

PRACTICE, PROMOTE AND PROTECT:

ICA's Strategic Plan to Empower the Future of Cooperatives
(2026–2030)





International
Cooperative
Alliance

About the International Cooperative Alliance

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) is the global voice of the cooperative movement, representing over 3 million cooperative enterprises worldwide. For 130 years, we have united cooperatives across all sectors and regions, promoting the cooperative model as a pathway to economic democracy, social justice, and sustainable development.



What's Inside this Document:

Page 5 – Introduction: A Strategy for Our Times

Page 6 – Why Cooperatives Matter Now

Page 8 – Why Government Leaders Should Care

Page 9 – Why Academics and Cooperators Should Care

Page 10 – Our 2030 Strategy: Executive Summary

Page 14–15 – Our Theory of Change

Page 16 – Strategic Objectives

Page 17 – Strategic Interventions

Page 18–19 – Expected Impacts

Page 22 – Why This Strategy Matters for Everyone

Page 24 – Highlights for Governments and Leaders

Page 26 – Highlights for Academic Community

Page 28 – Highlights for Cooperatives and the Public

Page 31 – Connect With Us

Forewords

The cooperative movement has always been about people taking their future into their own hands. Two centuries ago, ordinary citizens came together to create organizations that would serve their communities—not distant shareholders. Today, over three million cooperatives worldwide carry that legacy forward.

This plan, Practice, Promote and Protect: ICA's Strategic Plan to Empower the Future of Cooperatives (2026–2030), is more than a document. It is a compass for the years ahead. It asks us to do three simple but powerful things: put our values into practice, promote our cooperative model as a force for good, and protect our shared identity that makes us unique.

We live in a time of profound challenges—climate change, inequality, conflict, and threats to democratic life. Yet we also live in a time of unprecedented opportunity. Around the world, cooperatives are creating decent work, advancing gender equity, feeding communities, protecting ecosystems, and fostering peace. We are proving that local action, rooted in democratic values, can deliver solutions to global crises.

This plan is also an invitation. It calls on educators, policymakers, and citizens everywhere to see in cooperatives a partner for building stronger societies. It calls on the youth of today—our future leaders—to bring their creativity and courage to this movement of solidarity. And it calls on every cooperative member to recognize that they are part of something larger than their own enterprise: a worldwide community striving for a sustainable and just future.

We do this not for ourselves alone, but for generations to come. Together—by practicing, promoting, and protecting cooperation—we will continue to shape a better world.



Ariel Guarco
President, International Cooperative Alliance



This plan, Practice, Promote and Protect: ICA's Strategic Plan to Empower the Future of Cooperatives (2026–2030), is the outcome of one of the most collaborative processes in the history of our movement. Leaders from every region, sector, and thematic committee shaped it together, ensuring that the perspectives of our diverse cooperative family are reflected throughout. It is not a plan written for the movement, but by the movement itself.

At its heart, this strategy is guided by a **theory of change**. It begins with our Alpha—the Cooperative Identity, which defines who we are and how we act—and points toward our Omega—a future where cooperatives expand their role in the global economy, recognized as a trusted and effective alternative within the broader community of business models.

To move from vision to impact, we have defined five strategic objectives that form a continuous cycle:

- **Building awareness and membership growth.**
- **Promoting inclusive opportunities in cooperatives.**
- **Enabling regulation and policy recognition.**
- **Strengthening cooperative networks and cooperation.**
- **Advancing cooperative competitiveness.**

To reach these objectives, our initiatives are organized into five broad intervention themes: People, Data, Advocacy, Finance, and Future. Each theme brings together a range of efforts—from strengthening leadership and education, to expanding access to knowledge and finance, to fostering innovation and digital transformation. Taken together, these themes create a framework for action that is both adaptable to local contexts and united in a shared global purpose.

We stand on the edge of a time of radical change. The choices made in the coming years will shape our economies, our democracies, and our planet for generations. This is a moment of risk, but also of extraordinary opportunity—for cooperatives, and through them, for the world. If we act together, cooperatives can be at the forefront of building societies that are more inclusive, more sustainable, and more humane.

