

Institutional resources of co-operatives at the global level for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals



Institutional resources of co-operatives at the global level for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals

Author

Fran McCrae

Fran McCrae is Policy & Communications Officer for the International Co-operative Alliance and Coordinator of the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC). She currently oversees projects on co-operative engagement in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, co-operative statistics, and gender equality and women's empowerment. In prior roles, she managed communications for the 2012 UN International Year of Co-operatives at the European Community of Consumer Co-operatives (Euro Coop), consulted on EU environment policy, and provided communications support to the Texas House of Representatives.

This paper was prepared at the request of the Division for Social Policy and Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to be presented at its Expert Group Meeting, “Ensuring That No One Is Left Behind: The Cooperative Sector as a Partner in the Implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, held in New York City on 16–17 November 2016.

Published in 2016 by the International Co-operative Alliance

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
CO-OPS FOR 2030	7
<i>How this resource can be leveraged</i>	8
GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS	9
<i>How these resources can be leveraged</i>	10
STORIES.COOP	10
<i>How this resource can be leveraged</i>	11
SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING FOR CO-OPERATIVES: A GUIDEBOOK	11
<i>How this resource can be leveraged</i>	12
THEMATIC COMMITTEES	12
<i>How this resource can be leveraged</i>	13
ALLIANCE YOUTH NETWORK	15
<i>How this resource can be leveraged</i>	15
FRAMEWORK PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION	16
<i>How this resource can be leveraged</i>	17
GLOBAL CO-OPERATIVE IMPACT FUND	17
<i>How this resource can be leveraged</i>	17
5-5-5 MUTUAL MICROINSURANCE STRATEGY	18
<i>How this resource can be leveraged</i>	19
CONCLUSION	20

Introduction

As people-centred, values-driven businesses, co-operatives are active contributors to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are ending poverty, by providing a space for the world's poor to create their own economic opportunities and by improving access to basic services like clean water and clean energy. They are eradicating hunger and building food security by securing the livelihoods of farmers and making safe and adequate food accessible. They are furthering gender equity and empowering women by creating ways for women to participate in the economy and become leaders. They are creating decent work and developing rural areas sustainably. They are reducing inequalities by including the most marginalised groups (young people, indigenous people, women) in the economy. They are combatting climate change by integrating environmental sustainability into the growth and strategies of their businesses.

To continue achieving the SDGs and to make an even more important impact, co-operatives can leverage a variety of resources from the co-operative movement, co-operative minded organisations, governments, and intergovernmental organisations, such as UN agencies. When considering co-operative organisations at the global level, institutional resources come from the International Co-operative Alliance (Alliance) and its regional offices, global sector organisations, and thematic committees.

The International Co-operative Alliance is an independent, non-governmental organisation established in 1895 to unite, represent, and serve co-operatives worldwide. The Alliance provides a global voice and forum for knowledge, expertise, and coordinated action for and about co-operatives. The members of the Alliance are international and national co-operative organisations from all sectors of the economy. The Alliance has members from over 100 countries, representing close to one billion individuals worldwide. The Alliance also has eight sector organisations, representing co-operatives in agriculture, health, housing, retail, industry and services, insurance, banking, and fisheries.

This paper will explore what resources are offered by the Alliance and how co-operatives can leverage them for greater contribution to the SDGs.

Co-ops for 2030

To respond to the UN's call to action for co-operatives to participate in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the members of the International Co-operative Alliance decided in November 2015 to establish an online platform that would allow co-operatives to learn about the SDGs and pledge commitments to achieve them: Co-ops for 2030 (www.coopsfor2030.coop).

To make the 17 SDGs and corresponding 169 targets more approachable for co-operatives, the Alliance regrouped the SDGs into four action areas where co-operatives can make the most important impact: eradicating poverty, improving access to basic goods and services, protecting the environment, and building a more sustainable food system. Key targets for co-operative engagement were identified (e.g. target 2.3 on doubling the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers), and potential pledges and indicators for each target were drafted (e.g. 'We commit to increase our members' agricultural production by X% by 2030', with the indicator being the volume of agricultural production per member and/or average income of producer-members, by sex and indigenous status).

The educational component of the Co-ops for 2030 platform is complemented by the engagement portion. The website has an online form where co-operatives can submit their pledges and a search function for users to explore submitted pledges by country, action area, SDG, and target. The Alliance hopes to add to the platform search filters and opportunities for co-operatives to report their progress leading up to the 2030 timeline.

Co-ops for 2030 was launched on the 2016 International Day of Co-operatives in July. As of October 2016, 76 co-operatives in 29 countries have made a total of 156 pledges.



