



## Sustainable Development Goals

### Position Paper

The International Co-operative Alliance welcomes the United Nations process for the establishment of Sustainable Development Goals and considers this to be one of the highest priorities for public international policies in the coming years.

#### Who we are

The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) is an independent, non-governmental organization established in 1895 to unite, represent and serve co-operatives worldwide. It provides a global voice and forum for knowledge, expertise and coordinated action for and about co-operatives.

Alliance's members are international and national co-operative organizations from all sectors of the economy, including agriculture, industry, services, banking, retail, fisheries, health, housing, and insurance. The Alliance has members from one hundred countries, representing one billion individuals worldwide. Several hundred million people draw all or part of their income from a co-operative.

The Alliance is the guardian of the co-operative definition, values and principles enshrined in the Statement on the Cooperative Identity and included in the ILO Recommendation 193/2002 on the Promotion of Cooperatives<sup>1</sup>.

#### Our Vision of Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development is at the very core of co-operative enterprises. This is a model of business based on ethical values and principles whose goal is to provide for the needs and aspirations of their members.

Through self-help and empowerment, enhancing local resources and capacities and reinvesting surpluses, co-operatives play a pivotal role in responding to local community needs and objectives.

Instead of looking at short-term goals of maximizing profits, co-operatives have a long-term aim of sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental responsibility.

Therefore co-operative enterprises support and promote a vision of Sustainable Development based on a triple bottom line approach: economic, social and environmental.

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<sup>1</sup> *Co-operative values: self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity; Co-operative principles: Voluntary and open membership; Democratic member control; Member economic participation; Autonomy and independence; Education, training and information; Co-operation among co-operatives; Concern for community. More details can be found [HERE](#).*

## The Goals

The International Co-operative Alliance considers that the report of the High Level Panel of Eminent People on the Post 2015 Development Agenda is, in general, a good basis to the establishment of Sustainable Development Goals. Overall the report identifies the main challenges and issues linked to a global definition of the problem. Furthermore, these goals should be considered as interdependent in the sense that ones cannot be achieved without others. For example, ending poverty cannot be achieved without creating jobs, securing sustainable livelihoods and equitable growth.

- End poverty
- Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality
- Provide quality education and life long learning
- Ensure healthy lives
- Ensure food security and good nutrition
- Achieve universal access to water and sanitation
- Secure sustainable energy
- Create jobs, sustainable livelihoods and equitable growth
- Manage natural resources assets sustainably
- Ensure good governance and effective institutions
- Ensure stable and peaceful societies
- Create a global enabling environment and catalyze long-term finance

Apart from these, the International Co-operative Alliance considers that affordable and sustainable access to community services should be added to the list given its fundamental relevance to human dignity and social integration. These include, among others, access to housing and housing security; universal health coverage; education and other social services.

To achieve these objectives the International Co-operative Alliance considers that there is a need to **establish concrete, measurable and ambitious indicators and targets**.

## Our Contribution

Closing the 2012 UN International Year of Co-operatives, the UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon recognized that "as a strong partner in development, the co-operative movement works with the United Nations every day to empower people, enhance human dignity and help achieve the Millennium Development Goals"

The Rio+20 conclusions also "acknowledge the role of co-operatives (...) in contributing to social inclusion and poverty reduction, in particular in developing countries".

Co-operative enterprises include in their day-to-day business operations a multitude of economic, social and environmental objectives, based on their values and principles.

Co-operatives contribute to sustainable development by bringing a democratic approach to access to land, capital and entrepreneurial decisions. By doing this, it sends a message to the whole society saying that there are sustainable alternatives to the organization of business and social activities in a more ethical and people-centered way.

The concrete contribution of co-operatives to the proposed Sustainable Development Goals is vastly illustrated in several documents.

As a result of the UN International Year of Co-operatives (2012), under the motto "Co-operative Enterprises Build a Better World", the International Co-operative Alliance collected a series of stories that illustrate how, all over the globe, co-operative enterprises are working towards sustainability: [COOP STORIES](#)

Some examples from different sectors of activity and regions are:

Co-operatives provide employment in the form of decent work. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), in Kenya, 63% of the population derives their livelihoods directly or indirectly from co-operatives, and approximately 250,000 Kenyans are directly employed by co-operative based institutions<sup>2</sup>.

In Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, the co-operative SAGUAPAC has become the largest urban water co-operative in the world, with 183,000 water connections serving the equivalent of 1.2 million people and a water quality of 99.3 out of 100.

In the retail sector, co-operatives are at the forefront of sustainability and fighting climate change. A complete report is accessible online<sup>3</sup>. As an example, the Co-operative Group in the United Kingdom is a leading retailer for the promotion and sale of Fair Trade products as a part of its ethical food policy.

The Watthan Artisans Co-operative in Cambodia brings together some of those who suffered the after effects of the Pol Pot regime. Bearing injuries from landmines, bombs or having suffered from polio, deafness or psychological scars, the members of the Watthan cooperative came together in 2004 to produce handicrafts. They were supported by an NGO, which trained them to work with cotton, locally produced silk, reclaimed hardwood or recycled materials.