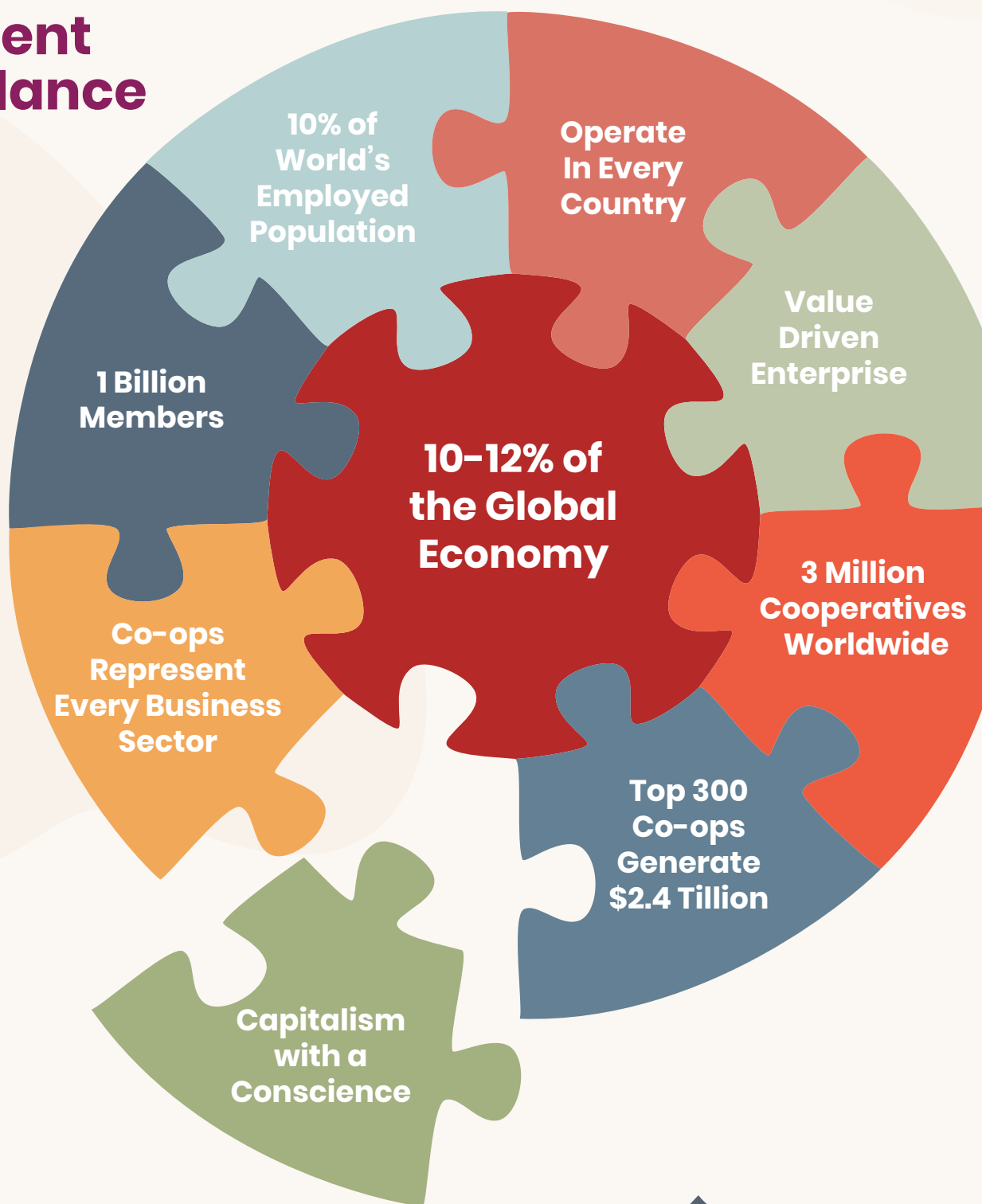
That is the promise of cooperation—and the better future we can create, together.



Jeroen Douglas

Jeroen Douglas
Director General, International Cooperative Alliance

Cooperative Movement At-A-Glance



Introduction: A Strategy for Our Times

The world is changing rapidly. Climate change threatens our planet. Economic inequality continues to grow. Democratic institutions face unprecedented challenges. Yet amid these crises, there is hope: cooperative enterprises are proving that business can be a force for good.

What is a Cooperative?

A cooperative is defined in the Statement on the Cooperative Identity¹ as *an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.*

Cooperatives are businesses owned and controlled by the people who use their services or work there. They operate for the mutual benefit of their members, guided by values of self-help, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. From credit unions and farmer cooperatives to housing co-ops and worker-owned businesses, cooperatives serve over one billion people worldwide.

Our Mission: Practice, Promote, Protect. This strategy, spanning 2026–2030, is built on three pillars:

- **Practice** cooperative values in everything we do
- **Promote** the cooperative model as a solution to global challenges
- **Protect** our cooperative identity and principles

A Strategy Born from Collaboration. This plan emerged from extensive consultations with cooperative leaders across regions, sectors, and communities. It reflects the collective wisdom of our movement and our shared commitment to building a more just, sustainable, and democratic economy.

Our Bold Vision. By 2030, we envision cooperatives playing a significantly larger role in the global economy. We see a world where cooperation is recognised as the pathway to addressing humanity's greatest challenges.

¹<https://ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

Why Cooperatives Matter Now

Addressing Global Challenges Through Local Solutions

The world faces interconnected crises that demand new approaches.

Cooperatives offer proven solutions:

Climate Action

Cooperatives have been environmental pioneers for decades. Agricultural cooperatives promote sustainable farming. Energy cooperatives accelerate renewable energy adoption. Consumer cooperatives drive responsible consumption. By their very nature, cooperatives think long-term, making decisions that benefit future generations.

Economic Democracy

In an era of growing inequality, cooperatives distribute wealth more fairly. They keep profits in local communities, create good jobs, and give workers a voice in decisions that affect their lives. Cooperative businesses are more resilient during economic downturns and less likely to abandon their communities.

Social Justice and Inclusion

Cooperatives were among the first organisations to embrace universal suffrage and gender equality. Today, they continue to lead in creating opportunities for marginalized groups, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. Their democratic governance ensures all voices are heard.

Building Trust and Community

At a time when trust in institutions is declining, cooperatives demonstrate that democratic governance works. They strengthen social cohesion, build



community resilience, and show that business can serve the common good.

Innovation with Purpose

Cooperatives are embracing new technologies while staying true to their values. They're creating platform cooperatives that give workers control over digital platforms, developing cooperative approaches to artificial intelligence, and pioneering sustainable business models.

Proven Track Record

During the 2008 global financial crisis,

cooperative banks showed greater stability than investor-owned banks. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, cooperatives demonstrated resilience and community support. History shows that cooperatives build more stable, sustainable economies.

Global Scale, Local Impact

With 3 million cooperatives serving over 1 billion members worldwide, the cooperative movement combines global reach with deep local roots. This unique combination enables coordinated action on global challenges while delivering tangible benefits at the community level.



Why Governments Find Value in Cooperatives

In an era of complex challenges – from economic inequality to climate change – governments need partners who share their commitment to public good. Cooperatives offer proven solutions that align government objectives with community needs, creating sustainable impact at scale.

Cooperatives as Partners in Governance

Effective governments recognise cooperatives as valuable partners in achieving public policy goals:

Delivering Public Services Cooperatives excel at providing essential services in areas where markets fail or governments struggle. Housing cooperatives address affordable housing shortages. Healthcare cooperatives expand access to medical services. Credit unions serve unbanked populations. Worker cooperatives revitalize declining industrial regions.

Economic Development Cooperatives create jobs that stay in communities. They develop local leadership, build business skills, and foster entrepreneurship. In rural areas, agricultural cooperatives help small farmers access markets and increase productivity. In urban areas, cooperative enterprises create alternatives to unstable gig economy jobs.