How this resource can be leveraged

Co-operative impacts are most visible at the local level, being enterprises so deeply entrenched in the communities in which they operate. This means that, for the most part, the contributions of co-operatives to sustainable development remain unknown to the wider co-operative movement, the development community, and policymakers.

Co-ops for 2030 has the potential to change that, by housing a repository of case studies of SDG implementation around the world.

The Alliance can use the pledges made by co-operatives to show global and national policymakers what co-operatives are doing in any given country, and use that information as leverage to improve the legal and regulatory environment for co-operatives.

The platform additionally provides an opportunity for co-operatives to learn from one another and strive to do more. If a co-operator sees a particularly high level of SDG engagement in his or her country, it could inspire increased ambition in future pledges.

The role of shared messaging is also fundamental. Co-ops for 2030 familiarises co-operatives with the SDG language and encourages them to adopt it as their own, uniting the movement under one campaign with a globally recognised theme. These shared messages can help co-operatives more effectively communicate their advantages as businesses, and make them more appealing partners for government officials, potential investors, civil society, and other enterprises.

Global communications tools

The Alliance has developed several communications tools: the Co-operative Marque, the .coop domain, and the Global Co-operative Marketing Campaign.



The Co-operative Marque (www.identity.coop) was developed in 2012 as a global branding symbol of the co-operative movement and its collective identity. The Marque aims to differentiate co-operatives from investor- or privately-owned businesses. As of September 2016, 3,025 co-operatives had registered to use the marque.

The .coop domain is for the exclusive use of co-operatives and allows for further differentiation as a co-operative.

Together, the Co-operative Marque and .coop domain can be used by co-operatives in a toolkit that offers videos, editorial work and messaging for newsletters and websites, a poster, banners, and access to the Alliance online store.

The Global Co-operative Marketing Campaign is a global marketing campaign to promote the co-operative identity. It was launched in 2015 by the Alliance Co-operative Round Table, an Alliance working group and think tank of leading co-operators from primary co-operatives.

The campaign includes a website that educates who and what co-operatives are and how they are unique as businesses; provides examples of co-operative social responsibility and tools for co-operators to better communicate the co-operative difference; diffuses a series of videos showcasing the co-operative identity; and features a co-op locator for users to find co-operatives near them. It serves as a tool for national co-operative movements to raise awareness domestically in a way that is coherent and unified around the globe.

The campaign has already launched nationally in Argentina, Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Finland, Greece, India, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States – with plans to be replicated in additional countries. Campaign materials can be customised to suit national contexts using the tool kit videos and promotional files.

How these resources can be leveraged

Co-operatives are often left out of discussions on sustainable development, because governments, other private sector actors, civil society, and the general public do not always understand what co-operatives are. Many mistake them for businesses like any other, and others mistake them for non-profits.

Co-operatives need to be able to communicate their message and inspire people to join the co-operative movement. A global-level campaign that can be customised from culture to culture can support the promotion of the co-operative model as a means to implement the SDGs.

The Co-operative Marque, the .coop domain, and the Global Co-operative Marketing Campaign are all resources for co-operatives to use online, in their communications, in their stores, on their farms, in their offices, or in their communities to spread the co-operative difference and create added value as a development actor.

Stories.coop

The Stories.coop digital campaign was an initiative of the Alliance and the European Research Institute on Cooperative and Social Enterprises (Euricse) during the 2012 United Nations International Year of Co-operatives to spread the benefits of co-operation through the tradition of storytelling.



Stories.coop currently has more than 450 stories searchable by country, sector, and number of employees. Many of the entries are animated with pictures, slideshows, and videos.

How this resource can be leveraged

Similar to the Co-ops for 2030 platform, Stories.coop is a database of narratives showing how co-operatives are furthering sustainable development. The co-operative movement has heard time and time again that policymakers require concrete examples of co-operative contributions, and Stories.coop is source of those examples.

Beyond advocacy, Stories.coop is a space where all co-operatives, including primary co-operatives in remote parts of the world, can share their stories and encourage other co-operatives to respond to the call to action in the 2030 Agenda.

The sustainability focus of co-operatives has them already engaged in implementation of the SDGs, whether they know it or not, and Stories.coop is another opportunity to promote their activities.

Sustainability Reporting for Co-operatives: A Guidebook

The Alliance released in March 2016 *Sustainability Reporting for Co-operatives: A Guidebook*¹, prepared by Sustainability Solutions Group. The Guidebook was created with both large and small co-operatives with varying levels of expertise with sustainability reporting in mind.



1

http://ica.coop/sites/default/files/media_items/ICA%20Sustainability%20ok.pdf

The Guidebook makes the case for why co-operatives should add sustainability reporting to their activities, provides advice for developing and communicating a sustainability report, outlines globally recognised systems for sustainability reporting, and offers sample reports as examples.

