Cooperatives and the Sustainable Development Goals

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Cooperatives and sustainable development

• The UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) acknowledged the role of cooperatives in contributing to social inclusion and poverty reduction, particularly in developing countries.

• Sustainability is recognized as one of the five pillars of the International Co-operative Alliance’s (ICA) Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade, which aims to position cooperatives as builders of economic, social and environmental sustainability by 2020.

• Cooperative enterprises are present in all sectors of the economy and have already demonstrated their capacity to address numerous themes proposed to be included in the post-2015 development agenda.
Post-2015 Development Agenda

• Rio+20 UNCSD in June 2012: What’s next after the MDGs?
• UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons (HLPE) proposed the post-2015 Development Agenda
• Five transformative shifts to guide the post-2015 Development Agenda:
  – **Universal equality**: everyone entitled to human rights and a livelihood to eradicate poverty by 2030
  – **Sustainable development**: integrate social, economic & environmental goals; stop climate change and reduce unsustainable consumption
  – **Inclusive economic growth**: all people to benefit from growth through employment creation
  – **Peace, good governance and dependable institutions** for all citizens
  – **A new global partnership**: coherent multilateral decision-making and strict enforcement of rules
| **Sustainable Development Goals**  
As proposed by the Open Working Group on the SDGs, June 2014 |
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<td><strong>End poverty</strong></td>
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<td><strong>End hunger, achieve food security and adequate nutrition, and promote</strong></td>
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<td>Attain healthy life for all at all ages</td>
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<td><strong>Equitable and inclusive quality education and life-long learning</strong></td>
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<td>Attain gender equality, empower women and girls</td>
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<td><strong>Secure water and sanitation</strong></td>
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<td>Ensure access to affordable, sustainable, and reliable modern energy services</td>
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<td><strong>Promote strong, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent</strong></td>
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The UN has stimulated international debate on the contents of SDGs:
- Thematic, national & international consultations on SDGs
- Contributions by states, civil society, and international organizations

Cooperatives have not been active and conspicuous in the debate/consultations on SDGs

Why are cooperatives not fully involved and heard in the SDGs debate?
The paper uses as a starting point the 12 SDGs as proposed by the HLPE in 2013.

The purpose of the paper is to:
- Contribute to the understanding of the actual & potential role of cooperatives in sustainable development
- Stimulate discussion on the relevance of cooperatives in the design and implementation of SDGs

Paper based on:
- Secondary data
- An on-line questionnaire survey
- In-depth interviews with some cooperative leaders
Cooperatives and the post-2015 development agenda

- Cooperatives are well-placed to contribute to the post-2015 development agenda:
  - They endeavour to meet the economic progress of the members while satisfying their socio-cultural interests and protecting the environment
  - Good governance features in the principles of cooperatives
  - Significant contribution to the realization of MDGs
Cooperatives and the proposed SDGs

**Poverty reduction**
- Income generation
- Employment creation
- Social welfare services

**Gender equality and women’s empowerment**
- Coops expand economic opportunities for women
- Gender divisions of labour

**Quality education and lifelong learning**
- Coops facilitate access to education (coop schools, teacher coops, educational support for members and families)
- Serve as lifelong learning centres

**Ensure healthy lives**
- Health sector coops (hospitals, health insurance, healthcare delivery, other social care and home-based care services)
Cooperatives and the proposed SDGs

**Food security and good nutrition**
- Coops produce and market food
- Increase producers’ access to inputs and markets
- Over 50% of the world’s ag produce marketed by coops
- Improved nutrition through diversified diets, knowledge sharing, extension

**Access to water and sanitation**
- Coops provide these services in urban and rural areas, offering alternative to both public and private sectors

**Sustainable energy**
Coops contribute to secure sustainable energy
- Increasing the share of renewable energy
- Integration of renewable energy projects
- Connection to electricity supply

**Employment creation, livelihoods & equitable growth**
Cooperatives
- Create employment & generate income
- Safeguard jobs
- Support livelihoods
- Promote equitable distribution of profits to ensure equitable growth
Cooperatives and the proposed SDGs

Sustainable natural resource management
- Environmental coops
- Social coops encouraging reuse of resources
- Waste pickers & recyclers coops

Promotion of stable and peaceful societies
- Coops are source of “positive social capital”
- Coops in post-conflict situations: credit, counselling, skills development
- Promote reconciliation and peacebuilding

Good governance
- Coop governance based on values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, honesty, openness, equity & equality
- Democratic member control a key principle of coops

Global enabling environment and long-term finance
- Coops bridge trade barriers between developed and developing countries, eg. fair trade
- Contribute to the stabilization of global financial crisis
- Provide the financial base for development activities
Conclusions of the paper