Crisis Resilience Cooperatives provide stability during economic disruptions. Their democratic decision-making processes and community accountability make them more cautious about risky investments. Their local ownership means they don't abandon communities when times get tough.

Meeting Sustainability Commitments

The UN Sustainable Development Goals require partnerships between government, business, and civil society. Cooperatives naturally align with all 17 SDGs, making them ideal partners for governments seeking to meet their international commitments.

Turn to page 24 for more details on how the ICA 2026–2030 strategy impacts governments and helps leaders reach their goals.

Why Educators Embrace Cooperative Learning

As educators shape the next generation of leaders and citizens, they increasingly recognise that education about cooperatives offers essential skills for navigating today's interconnected, value-driven economy. Understanding cooperatives prepares students for both career success and civic engagement in a rapidly changing world.

Cooperatives as Essential Education

Educators worldwide recognise that cooperative education prepares students for the economy of the future:

Real-World Democracy Skills

Cooperative studies teach practical skills in democratic participation, collective decision-making, and ethical leadership that students need as engaged citizens and future changemakers.

Alternative Business Models As traditional corporate models face scrutiny, students need to understand cooperative enterprises as viable, sustainable alternatives that balance profit with purpose and stakeholder with member value.

Global Competency With 3 million cooperatives operating across 150 countries, students who understand cooperative principles are better prepared for careers and global citizenship.

Social Innovation Laboratory

Cooperative case studies provide rich examples of social innovation, community development, and sustainable business practices across multiple disciplines – from economics and business to sociology and environmental studies.

Career Preparation The growing social economy offers diverse career opportunities in cooperative enterprises, development organisations, impact investing, and social entrepreneurship that require specialized knowledge and skills.

How Cooperatives Advance Together

The strength of the cooperative movement lies in its unity and shared purpose. When cooperatives work together – whether locally, nationally, or globally – they create opportunities that no single enterprise could achieve alone. This strategy harnesses that collective power to benefit individual cooperatives, their members, and the broader communities they serve.

For Cooperative Enterprises

This strategy directly strengthens every cooperative:



Enhanced Networks Better connections between cooperatives enable resource sharing, joint purchasing, and mutual support that increases competitiveness and reduces costs.



Improved Recognition Greater public awareness of cooperative values and impact improves member recruitment, community support, and market positioning.



Policy Advocacy Coordinated advocacy creates more favorable regulatory environments, tax policies, and development support for cooperative growth.



Innovation and Learning Shared research, best practices, and technology platforms help all cooperatives improve operations, governance, and member services



Access to Capital New financing mechanisms, investment funds, and development partnerships help cooperatives expand and serve more communities.



Leadership Development Training programmes, mentorship opportunities, and leadership exchanges ensure cooperative management reflects community diversity and maintains democratic values.

How the World Benefits from Stronger Cooperatives.

While cooperatives primarily serve their members, their impact extends far beyond membership boundaries. The cooperative model demonstrates that business can be a force for community good, creating ripple effects that benefit society as a whole.



Democratic Practice Cooperative membership provides hands-on experience in democratic governance, community organizing, and collective action that strengthens civil society.



Better Services Member-owned enterprises prioritize quality and community benefit over profit maximisation, often delivering superior value and customer care.



Community Resilience Local cooperative networks provide economic stability, social cohesion, and mutual support that help communities thrive through challenges.



Economic Opportunity Cooperatives create pathways to business ownership, financial services, and economic participation for people excluded from traditional markets.



A Strategy for a Changing World

The ICA Strategic Plan 2026–2030 guides the cooperative movement through rapidly changing global conditions. We face transformations in technology, governance, economics, climate, and social structures that require forward-looking leadership and coordinated action.

This strategy builds on our Statement on the Cooperative Identity – our shared definition, values, and principles – while addressing contemporary challenges. Through extensive consultation with cooperative leaders worldwide, we've created a framework that is both comprehensive and actionable.

Our Approach

We operate through ICA's Theory of Change, which provides a structured path from vision to impact. Our strategy includes clearly defined short-term goals for 2030 and longer-term objectives for 2035, ensuring our initiatives remain ambitious yet achievable.

The plan emphasizes collaboration, innovation, and financial sustainability while reinforcing the cooperative model's competitive advantages in an evolving economy.

One Movement, One Strategy, Thousands of Diverse, Independent Actors

Success requires unity of purpose. This strategy serves the entire cooperative movement, not just ICA as an organisation. Every cooperative – regardless of size, sector, or location – has a role in making this vision reality.

We embrace the principle that “the minimum is the maximum” – partial engagement won't drive the systemic change we seek. When we fully commit to working together, aligning efforts and integrating priorities, the cooperative movement reaches its highest potential.

Key Focus Areas

Our strategy addresses five critical areas where significant improvement is needed:

