



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Co-operatives: Empowering people for sustainable development and zero hunger

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Conference conclusions

The Global Challenge

The United Nations estimates that in 2050 the world will have a population of nine billion. This will create enormous pressures in the food system – from production to consumption. The challenge is less about how to feed nine billion people and more about how to do so in a sustainable way. A sustainable future will require coordinated action from all stakeholders, including the co-operative movement.

What co-operatives can do

The co-operative model can help reduce poverty and hunger and provide farmers with a support structure for better conditions. The structure, values and principles of co-operatives ensure:

- Democratic member control: By establishing a co-operative, members can directly influence the management decisions of the enterprise linked to their livelihoods;
- Scale: In a co-operative structure farmers can pool their resources to increase scale, gaining productivity, to access markets, better conditions, expertise and technology that, alone, they might not be able to access.
- Sustainability: Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of the communities where they operate and reinvest revenues in the co-operative, in members and in communities.
- Aggregating demand: Co-operatives in the food retail sector are also an important factor to aggregate demand from consumers to establish more direct links to producers, reduce food waste and inform and educate consumers towards sustainable consumption patterns.

Unleashing the potential of co-operatives

To unleash the transformative potential of co-operatives it is necessary to establish a level playing field for them that comprises:

- A policy and regulatory environment that is conducive to the creation, growth and development of co-operatives, including an adequate legal and administrative framework;
- Access to funding and capital that is consistent with the nature and structure of co-operatives without compromising democratic ownership and control;
- A national and international trade environment that respects the variety of agriculture in the world, which is fostered by co-operatives rooted in local communities, and stimulates co-operative to co-operative trade;

- A space for consultation between co-operatives and governments in order to discuss policy issues of mutual interest.

Our engagement

Realising that the global challenge of ending poverty and hunger sustainably requires a concerted action from all sectors and actors in society, the co-operative movement will:

- Implement actions that contribute to the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals as defined by the United Nations;
- Build partnerships with governments, local authorities, businesses, research institutions and academia, civil society and other stakeholders to enhance the outcomes of those actions;
- Engage with public authorities to improve the policy and regulatory environment for the creation, growth and development of co-operative enterprises;
- Explore and develop co-operative to co-operative trade opportunities in order to trigger economic development;
- Promote agriculture that is sustainable and firmly rooted in local people and communities, with active membership;
- Strengthen rural co-operatives to unlock their potential to achieve food security given that most of the poor in the world are located in rural areas;
- Countervail the risk of demutualisation by strengthening active membership and co-operation among co-operatives within the value chain.