How this resource can be leveraged

It will be impossible to gauge achievement of the SDGs without proper monitoring and evaluation processes in place. The UN is doing its part by recommending indicators for Member States to integrate into their frameworks; how can private sector actors do theirs?

Reporting that examines economic, social, and environmental sustainability provides a solution for co-operatives to track their progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Guidebook is a tool for co-operatives to improve or initiate their sustainability reporting, and is the only guide of its kind that is specific to co-operatives.

Thematic Committees

The co-operative members of the Alliance give specific attention to issues of joint interest through global thematic committees. There are currently three committees: Co-operative Law, Gender Equality, and Co-operative Research. Given their high levels of member engagement and



ability to coordinate action on a given issue, they have the potential to strengthen co-operative contributions to the SDGs.

The Co-operative Law Committee groups experts to work towards an enabling policy and regulatory environment for co-operatives. With legal

frameworks as part of the co-operative movement's *Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade*², this is an important area of collaboration.

In addition to advising the Alliance on co-operative law matters, the Committee is organising the 1st International Forum on Co-operative Law in November 2016 and working to develop a global co-operative law database (to be named CoopLex) that houses legislation and court decisions from around the world and provides a space for experts to interact and share.

Established in 2001, the Gender Equality Committee comprises representatives of co-operatives around the world, dedicated to the promotion of gender equity and women's empowerment within the co-operative movement and beyond.

In October 2016, the members of the Committee decided to adopt a strategy that focuses on SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) as its cornerstone. Members plan to better collect co-operative examples of gender parity and empowerment and to educate co-operatives about the importance of equality in their governance and activities.

The Committee on Co-operative Research has been bridging academic research and the co-operative world since 1957. The Committee organises a biennial global research conference and compiles papers in an annual *Review of International Co-operation*.

The Committee also involves emerging researchers in its work through its Young Scholars programme.

How this resource can be leveraged

The Alliance's Thematic Committees concentrate a group of co-operative experts and mobilise them on a specific issue. The energy and resources of such focused work can be substantial for deepening the impact of co-operative implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

² http://ica.coop/sites/default/files/media_items/ICA%20Blueprint%20-%20Final%20-%20Feb%2013%20EN.pdf

For example, in recent research on the role of gender in co-operatives³, findings suggest that while co-operatives are well-suited for equality and empowerment, they could do much more: increased inclusion of women in leadership positions, more and better training and professional development opportunities, and more participatory governance. The Gender Equality Committee, with its new commitment to the SDGs, is a potential global-level resource to spur such additional action, and a force for inspiring others.

The Co-operative Law Committee brings to the table CoopLex, which will educate the co-operative community and law experts about the enabling environment in a given country. Co-operators need to be informed about the regional and national legal and regulatory context in order to be more effective drivers of sustainable development. For example, if a co-operative learns about potential tax incentives for hiring persons with disabilities, the business might decide to create additional opportunities for a more inclusive workplace.

The Committee on Co-operative Research possesses the potential and know-how to create and promote literature on co-operatives as sustainable development actors. The Committee connects and engages a vast network of co-op minded academics, while also creating opportunities to fill research gaps. Evidence of this can be seen in the November 2015 “Co-operatives and the World of Work” Conference, co-hosted by the Committee and the International Labour Organization (ILO). More than 150 responses to the call for papers were received, proposing research on job creation, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue, among others.

³ ILO, 2015a. *Advancing gender equality: The co-operative way*, Geneva, Switzerland:

International Labour Organization. Available at: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---coop/documents/publication/wcms_379095.pdf.

Alliance, 2016. *Gender equality and women's empowerment in co-operatives: A literature review*, Brussels, Belgium: International Co-operative Alliance. Available at:

<http://ica.coop/en/media/library/publications/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-co-operatives-literature-review>.

Alliance Youth Network

Since 2003, the Alliance Youth Network has helped young co-operators to provide advice to the Alliance on youth-related issues, facilitated the participation and integration of youth in co-operatives through opportunities for reflection, discussion, exchange, research, and training; and disseminated information of interest to co-operative youth.

The Youth Network organises regular events for young people at global conferences for co-operators, prepares statements on International Youth Day, has a representative on the Alliance Global Board, and is currently



conducting a feasibility study on a potential social media platform for co-operators.

How this resource can be leveraged

The SDGs, particularly SDG 8, have specific targets related to improving educational and economic opportunities for youth. The Alliance Youth Network, with its membership of aware and active young people, has the potential to engage youth in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and encourage their co-operatives to commit to furthering youth-related targets.

Also, the Alliance Youth Network interacts directly with the Alliance global structures, helping to keep young professionals in the co-operative movement informed and involved in SDG implementation.

Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission

In March 2016, the Alliance signed a framework partnership agreement with the European Commission, “Co-operatives in development – people-centered businesses in action”, to advance and develop the co-operative sector worldwide. The goal of the partnership is to strengthen the Alliance’s capacity to promote the co-operative model within the international development field.

Activities under the scope of the partnership will support the development of an enabling environment for co-operatives, through allowing the Alliance and its regional office staff to participate in global, regional, and national policy processes and dialogues, technical and institutional



training, and visibility and communications efforts to create awareness and knowledge about co-operatives as development actors.

Furthermore, the partnership agreement will support institutional information flow and knowledge building, mapping co-operative actors around the world, and comparative knowledge on legal frameworks in the four regions (Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe).

As part of the partnership, the Global Co-operative Development Platform, a network of co-operative actors in development, was launched in October 2016.

The Framework Partnership Agreement will run until August 2020.

How this resource can be leveraged

The Framework Partnership Agreement with the European Commission is an unprecedented opportunity for co-operatives to position themselves as important development actors, improve the capacities of regional co-operative actors in a uniform and cross-cutting way, and better engage co-operatives in global policy scene.

With dedicated work on policy, communications, and research, the partnership will strengthen the co-operative movement to better implement the SDGs, under the tutelage and with the support of the European Union, one of the most significant global development actors.

Global Co-operative Impact Fund

The Alliance and Crédit Coopératif in France are collaborating on securing investors for the Global Co-operative Impact Fund, which will extend fair capital opportunities to help developing co-operatives in the financial sector in Africa. The GCIF seeks to support quasi-equity and long-term needs, provide technical assistance to support management capacity, business planning, and impact measurement, improve understanding of the co-operative identity, and establish co-operatives as an investment class.

The GCIF will target co-operative financial institutions, such as banks, credit unions, and microfinance institutions, that have an agriculture focus. Impacts of the investments will be measured according to performance indicators linked to social, financial, environmental, and co-operative governance issues. Sample metrics include percent of female borrowers, number of green loans, number of clients below the poverty line, and total dividend to members.

How this resource can be leveraged

Starting any new business requires significant upfront capital, and keeping that business afloat requires skilled management and forward thinking.

The GCIF will help new financial co-operatives in Africa establish themselves and with the requirement to integrate the co-operative identity and impact measurement, these fledgling co-operatives will also be implicated in the co-operative commitment to the SDGs.

The GCIF serves as a partnership opportunity for the co-operative movement, by giving co-operatives the resources they need to pull their members out of poverty and pay the co-operative benefit forward.

Africa is also the region where the co-operative movement is the least developed, and the GCIF will efforts in the region to reduce poverty and hunger, secure livelihoods, and boost financial inclusion.

5-5-5 Mutual Microinsurance Strategy

Since January 2015, the International Cooperative and Mutual Insurance Federation (ICMIF) has had in place its 5-5-5 Mutual Microinsurance Strategy⁴, which aims to extend mutual microinsurance to five million low-income households in five emerging markets (Colombia, India, Kenya, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka) over the course of five years.

To ensure success, ICMIF selected countries that are frontrunners in microinsurance (large microinsurance markets, large uninsured populations, and high poverty rates); where an ICMIF member already has a strong presence and expertise in mutual microinsurance; where an ICMIF member is ready and willing to partner in developing and implementing such a program; and where there is strong local research capacity and potential partners to complete a country study.

The 5-5-5 Strategy is comprised of three phases



⁴ http://www.icmif.org/filedepot_download/5857/762

for each country: a diagnostic study of the mutual market landscape, a diagnostic-based strategy to develop the mutual market, and an intervention programme with local and technical support.

How this resource can be leveraged

The 5-5-5 Mutual Microinsurance Strategy exemplifies the power of the collective inherent in the co-operative movement, and has the potential to alleviate poverty and build resilience against disasters for at least 225 million households.

ICMIF members will accelerate the growth of these emerging markets, and, as leaders, pave the way for other private sector and development actors to contribute to the betterment of low-income people.

Conclusion

A wealth of institutional resources for co-operatives and by co-operatives exist at the global level to support the movement in its implementation of the SDGs.

The International Co-operative Alliance and its affiliates have developed these resources in the hopes of supporting co-operatives in meeting the needs of their members.

Challenges persist: though these resources are available, not all co-operatives, in particular primary co-operatives and those in rural areas, are aware that they exist. For greater impact, the co-operative movement must therefore count on its partners – governments, the United Nations, and civil society – to further disseminate these tools and to collaborate on the development of future resources.

It is only through a joint vision, shared action, and a collective spirit that the 2030 Agenda can be achieved.