

MEDIA RELEASE

23 September 2019

The fight against climate change concerns us all

The cooperative movement – representing 1,2 billion cooperative members – is strongly committed to environmental issues, and sectors such as agriculture are increasingly concerned with environmental sustainability. As member-driven, value-based, democratically-managed, and locally-rooted enterprises, cooperatives answer to the needs and aspirations of the communities where their members are based. Since these communities are increasingly experiencing needs and aspirations of an environmental nature, cooperatives have a key role to play for the sustainable use of the planet's resources and climate change.

Among the examples, more and more agricultural cooperatives work to maintain the longevity of the land where they grow crops through sustainable farming practices. Consumer cooperatives increasingly support sustainable sourcing for their products and educate consumers about responsible consumption. Housing cooperatives help ensure dwellings are safe. Cooperative banks contribute to stability thanks to their proximity to their clients, provide access to finance at the local level, and are widespread even in remote areas. Many utility cooperatives are engaged in the transition to cleaner electricity and rural access to energy and water. Worker and social cooperatives in diverse sectors (health, communications, tourism, etc.) progressively tend to provide goods and services in an efficient, eco-friendly way while creating long-term, sustainable jobs.

Many cooperatives are taking on a leadership role in promoting energy efficiency, waste management, and greenhouse gas emissions reductions, and are addressing the climate change challenge in communities throughout the globe.

Furthermore, the cooperative model is well suited to linking environmentally-friendly projects with the improvement of the livelihoods of local communities. In particular, cooperatives are well placed to secure domestic resource mobilisation, allowing profits to remain within the community by being reinvested in important areas such as education, health, or housing. Cooperatives' locally-rooted and ethical approach make them a strong ally for sustainable development.

Cooperatives have two centuries' experience in building sustainable and resilient societies and they are working towards the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As such, as part of the ICA's Global Conference on "Cooperatives for Development", a plenary session on "Promoting the preservation of the environment in Africa and beyond" will take place on 15 October in Kigali, Rwanda.

This session will address the challenges of climate change and preservation of the environment, which require a strategy that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

Cooperatives' commitment to climate action

The ICA has called on heads of state to agree to effective measures against climate change several times, one of which was during the COP21 which the organisation attended in [December 2015](#).

The President of the ICA, Ariel Guarco, believes that [the first innovation in the fight against climate change is cooperation](#): “[cooperative’s] logic is based on democracy and solidarity and is, therefore, an alternative to the model that generated environmental degradation and inequality”.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) listed [Denmark as one of the most salient cases](#) as in 2004, 23 per cent of the country’s wind capacity was owned by cooperatives. Moreover, in this country “there were 20 centralised biogas plants, the majority of which were owned by farmer cooperatives, accounting for 80 per cent of Denmark’s biogas production”.

Denmark is not an isolated case: the ILO likewise highlighted [Canada](#), “where renewable energy cooperatives are a recent phenomenon” with “71 registered renewable energy cooperatives in 2011”.

In [Germany](#), as stated by the Executive Agency for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (EASME) “Citizen cooperatives have long been investing in the production of renewable energies and some are now looking at how to buy back the energy grid from the energy companies. They failed to do so in Berlin, but have succeeded in Hamburg, creating a new business model that many other countries would like to emulate”.

In terms of waste management: “Waste pickers have been organising themselves into cooperatives and other solidarity-based associations”, states Ms Sonia Dias, Waste Picker Sector Specialist at Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) at Redesol, a network of waste picker cooperatives in Brazil, [in an interview with the ILO](#).

This has been the case not only in Brazil but in many other Latin American and South Asian countries. It has proven to be essential in the transition from the informal to the formal economy, fostering decent work for employees: “Cooperatives have played a key role in integrating waste pickers into formal waste management chains, particularly in Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, India, and South Africa”, writes the ILO in their publication [‘Cooperatives and the world of work n° 12’](#).

Sources

<https://www.ica.coop/en/media/news/co-operatives-solid-lever-take-climate-challenge>

<https://eng.arielguarco.coop/co-operative-agenda-to-defend-the-planet/>

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_233199.pdf

<https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/news/spreading-model-renewable-energy-cooperatives>

https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/news/WCMS_632675/lang--en/index.htm

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---coop/documents/publication/wcms_715845.pdf

ENDS

For further information contact:

Leire Luengo

Director of Communications

International Co-operative Alliance

luengo@ica.coop

Tel: + 32 2 285 00 76

www.ica.coop

NOTES TO THE EDITOR

About the International Cooperative Alliance

The International Cooperative Alliance is a non-profit international association established in 1895 to advance the cooperative social enterprise model. The International Cooperative Alliance is a voice for cooperatives worldwide, representing more than 309 cooperative federations and organisations across 109 countries.

12 % of humanity are cooperators. Through its membership, the International Cooperative Alliance represents 1.2 billion people from 2.94 million cooperatives worldwide. The largest 300 cooperatives in the world have combined annual revenues of 2.16 trillion USD (2015) and 280 million people around the world (10% of the employed population) secure their livelihoods in cooperatives, either through direct employment or by organising themselves through a cooperative.

The International Cooperative Alliance works with global and regional governments and organisations to create legislative environments that allow cooperatives to form and grow. The International Cooperative Alliance also promotes the importance of a people-centred, co-operative, value-based business model to the media and the public.

Operating from a global office in Brussels, Belgium, the International Cooperative Alliance is organised into four Regional Offices (Europe, Africa, Americas, and Asia-Pacific), and eight Sectoral Organisations (Banking, Agriculture, Fisheries, Insurance, Health, Housing, Consumer Cooperatives, and Service and Industry cooperatives).