In France, the co-operative bank<sup>4</sup> *Crédit Coopératif* introduced a mechanism whereby it donates the value of 0.01 per cent of every interbank currency transaction it undertakes. The funds are donated at the conclusion of each year to a recognized NGO of its choice that works in international co-operation for development, thereby helping to fulfill the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

The Heiveld Co-operative for tea farmers in South Africa has its own tea court, where rooibos is chopped, fermented and dried. As well as operating the processing facility, the cooperative also provides organic and fair-trade certification services to its members, as well as training on sustainable resource use, adaptation to climate change, organic production and sustainable harvesting. It also exports bulk and packaged rooibos to domestic and international clients and sells inputs like seed to members. This has helped many small-scale farmers who previously had poor access to land, markets and rooibos-tea processing facilities, and as a result received low prices for their products<sup>5</sup>.

Since 2011 the Korea National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives has been implementing a Knowledge Sharing Program through which it invites fisheries cooperators from developing countries every year to share its knowledge with other co-operative organizations<sup>6</sup>.

TIP Friendly Society (TIP) caters for the insurance needs of Jamaican educators. Its objective is to improve the economic, social and health status of members, staff and the wider community by providing thrift and credit facilities as well as sickness, accident and death benefits. But it has also demonstrated how it is reinvesting in the community through its scholarship program, which assists its members and their dependents in meeting their educational needs. The program is not only for university funding at undergraduate and post-graduate levels, but also for secondary school education.

After the hurricane that devastated Haiti, the first housing co-op was launched in Jacmel on 4 December 2011 the Southeastern Haiti Savings, Housing and Small Business Credit Co-op (CEL-CPME SE). Co-op members say they are the first positive and organized response from Haiti's civil society to the earthquake. It aims to mobilize the savings of co-op members to provide cheap loans, since commercial banks charge far too much. Many of the members already have their own house but they have loan their savings to help others.

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<sup>2</sup> [ILO Website](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Euro Coop Climate Change Report](#)

<sup>4</sup> *For a perspective on the resilience of financial co-operatives see the ILO study "[Resilience in a Downturn: the power of financial cooperatives](#)"*

<sup>5</sup> *For an outlook of the contributions of agriculture co-operatives please consult the [FAO website](#).*

<sup>6</sup> [Knowledge Sharing Program](#)

Founded in 1967 as an alternative to the capital-based health plans and the increasing commodification of the health system and based on the principles of professional excellence and fairness the *União dos Médicos de Santos (Unimed Santos)* was the first health co-operative in Brazil. Since then, Unimed has grown to become a network of 360 cooperatives covering over 80% of Brazil's counties. In addition to 100 of its own hospitals, 54 laboratories and 456 ambulances, it also has 3,033 associated hospitals within its network, and provides care to 19 million customers, 10% of the country's population.

## Our Policy Asks

Even though co-operative enterprises contribute every day and in almost every sector of the economy towards the achievement of sustainable development goals, there are still several obstacles that prevent them from fully exploring their potential.

A major constraint to co-operative enterprises in many countries is the poor enabling environment: either due to restrictive laws and regulations stemming from the legacy of state control or, in some cases, the complete absence of a co-operative legal framework. The negative impact of this lack cannot be overemphasized. To function well, such organizations need a robust enabling environment with solid prudential regulation, protecting democratic member control and ownership, autonomy, as well as voluntary and open membership. Further, such a framework must be simple and transparent concerning its registration, auditing and reporting processes.

Unleashing the full potential of co-operatives requires, among other measures:

- **Recognition** that co-operative enterprises are a well suited model of business to deliver Sustainable Development Goals; the generation and equitable distribution of wealth, the creation and maintenance of sustainable enterprises and jobs at the local level and the concern for the surrounding community are specific characteristics of co-operatives that makes them well suited to deliver these goals.
- **Inclusion** of specific targets and indicators related to the promotion and development of co-operatives in member countries, in accordance to the definition, values and principles referred above; these targets should be associated with a concept of growth that includes other factors than GDP, in particular targets associated with social and environmental indicators<sup>7</sup>.
- **Access** to specific implementation measures and programs including funding; these programs and measures should be adapted to the specific characteristics of co-operatives and respect their specific business model, by which, inter alia, the share capital must be owned and democratically controlled by their members. These programs should encourage co-operatives' trend to build financial reserves on their own funds and, wherever they reach a certain density, to establish mutualized financial instruments among themselves. Any financial initiative willing to promote co-operatives should acknowledge their needs and contribute through existing co-operative intermediaries, whenever these exist.
- **Participation** of co-operative structures in the discussions and decision-making processes regarding the Sustainable Development Goals. The decision-making process should be made in full compliance with participatory principles. Moreover, the identification of specific measures and programs should ensure the involvement of local business, their representative organizations and civil society. Programs should be designed through local consultation processes and preceded by in-depth assessment studies of the local context.

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<sup>7</sup> See "[Co-operative Growth for the 21st Century](#)"

The International Co-operative Alliance considers that it is in the interest of all people and institutions the support for the development of co-operative enterprises and is available to work with the relevant institutions to implement these views.