Building awareness of cooperative values and benefits

Creating inclusive opportunities for all people to participate and lead

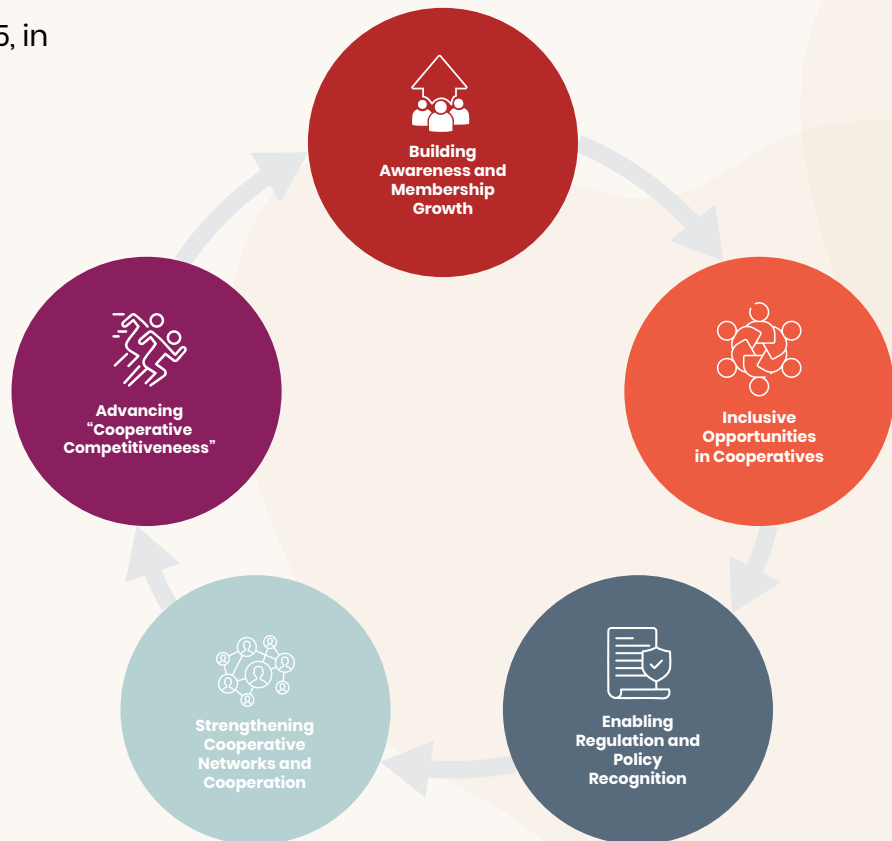
Enabling supportive policies and environment that recognise cooperatives' unique contributions

Strengthening networks between cooperatives at all levels

Advancing competitiveness through innovation and best practices

These objectives form a continuous cycle, each reinforcing the others to sustain long-term impact and growth.

This strategy has been approved and ratified by the ICA General Assembly, on 2 July 2025, in Manchester England.²



The Cooperative Accelerator Cycle

How does our strategic plan will strengthen the global cooperative movement? By raising awareness and growing membership, we expand participation. By ensuring inclusive opportunities, we make cooperatives accessible to all. Through supportive regulation and recognition, we create an enabling environment. By fostering networks and cooperation, we build stronger connections. And by advancing cooperative competitiveness, we ensure co-ops thrive in a rapidly changing economy. Each step reinforces the others, creating a continuous cycle of growth and impact for cooperatives worldwide.

² <https://ica.coop/en/newsroom/news/ica-general-assembly-adopts-new-strategy-manchester>

Our Theory of Change

From Vision to Impact: A Strategic Roadmap

Our Theory of Change maps the path from cooperative values to global transformation. It shows how strategic interventions create conditions for success, how initiatives turn those interventions into action, and how we measure progress toward our goals.

Our Alpha and Omega: The Cooperative Identity

Everything begins with the Statement on the Cooperative Identity – our definition, values, and principles established over 175 years of cooperative practice. This is our Alpha: who we are and how we operate as people-centered, planet-conscious enterprises that build peace.

Our Vision: Economic Democracy Our Omega is a future where cooperatives represent a significantly larger share of the global economy. We aim to move cooperation from alternative to essential – scaling from principle to power while ensuring prosperity for all.

Strategic Interventions We organize our work around five key themes:



People: Strengthening leadership, inclusivity, and education



Data: Building knowledge through research and information sharing



Advocacy: Enhancing legal frameworks and policy influence

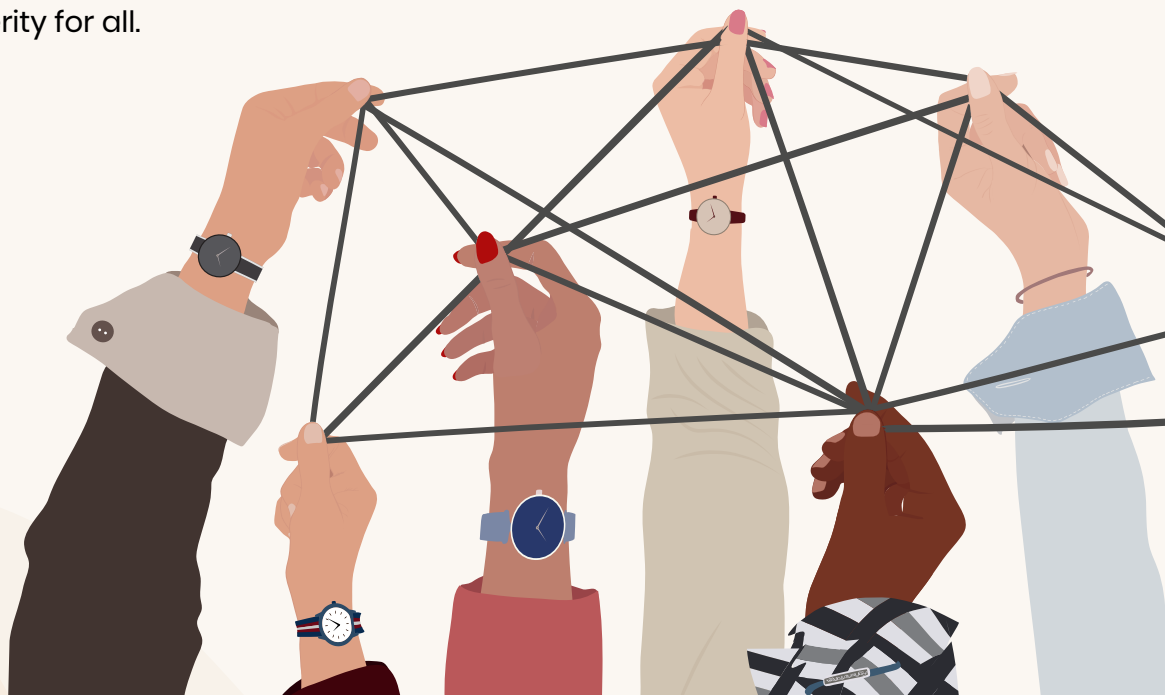


Finance: Expanding access to cooperative-friendly capital



Future: Integrating technology and sustainable innovation

Measuring Success We track progress through short-term outcomes by 2030 and long-term impacts beyond 2035. Success means cooperatives worldwide are stronger, more connected, and better equipped to address global challenges while serving their members effectively.



