaborative group committing their organizations to forging solutions to some of the world’s most pressing challenges.<sup>33</sup> The Circle is developing a common plan to arrive at the World Social Summit with specific commitments and actions plans for accelerating social development and progress towards the Goals and promote cooperatives as viable solutions to global challenges.

43. The Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives<sup>34</sup> is currently conducting research on preparing a standard and internationally comparable system of statistics to capture the contribution of cooperatives to national social and economic development. The mission is refining and advancing cooperative statistics that will inform policymaking for supporting the development of cooperatives.<sup>35</sup>

44. In addition, the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives is conducting a research programme entitled Cooperatives for a Sustainable Transformation in Africa (CoopStar), aimed at enhancing the role of cooperatives in the socioeconomic transformation of Africa. The programme is intended to empower cooperatives as pivotal actors in achieving the Goals and supporting outcomes of the Second World Social Summit. The Committee is collaborating with academic

<sup>29</sup> See <https://rightlivelikelihood.org/the-change-makers/find-a-laureate/seikatsu-club-consumers-cooperative/>.

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xpmuPCiqUWU>.

<sup>31</sup> See <https://2025.coop/>.

<sup>32</sup> Figures are for June 2025.

<sup>33</sup> See <https://cm50.coop/>.

<sup>34</sup> Members of the Committee: the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the International Labour Organization, the International Trade Centre, the International Cooperative Alliance, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

<sup>35</sup> See <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/technical-working-groups-cooperative-and-social-and-solidarity-economy-sse>.

institutions, other international organizations and cooperative networks to generate knowledge, share best practices and build capacity across Africa. the Committee is also updating its series of briefs on the Goals highlighting the role of cooperatives in sustainable development.<sup>36</sup>

### **International Year in Africa**

45. Africa has in recent years been pursuing continent-wide initiatives to promote the growth and development of cooperatives. In 2024, with technical support from the International Cooperative Alliance and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Pan-African Parliament adopted a model law on cooperatives for the continent intended to guide the development of new cooperative legislation and the review of existing laws at the national level. This follows the recommendation in General Assembly resolution 78/175 on cooperatives in social development that Governments review existing legislation and regulations to make the national legal and regulatory environment more conducive to the creation and growth of cooperatives by improving existing laws and regulations and/or by establishing new ones, especially in the areas of access to capital, autonomy, competitiveness and fair taxation. The model law will guide reviews of cooperative laws at the national level and provide a reference point for countries seeking to incorporate best practices in their cooperative laws and promote harmonizing cooperative legislation and practice across Africa.

46. In addition, with technical support from ILO, the African Union has prepared and adopted the 10-year strategic plan on the Social and Solidarity Economy 2023–2032. The plan was formally adopted in February 2025. This plan is intended to strengthen the role of the social and solidarity economy in Africa, including cooperatives, by promoting a people-centred economic model focused on social justice and decent work.<sup>37</sup> The African Union Commission also joined the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy earlier in 2025,<sup>38</sup> an international collaborative network to promote the social and solidarity economy sector and share knowledge and best practices.

47. Morocco officially launched the International Year of Cooperatives, 2025, in Rabat in February, with over 200 participants, including government officials, cooperative leaders, and development partners. In addition, Morocco hosted the eleventh Technical Committee of the Africa Ministerial Cooperative Conference, in preparation for the Africa Ministerial Cooperative Conference taking place in October 2025. Other countries organizing events for the year include Mauritius, Nigeria and the United Republic of Tanzania. In Uganda, the Kampala Medical and Allied Workers Cooperative organized a health symposium attended by medical workers, government officials and representatives of international health cooperatives.<sup>39</sup> Following the symposium, a medical camp provided free treatment to some 800 people.

48. The FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa, in collaboration with the International Cooperative Alliance-Asia and Pacific and the International Cooperative Alliance Africa, organized in January 2025 a strategic dialogue on cooperative development for rural and agrifood systems transformation in the Near East

<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.copac.coop/copac-launches-building-a-better-world-together-sdg-brief-series-update-for-iyc-2025/>.

<sup>37</sup> See [https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/conceptnotes/43938-CN-ENGLISH-CONCEPT\\_NOTE-5TH\\_STC-SDLE.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/newsevents/conceptnotes/43938-CN-ENGLISH-CONCEPT_NOTE-5TH_STC-SDLE.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> See <https://unsse.org/2025/03/31/untfsse-welcomes-african-union-and-social-enterprise-world-forum/>.

<sup>39</sup> See <https://ica.coop/en/newsroom/news/social-justice-through-cooperative-healthcare>.

and North Africa region.<sup>40</sup> The event brought together government representatives, cooperative actors, development partners and researchers to explore the role of cooperatives in fostering inclusive, sustainable rural transformation. The dialogue was focused on strengthening the enabling environment for cooperatives and leveraging their potential to enhance food security, rural livelihoods and climate resilience in the region.