• Coops have all along contributed to sustainable development in the areas of the proposed 12 SDGs.
• However, coops have not been proactive in national and international debates.
• Coops not fully engaged in the debate on formulation of SDGs:
  – Focus on the local and specific issues of interest.
  – Lack of information about SDGs or waiting for invitation.
  – Lack of voice and representation of coops (or both?).
• The potential of coops to advance the realization of SDGs seem not fully recognized by policy-makers.
Recommendations of the paper

The United Nations should recognize the role of cooperatives in the realization of sustainable development by including cooperatives in the indicators, targets and funding mechanisms for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Cooperatives should be proactive by getting involved in discussions at all levels (local, national, regional and international) on the post-2015 development agenda in order to secure the opportunity to share their experiences on the realization of sustainable development.

National, regional and international cooperative organizations should enhance their representation and advocacy roles, to improve the presence and voice of cooperatives in the post-2015 development agenda and the wider international policy debates.
The online survey

• Findings based on an online survey are presented in a brief, which is available through the ILO COOP website www.ilo.org/coop

• Purpose of survey is to find out how:
  – The cooperative business model is contributing towards achieving sustainable development
  – Actors in the cooperative movement perceive the debate around the post-2015 development framework and the role of cooperatives in this debate

• A total of 291 respondents in three different languages (EN, FR, SP) from:
  – Primary cooperatives
  – Cooperative unions and federations
  – Cooperative support institutions
  – Governmental and non-governmental organizations
Contribution of cooperatives to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

MDGs where the cooperative movement has made the most significant contributions:

- MDG 8 Developing a global partnership for development
- MDG 7 Ensuring environmental sustainability
- MDG 3 Promoting gender equality and empowering women
- Results achieved through: training, knowledge sharing, research, direct project implementation, organizing events.

Cooperative movements’ contributions toward MDGs:

- Focused more on local and national levels, with less activity on regional and international levels
- Respondents reported less contributions on health-related MDGs (improving maternal health, reducing child mortality, and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria & other diseases).

ILOcoop
www.iло.coop
Cooperatives’ participation in the post-2015 debate

- Nearly half of the respondents expressed their organization’s participation in thematic, national or regional consultations on the post-2015 development agenda!

- The reasons given for not having taken part in the consultation processes include:
  - lack of knowledge about consultations
  - not feeling that they were invited or welcome to join them

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<th>Consultations</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<td>Thematic consultations</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>National consultations</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Regional consultations</td>
<td>19.32%</td>
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<td>None</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
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Cooperatives’ potential to contribute to the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

• Respondents noted that the proposed SDGs are well-aligned with the priorities of their organizations

• Many of them indicated the high potential of cooperatives and their movement to contributing to the achievement of the proposed goals

• The respondents identified the following as goals where cooperatives have the most potential to contribute to:
  – Ending poverty (mentioned by 27% of the respondents), and
  – Creating jobs, sustainable livelihoods, and equitable growth (20%).

• Potential of cooperatives was also seen significant for the following proposed SDGs:
  – Ensuring food security and good nutrition (10%),
  – Providing quality education and lifelong learning (9%),
  – Ensuring good governance and effective institutions (8%), and
  – Empowering girls and women and achieving gender equality (7%).
Cooperatives create jobs

- Close to 85% of the respondents reported their institutions were involved in the promotion of decent work and job creation.

- Cooperatives contribute to this goal by:
  - Creating stable employment, advocating and promoting social protection for all.
  - Complying with international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work.
Cooperatives are resilient to crises

- Cooperative enterprises across sectors have continued to grow and prosper during the crises, which is reaffirmed by the survey results.

- **68 per cent** of respondents observed that the number of cooperatives has grown in their country or region during the past decade.

- **63 per cent** noted that individual membership in cooperatives has increased.

- **57 per cent** perceived the number of people employed by cooperatives as having risen.
Challenges facing cooperatives

• Respondents identified several challenges for cooperatives in contributing towards achieving sustainable development:

• Inadequate enabling environment for cooperative development
  63% of respondents observed that government support to cooperatives had either remained the same or declined in the past decade

• Cooperatives’ limited engagement on articulating a global vision for sustainable development
  29% of respondents reported their institutions’ contributions to sustainable development was at local and 35% at national level, compared to 19% at regional and 17% at international level

• Misconceptions persist on the cooperative model of business among employers’ organizations, trade unions as well as research institutions
The way forward for cooperatives to better engage in sustainable development

- Cooperative movement is focused on delivering at local level than communicating impact to the global level
- There are two critical elements to securing more active engagement of the cooperative movement on sustainable development:
  1. Government’s provision of a supportive policy and legal framework
  2. Cooperatives and their organizations promoting the cooperative model as outlined in the ILO Recommendation 193 concerning the Promotion of Cooperatives