How Change Happens

Our theory recognises that sustainable transformation requires coordinated action across multiple levels:

- **Individual Cooperatives** become stronger through better governance, increased membership, improved services, and enhanced competitiveness.
- **Cooperative Networks** grow more effective through shared resources, joint advocacy, collaborative purchasing, and knowledge exchange.
- **Legal and Policy Environment** becomes more supportive through evidence-based advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and demonstration of cooperative impact.
- **Public Understanding** increases through education, storytelling, and visibility of cooperative successes.
- **Global Movement** gains influence through coordinated action, shared identity, and collective impact on international development goals.
- **Interconnected Impact** Each element reinforces the others. Stronger individual cooperatives contribute

to more effective networks. Better networks enable more powerful advocacy. Supportive policies help cooperatives grow and serve more people. Greater public understanding attracts new members and partners. This creates a virtuous cycle of cooperative development.

- **Innovation and Tradition** Our approach balances continuity with innovation. We scale and improve our proven methods while pioneering new approaches. This includes developing cooperative-specific technology platforms, creating new financing mechanisms, and adapting our governance models for the digital age.

The goal is bundled action—loose coordination leads to lost opportunities, while coordinated effort multiplies our impact across the global cooperative ecosystem.





Theory of Change

Strategic Objectives

Five Pillars for Cooperative Growth

Our strategic objectives address the areas where cooperatives must improve to achieve our vision of a more cooperative economy:

- 1. Building Awareness and Membership Growth** We will increase global awareness of the cooperative model among both potential members and the general public. This means creating stronger recognition of cooperative values, principles, and successes while ensuring cooperatives become the preferred choice for people seeking to meet their common economic and social needs.
- 2. Promoting Inclusive Opportunities in Cooperatives** Cooperatives must lead in creating inclusive opportunities for people of all backgrounds. We prioritize gender equality and youth empowerment while ensuring that marginalized communities have pathways to leadership, governance participation, and economic benefit through cooperative enterprises.
- 3. Enabling Regulation and Policy Recognition** Cooperatives need supportive policy environments to reach their full potential. We advocate for cooperative-friendly legal frameworks and work to increase recognition by governments, regulators, and international organisations of cooperatives' unique contributions to sustainable development.
- 4. Strengthening Cooperative Networks and Cooperation** A thriving movement depends on strong connections. We deepen engagement between cooperatives at local, national, regional, and global levels while fostering partnerships across sectors and borders. This builds a more resilient, interconnected movement that learns from shared experience.
- 5. Advancing Cooperative Competitiveness** Cooperatives must excel in the marketplace while maintaining their values. We provide tools, technology, education, research, and leadership development to ensure cooperatives remain innovative, efficient, and effective in serving their members and communities.





Strategic Interventions

Five Frameworks for Action

To achieve our strategic objectives, we organize our initiatives under five Strategic Interventions that provide structure and focus for cooperative action worldwide:



People: Strengthening Human Capacity We invest in cooperative leadership, education, and inclusion to ensure diverse participation and long-term sustainability. This includes masterclasses for emerging leaders, mentorship programmes for women and youth, cooperative curriculum development for educational institutions, and preservation of our movement's rich heritage.



Data: Building Knowledge Power We harness cooperative knowledge, research, and digital engagement to strengthen decision-making and advocacy. This includes developing data collection protocols, creating research databases, mapping cooperative initiatives globally, and launching innovative platforms like cooperative AI chatbots to make information accessible to all cooperatives.



Advocacy: Enhancing Legal and Policy Frameworks We strengthen cooperative representation in policymaking and legal frameworks to create

enabling environments. This includes mapping cooperative legislation worldwide, building partnerships with governmental and international institutions, and ensuring cooperative principles are properly reflected in law and policy.



Finance: Expanding Access to Capital We develop financial resources and investment opportunities tailored to cooperative needs. This includes partnerships with development finance institutions, cooperative investment funds, and innovative financing mechanisms that respect cooperative principles while enabling growth and expansion.



Future: Innovating for Tomorrow We embrace sustainable digital transformation and innovation to ensure cooperatives remain relevant and competitive. This includes technology platforms that connect cooperatives globally, sustainable business model development, and integration of emerging technologies while maintaining cooperative values.



Theory of Change

Expected Impacts

Transforming Cooperatives Worldwide

Our strategic interventions will create measurable improvements for cooperatives at all levels:

Stronger Membership and Engagement:

- More people joining cooperatives as they recognise the benefits of cooperative membership
- Existing members becoming more active in governance and cooperative activities
- Youth and women taking leadership roles in greater numbers
- Marginalized communities gaining access to cooperative opportunities

Enhanced Knowledge and Decision-Making:

- Cooperatives accessing better research, data, and educational resources
- Leaders making more informed strategic decisions based on comparative data
- Best practices spreading rapidly through cooperative networks
- Innovation accelerating through knowledge sharing

Greater Recognition and Trust:

- Communities recognising cooperatives as trusted, ethical businesses
- Media coverage highlighting cooperative successes and contributions

- Public understanding of cooperative principles and benefits increasing
- Governments acknowledging cooperatives as development partners

Improved Competitiveness and Sustainability:

- Cooperatives scaling their operations while maintaining democratic governance
- Technology adoption improving efficiency and member services
- Environmental sustainability becoming standard practice
- Financial performance strengthening through better management and access to capital

Expanded Networks and Collaboration:

- Stronger connections between cooperatives enabling resource sharing
- Global supply chains incorporating more cooperative enterprises
- Joint ventures and partnerships multiplying cooperative impact
- New cooperative formation accelerating in underserved communities

Building a Cooperative Ecosystem:

Innovation and Adaptation:

- Cooperatives leading in sustainable business practices
- Digital transformation occurring while preserving democratic values
- New cooperative models emerging to address contemporary challenges
- Platform cooperatives democratizing the digital economy

Policy and Regulatory Success:

- Legal frameworks better supporting cooperative development
- Government policies recognising cooperative contributions to development goals
- International organisations incorporating cooperative perspectives in their work
- Competition policies acknowledging cooperative business models

Financial Accessibility:

- Cooperative-friendly investment mechanisms becoming widely available
- Development finance reaching cooperative enterprises more easily
- Members accessing better financial services through cooperative institutions

- Cooperative capital markets developing to serve movement needs

Cultural and Social Impact:

- Cooperative values influencing broader business practices
- Educational institutions incorporating cooperative studies in their curricula
- Young people choosing cooperative careers in greater numbers
- Democratic participation skills spreading through cooperative membership





Our Alpha—Our foundation—the Cooperative Identity defines who we are, our values, and how we do business.



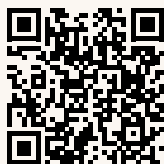
Strategic Interventions



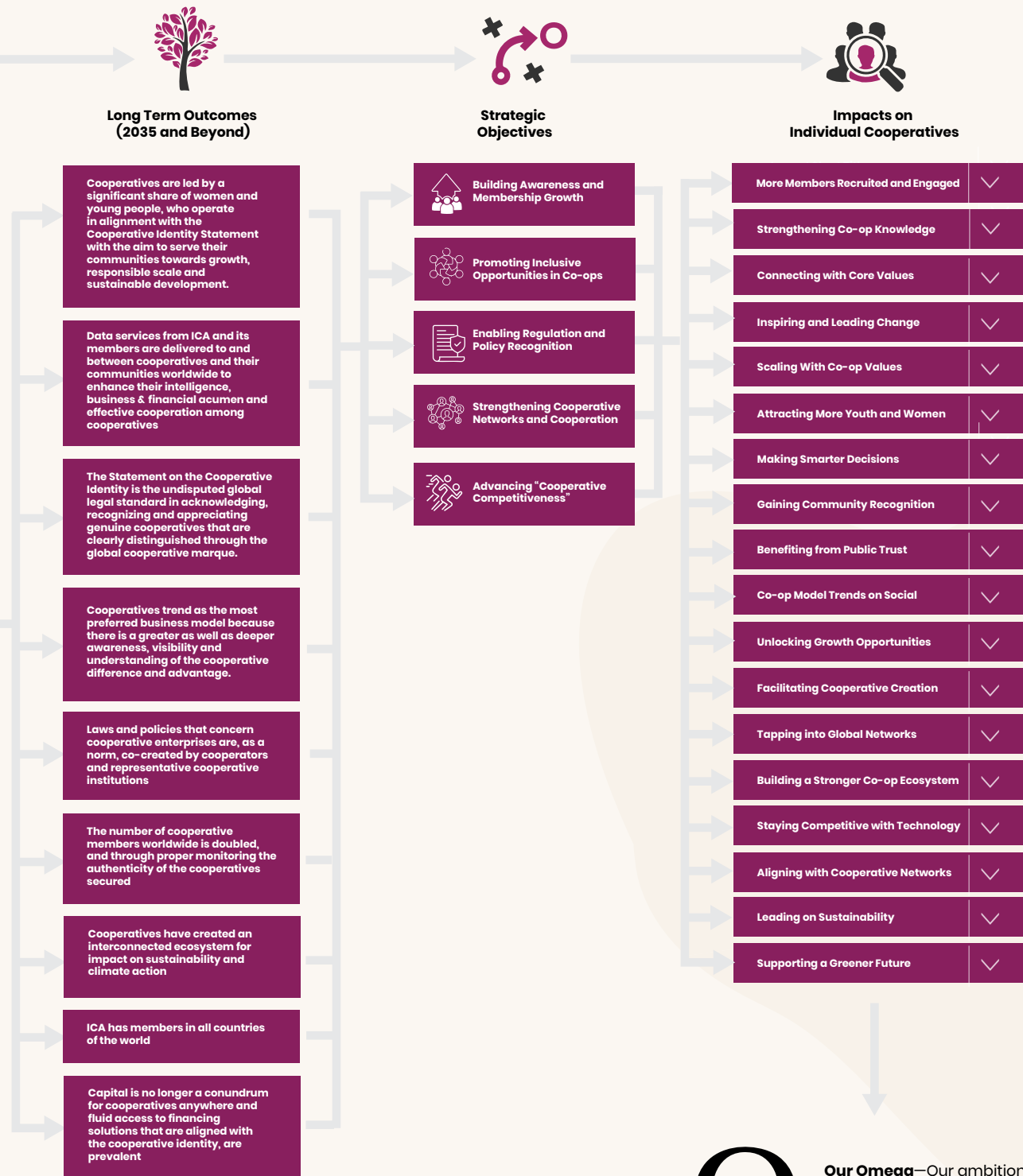
Key Initiatives



Short Term Outcomes (2030)



[Interactive Theory of Change](#)



Our Omega—Our ambition—cooperatives will increase their share of the global economy while ensuring prosperity for all.

Conclusion: A Movement for Everyone

This strategy serves not only existing cooperatives but everyone who believes business can be a force for good. By strengthening the cooperative movement, we create more opportunities for socio-economic participation, democratic governance, and sustainable development.

The success of this strategy depends on collective action: cooperatives working together, governments creating supportive policies, academic institutions engaging in cooperative education and research, and civil society recognising cooperatives as partners in building a better world.

Together, we can create an economy that works for everyone—an economy based on cooperation, not just competition; on democratic participation, not just profit maximisation; on sustainable development, not just short-term gains. The cooperative movement stands ready to lead this transformation. Join us in practicing, promoting, and protecting the cooperative way of building a better world.