49. Building on the outcomes of this dialogue, the FAO Regional Office has launched a storytelling initiative entitled “Voices of the Cooperators: A Journey Through the Agrifood Systems of the Near East and North Africa”. The publication is aimed at amplifying the voices of cooperative members across the region, highlighting their lived experiences, innovations and contributions to resilient and inclusive agrifood systems. It will serve as a platform to inspire action, foster partnerships, and strengthen the visibility and role of cooperatives in sustainable rural development.

### **International Year in Asia-Pacific**

50. The Asia and Pacific region has embraced the International Year of Cooperatives as an opportunity to amplify cooperative identity, expand public awareness and build multi-stakeholder alliances to achieve the Goals. The International Cooperative Alliance-Asia and Pacific and its member organizations across 29 countries have actively engaged in national, subregional and regional initiatives since the International Year of Cooperatives. The International Year has been proclaimed to be an extraordinary opportunity to showcase the transformative power of cooperatives in building a just, inclusive and sustainable world.<sup>41</sup>

51. That opportunity has been recognized by the parliament of Japan, where the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors passed a resolution supporting the cooperative movement.<sup>42</sup> In the resolution, the role of cooperatives in achieving the Goals and promoting social and economic progress is highlighted. It calls upon the government to, inter alia, position cooperatives as powerful entities in the creation of sustainable local communities.

52. The regional launch of the International Year was held on 20 February 2025, at an event that was co-hosted by the International Cooperative Alliance-Asia and Pacific, the International Year of Cooperatives 2025 Japan Committee and the ILO Office for Japan. It brought together 700 delegates (250 in person and 450 online), including various cooperative leaders, cooperators, government representatives and youth participants, to celebrate and reinforce the role of cooperatives in sustainable development.<sup>43</sup> Some countries presented their activity plans for the international year, including the Islamic Republic of Iran and Malaysia. The Ibaraki and Shimane prefectures of Japan also presented their activity plans. Speakers from the National Federation of University Co-operative Associations and the International Cooperative Alliance-Asia and Pacific Committee on Youth Cooperation, among others, discussed the need to integrate young leaders into the cooperative movement.

<sup>40</sup> See <https://www.fao.org/neareast/events/details/strategic-dialogue-on-cooperative-development-for-rural-and-agrifood-systems-transformation-in-the-near-east-and-north-africa-region/en#:~:text=The%20primary%20objective%20of%20this,development%20across%20the%20NENA%20region.>

<sup>41</sup> See [https://icaap.coop/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Message-From-ICA-AP-President\\_-Dr.-Chandrapal-Singh-Yadav.pdf](https://icaap.coop/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Message-From-ICA-AP-President_-Dr.-Chandrapal-Singh-Yadav.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> See [https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb\\_english.nsf/html/statics/english/ketsugi\\_e250527.html](https://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_english.nsf/html/statics/english/ketsugi_e250527.html).

<sup>43</sup> See <https://icaap.coop/2025/02/20/press-release-launch-of-the-international-year-of-cooperatives-2025-in-the-asia-pacific-region-and-japan/>.

53. In terms of communication and capacity-building, a storytelling and branding workshop held in Malaysia trained 19 communication focal points from eight countries in digital storytelling to enhance the visibility and reach of cooperatives. Hosted by Angkasa, the National Cooperative Movement of Malaysia, communication, marketing, public relations and international relations professionals engaged in hands-on exercises, interactive discussions and expert-led sessions to elevate their cooperative brands in the digital space.

54. Nepal used the occasion of its sixty-eighth National Cooperative Day, 2 April 2025, to raise awareness of the International Year. The Philippines launched the International Year at an event held in February with over 5,000 participants.<sup>44</sup> The cooperative movement in Fiji, under the aegis of the Department of Cooperative Business, convened a launch event in Suva in March 2025, reaffirming International Year of Cooperatives as a platform for regional integration. India hosted its first Youth Cooperative Research Conference in March to mark the International Year, providing a platform for young scholars to present papers on the theme “Cooperatives: key for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals”. In addition, the Tribhuvan Sahkari University Bill 2025 was passed by both houses of the Parliament of India, paving the way for the establishment of the first national cooperative university in that country.

55. Future activities planned in the region to mark the International Year include a cooperative forum to be held in Papua New Guinea in August as a capacity-building seminar, entitled “Cooperative Entrepreneurship: Shaping a Sustainable Future”, organized by the Office of Cooperative Societies of the Government of Papua New Guinea with the participation of multilateral regional agencies and the members of the International Cooperative Alliance-Asia and Pacific. An All-China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives exposition, to be held in Shanghai, China, in November 2025, is expected to be focused on promoting trade among cooperatives as part of regional International Year of Cooperatives, 2025, celebrations.