This Strategy Matters for Everyone

Beyond Cooperatives: Impact for All

While this strategy focuses on strengthening cooperatives, its benefits extend far beyond the cooperative movement itself. In an interconnected world, stronger cooperatives contribute to healthier economies, more resilient communities, and more sustainable societies.

Economic Benefits for All Cooperative enterprises keep wealth in local communities, create stable employment, and provide essential services. They demonstrate that businesses can be profitable while serving the public good. As cooperatives grow stronger and more numerous, they create standards that encourages all businesses to adopt more ethical practices.

Social and Democratic Benefits

Cooperatives serve as schools of democracy, teaching practical skills in collective decision-making, conflict resolution, and civic engagement.

These skills strengthen democratic institutions throughout society.

The cooperative movement's long history of promoting

equality and inclusion continues to inspire broader social progress.

Environmental Leadership Cooperative businesses, being locally anchored, and with their long-term perspective, and community accountability, naturally tend toward sustainable practices. As environmental challenges intensify, the cooperative model offers proven approaches to balancing economic activity with ecological responsibility.

Innovation and Resilience The cooperative movement's combination of global networks and local roots creates unique capacity for both innovation and crisis response. This dual capability benefits entire communities and economic systems, not just cooperative members.

International Development In emerging economies, cooperatives provide pathways out of poverty, platforms for economic organisation, and models for democratic governance. Strengthening these institutions contributes to global stability and prosperity.



The following sections highlight specific benefits for different stakeholder groups, showing how cooperative success creates value for government leaders, academic institutions, and the general public.

Highlights for Governments

Cooperatives as Partners in Governance and Development

Delivering on Sustainable Development Goals

Cooperatives naturally align with all 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. They reduce poverty (SDG 1), promote food security (SDG 2), ensure inclusive education (SDG 4), advance gender equality (SDG 5), create decent work (SDG 8), reduce inequalities (SDG 10), build sustainable communities (SDG 11), and promote partnerships (SDG 17). Supporting cooperatives helps governments meet their international commitments efficiently and effectively.

- serve unbanked populations
- Housing cooperatives address affordable housing shortages
- Healthcare cooperatives expand access to medical services
- Crisis Response and Resilience During the 2008 financial crisis, cooperative banks showed greater stability than investor-owned banks. Throughout COVID-19, cooperatives demonstrated exceptional community support and business continuity. Cooperative enterprises provide economic stability that benefits entire regions.

Economic Development and Job Creation

- Cooperative enterprises create meaningful employment opportunities worldwide
- Rural cooperatives help small farmers access global markets
- Worker cooperatives revitalize declining industrial regions
- Credit unions and cooperative banks

Democratic Strengthening

Cooperatives enable practical democracy to millions of people worldwide. Members learn to participate in governance, make collective decisions, and hold leaders accountable. These skills strengthen democratic institutions and civic engagement throughout society.



Innovation in Public Service Delivery

Cooperatives excel at providing services where markets fail or governments face resource constraints. They combine business efficiency with social mission, often delivering better outcomes at lower cost than either pure market or pure government approaches.

Policy Recommendations

- Include cooperatives in national economic development strategies
- Ensure legal frameworks recognise cooperative enterprises distinctly
- Provide cooperative development support in post-conflict and development contexts
- Integrate cooperative perspectives in climate action and sustainability planning
- Partner with cooperatives in achieving SDG commitments

Highlights for Academic Communities

Cooperative Education for Tomorrow's Leaders

Universities and educational institutions have a vital role in preparing students for an economy where cooperative enterprises are increasingly important. Integrating cooperative studies into curricula provides students with essential knowledge for professional success and civic engagement.

Essential Business Education

Cooperative studies should be part of core business curriculum because:

- **Alternative Business Models:** Students need to understand cooperative capitalism and member-owned enterprises alongside traditional corporate structures
- **Democratic Governance:** Future leaders must learn collaborative decision-making and inclusive management practices
- **Sustainable Enterprise:** Cooperative principles provide frameworks for balancing profit with social and environmental responsibility
- **Global Competency:** With cooperatives operating across 150+ countries, understanding this model is essential for international business literacy

Cross-Disciplinary Learning

Cooperative principles enhance education across multiple fields:

- **Economics:** Students explore alternative economic models that prioritize equity and sustainability
- **Political Science:** Democratic governance in cooperatives provides practical examples of participatory democracy
- **Development Studies:** Cooperatives demonstrate community-based approaches to economic development
- **Social Work:** Understanding cooperative principles helps students support community organizing and social innovation

Career Preparation

The growing social economy requires graduates who understand:

- Impact investing and sustainable finance
- Social enterprise development and management
- Community development and cooperative organizing
- Policy analysis for alternative economic models

Practical Implementation

- Academic institutions can integrate cooperative education through:
- Case studies of successful cooperative enterprises
- Student cooperative projects on campus
- Partnerships with local cooperative organisations
- Study abroad programmes with international cooperative institutions
- Guest lectures from cooperative leaders and practitioners



Highlights for Cooperatives

Benefits for the Cooperative Community

The cooperative movement grows stronger when individual cooperatives thrive and communities recognise the value of cooperative enterprises. This strategy creates tangible benefits for existing cooperatives while demonstrating to the broader public why cooperative principles matter for building resilient, equitable communities.