### **International Year in Latin America and the Caribbean**

56. In the Americas and the Caribbean, the International Cooperative Alliance Regional Office for the Americas has created the Regional Committee of the Allied Parties<sup>45</sup> for the International Year of Cooperatives, 2025. The high-level, broad-based committee is a strategic and inclusive space made up of eight intergovernmental organizations and 19 national Governments represented through their institutes for the promotion of cooperatives, representatives of cooperatives, non-governmental

<sup>44</sup> See <https://cda.gov.ph/updates/cda-and-philippine-cooperative-sector-launch-international-year-of-cooperatives-2025/>.

<sup>45</sup> Co-chaired by the Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations, Paula Narváez Ojeda, and the Chief Economist of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Máximo Torero Cullen. The Secretary is the ICA Regional Director for the Americas, Danilo Salerno. Organizations represented in the Committee are the UNESCO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean; the International Labour Organization Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean; the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean; the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC); the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture; the Latin American Integration Association; the Delegation of the European Union to Costa Rica, Panama and Central America; the City of Knowledge Foundation, Panama; Social Economy Europe; the National Institute of Cooperatives, Uruguay; the National Institute of Social Economy, Mexico; the Panamanian Autonomous Cooperative Institute; the Cooperative Supervisory Council, Honduras; the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Brazil; the National Institute for Partnerships and Cooperatives, Chile; the National Institute for Cooperatives, Paraguay; the Cooperative Law Committee; the International Centre for Co-operative Management, Saint Mary's University, Canada; the independent press cooperative La Diaria, Uruguay; and Cooperatives of the Americas.

organizations, foundations and experts in cooperative legislation and research. The Committee is raising awareness of the role of cooperatives and mobilizing resources from its constituencies, both financial and in kind, to multiply the impact of the International Year.

57. The regional launch of the International Year of Cooperatives in the Americas was held on 20 February in Punta del Este, Uruguay. This included official launch of the Regional Agenda of official events of Cooperatives of the Americas for the International Year.<sup>46</sup> Several activities are scheduled to raise public awareness of the role of cooperatives, with a strong research agenda covering: (a) how cooperatives can adapt to the ongoing economic and digital transformation; (b) the role of cooperatives in promoting social inclusion by empowering youth, women and marginalized communities; (c) case studies of cooperatives working on environmental sustainability and the circular economy; (d) recommendations on what will constitute an enabling environment for cooperatives; and (e) the development of statistical frameworks that can capture the socioeconomic impact of cooperatives.

58. Many of the activities that have already taken place include a joint conference between the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Cooperatives of the Americas in Santiago in May 2025, intended to increase public awareness of the contribution of cooperatives to sustainable development; and strengthening collaboration between cooperatives, the governments of the region and the United Nations system.<sup>47</sup> The Regional Committee has also organized events with FAO and ILO.

59. Cooperatives America is currently finalizing a research document on the evolution of the cooperative sector between the International Years of Cooperatives (2012–2025), which is focused on public policies, regulations and legal frameworks that foster favourable environments for the development of the cooperative sector. This echoes the recommendations in the 2023 report of the Secretary-General on cooperatives in social development, in which he called upon Governments to support cooperatives as successful business enterprises using the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach, including by conducting further research on the enabling ecosystem for cooperatives to build a solid foundation for evidence-based policymaking. The publication, due for release later in 2025, will enrich the debate on the role of cooperatives during this international year and beyond, helping to drive concrete actions to strengthen institutions, expand alliances and deepen the alignment of public policies with the cooperative identity.

60. Members of the Committee are also considering the option of making the Committee a permanent space of coordinated dialogue and results-based activities on cooperatives after the International Year.

### **International Year in Europe**

61. In Europe, the International Year of Cooperatives, 2025, has been characterized by a dynamic combination of high-level political engagement and grass-roots mobilization. One of the most prominent institutional milestones was co-hosted by the European Commission's High-level Conference on the Social Economy, in

<sup>46</sup> See <https://aciamericas.coop/en/>.

<sup>47</sup> See <https://aciamericas.coop/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/PROGRAMA-INGLES.pdf>.

Participants included leaders of cooperative unions representing cooperatives from all productive sectors, authorities of United Nations agencies, government authorities, parliamentarians, international experts, academics and representatives of international organizations. ECLAC and the Cooperative of the Americas have a permanent collaboration framework established through a memorandum of understanding signed in 2020, reflecting the commitment of ECLAC to cooperative development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

collaboration with Cooperatives Europe, the European Confederation of Workers' Cooperatives, Social Cooperatives and Participative Enterprises, and the European Economic and Social Committee. The flagship event brought together European Union officials, Member States and key stakeholders to position the cooperative model at the heart of the European strategy for enhancing competitiveness, sustainability and resilience, in particular in the light of the twin green and digital transitions.

62. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Government has committed to doubling the size of the countries' cooperatives and mutual sector, a significant boost for the United Kingdom, where cooperatives share a smaller percentage of gross domestic product compared with comparable European economies, such as France and Germany. The Government has committed to working with the sector to address the barriers that they face, such as access to finance.<sup>48</sup> The action-oriented and measurable goal is an example of the kind of commitment that countries can make to support the growth and impact of cooperatives. Boosted by this commitment, the cooperatives sector in the United Kingdom is organizing several events commemorating the International Year, including hosting the International Cooperative Alliance Congress in the city of Rochdale, considered the birthplace of the modern cooperatives movement.<sup>49</sup>

63. As part of the celebrations of the International Year of Cooperatives, the role of cooperatives was highlighted during the Second Regional Rural Youth Forum, organized by the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia in collaboration with Cooperatives Europe. Specifically, the session entitled "Collective action to empower rural youth" provided highlights of the role of cooperatives in facilitating the social, economic and policy inclusion of rural youth in agrifood systems.

64. Türkiye is preparing a series of activities to mark the occasion. A thematic event focused on the governance, financial sustainability and digital transformation of cooperatives was organized as part of the celebration of the International Day of Cooperatives. As an information product to facilitate the development of cooperatives, a cooperatives handbook has been prepared in partnership with the High Advisory Council of the Turkish Industry and Business Association.

## V. Conclusions and recommendations

65. The present report provides highlights of the transformative role that cooperatives can play in supporting countries in achieving the Goals while also supporting the outcomes of the World Social Summit. As the world faces widening inequality, social fragmentation and declining trust in institutions, cooperatives have emerged as a vital, people-centred solution to rebuild social cohesion and promote inclusive development.

66. Today, the wealthiest 1 per cent own more than 95 per cent of global wealth. In many countries, access to education and healthcare is still a privilege, not a right. These disparities disproportionately affect women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities, reinforcing cycles of exclusion. It is therefore imperative that cooperatives continue to strengthen their democratic governance practice as the best way to ensure inclusive participation in decision-making, especially from underrepresented groups.

<sup>48</sup> See <https://www.abc.ul.coop/news/labour-partys-aim-to-double-the-size-of-the-co-operative-and-mutual-sector/>.

<sup>49</sup> See <https://www.uk.coop/IYC>.

67. In a world increasingly marked by polarization and institutional failure, cooperatives represent a strategic asset. They rebuild trust from the ground up, through shared ownership, transparent governance and community accountability. Unlike top-down interventions, cooperatives are embedded in local contexts and driven by the people that they serve. This makes them uniquely resilient and responsive to community needs. Cooperatives are therefore encouraged to continue to invest in the education and skills development of members by providing ongoing training in financial literacy, digital tools and cooperative principles, in partnership with educational institutions.

68. Cooperatives also counteract the alienation and disempowerment that fuel social unrest. By giving individuals a stake in their economic and social futures, cooperatives restore a sense of agency and belonging. They model inclusive governance, offering a blueprint for democratic renewal in an era of declining civic trust. Cooperative enterprises and organizations are therefore encouraged to continue to raise awareness and build partnerships and networks through collaboration with other cooperatives, non-governmental organizations and public institutions to scale impact.

69. The United Nations designation of 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives has galvanized global action to raise awareness of the cooperatives model and conduct more research on policies and actions that can further spur their growth. Cooperatives at the national, regional and international levels are preparing to take the mantle.

70. International organizations, including the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives, are advancing cooperative statistics, research and capacity-building. The Cooperatives and Mutuals Leadership Circle is preparing concrete commitments for the World Social Summit, reinforcing the sector's role in addressing global challenges.

**71. To continue that momentum, governments may wish to adopt the following recommendations:**

- (a) Review and reform cooperative laws, ensuring their autonomy, fair taxation and access to capital for cooperatives;**
- (b) Integrate cooperatives into national development plans, recognizing them as key actors in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the outcomes of the World Social Summit;**
- (c) Provide targeted budgetary support to scale up the capacity of cooperatives and include cooperatives in sectoral strategies (e.g. agriculture, health, education and employment), in particular those led by marginalized populations, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities;**
- (d) Collaborate with international bodies, including the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives and other specialized organizations that promote cooperatives, to map the cooperative ecosystem and develop robust indicators to track their social, economic and environmental impact;**
- (e) Support cooperatives' training, leadership development, digital innovation and market access to enhance the economic and social impact of cooperatives to reduce poverty, create decent work and promote social justice and inclusion in society.**