Stronger Individual Cooperatives

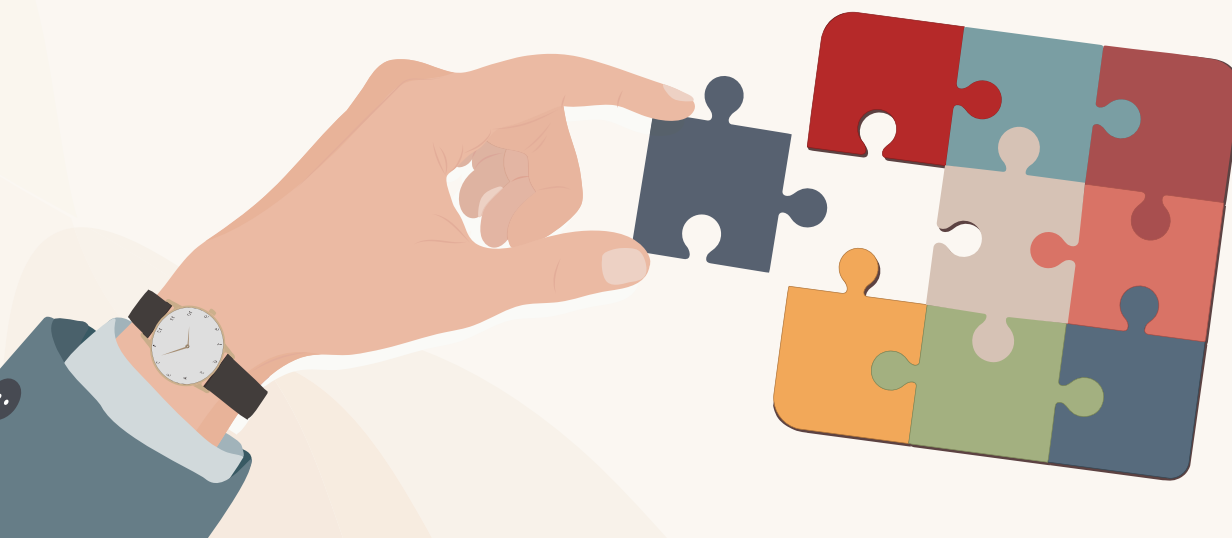
- Enhanced governance through shared best practices and training
- Better access to markets through cooperative networks
- Improved financial services and access to capital
- Technology adoption that preserves democratic values
- Leadership development that reflects community diversity

More Effective Networks

- Stronger federations and apex organisations
- Better coordination on advocacy and policy issues
- Shared services that reduce costs and improve efficiency
- Joint purchasing power that increases competitiveness
- Knowledge exchange that accelerates innovation

Global Movement Strength

- Coordinated response to international challenges
- Shared identity that builds solidarity across borders
- Collective advocacy that amplifies cooperative voice
- Resource sharing that supports cooperative development worldwide
- Cultural exchange that enriches the movement



Benefits for the Entire World

Creating a better, more sustainable and more equitable world

The cooperative movement's success creates value that extends beyond members to entire communities. When cooperatives thrive, they demonstrate that business can serve the common good while remaining economically viable, creating positive examples that influence broader economic practices.

Economic Opportunity

- Pathways to business ownership for people who couldn't otherwise afford it
- Access to financial services through credit unions and cooperative banks
- Affordable housing through housing cooperatives
- Fair trade products through consumer cooperatives
- Local food systems through agricultural cooperatives

Democratic Participation

- Practical experience in democratic decision-making
- Leadership development opportunities for people of all backgrounds
- Community organizing skills through cooperative membership
- Civic engagement training through cooperative governance

Better Services

- Member-focused services that prioritize quality over profit maximisation
- Community-controlled utilities and essential services
- Healthcare cooperatives that serve underserved populations
- Educational cooperatives that provide innovative learning opportunities

Community Resilience

- Local economic stability through community-owned enterprises
- Social networks that provide mutual support
- Environmental stewardship through sustainable cooperative practices
- Cultural preservation through cooperative community organisations

Getting Involved

- Join a local cooperative as a member
- Start a cooperative to meet community needs
- Support cooperative businesses through purchasing decisions
- Advocate for cooperative-friendly policies in your community
- Learn more about cooperatives and share that knowledge with others

Acknowledgments

This strategy was developed through extensive consultation with cooperative leaders worldwide. Special thanks to our regional directors, sectoral organisation leaders, thematic committee chairs, the ICA team and the Strategy Leadership Group who guided this collaborative process.

We acknowledge the contributions of cooperative organisations, academic institutions, and development partners who shared their expertise and insights. We also thank Howard Brodsky and his unwavering commitment to the cooperative movement. This truly represents the collective wisdom of our global movement.

Supporting the Strategy

The success of this strategy depends on active participation from cooperatives, governments, academic institutions, and civil society organisations worldwide. Together, we can build a more cooperative economy that serves everyone.

Our Values

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others.

Our Identity

A cooperative is defined in the Statement on the Cooperative Identity as an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

Our Principles

ICA is the custodian of the standards that guide the cooperative movement. These seven principles distinguish us from other business models:

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training, and Information
6. Cooperation among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

These principles, rooted in 175 years of cooperative practice, guide how we operate and ensure that cooperatives remain true to their mission of serving members and communities.

Connect with us

International Cooperative Alliance
Avenue Milcamps 105
1030 Brussels, Belgium
Global Office: Tel: +32 2 743 1033
Email: ica@ica.coop
Web: www.ica.coop

Regional Offices:

ICA Africa: www.icaafrica.coop
ICA Americas: www.aciamericas.coop
ICA Asia-Pacific: www.icaap.coop
Cooperatives Europe:
www.coopseurope.coop

Key Resources:

UN International Year of Cooperatives 2025: www.2025.coop
Cooperative Facts and Figures: www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/facts-and-figures
Statement on Cooperative Identity: www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity
Global Cooperative Monitor: www.monitor.coop
Cooperative News: www.thenews.coop

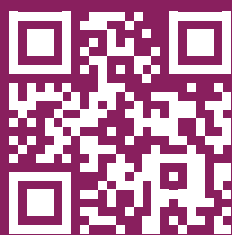
How to Get Involved:

- For Cooperatives: Learn about ICA membership at www.ica.coop membership
- For Governments: Contact us about policy partnerships
- For Researchers: Explore our research resources and collaboration opportunities
- For Students: Discover cooperative studies programmes and opportunities
- For Everyone: Find cooperatives in your community and learn how to join or start one

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The International Cooperative Alliance represents over 3 million cooperatives serving more than 1 billion people worldwide. Our Strategic Plan 2026-2030 provides a roadmap for strengthening the cooperative movement and expanding its positive impact on communities everywhere.

Learn more at www.ica.coop