

5th July 2014

"Co-operative enterprises achieve sustainable development for all."

This year, International Co-operative Day, to be celebrated on 5 July, will have the theme of "Co-operative enterprises achieve sustainable development for all." Concern for the community is one of the co-operative movement's founding values and, as such, the need to sustainably safeguard favourable living conditions for communities underpins all co-operatives' operations and vision.

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In a general sense, sustainability is the capacity to support, maintain or endure. Since the 1980s, the concept of sustainability has evolved to mean the integration of environmental, economic and social dimensions. Co-operatives here again are the forerunners of modern sustainability. By placing human need at their centre, they respond to today's crises of sustainability and deliver a distinctive form of "shared value".

One of the goals of the Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade is to "position co-operatives as builders of sustainability."¹ The co-operative sector needs to explain and show to the world that sustainability is part of its intrinsic nature, and that co-operative enterprises make a positive contribution to sustainability.

As part of this, the Alliance commissioned a [scan](#) of co-operatives from different sectors and regions around the world to see how closely linked they are to sustainability. Launched at our global conference in Cape Town in November 2013, the report concluded that co-operatives embed sustainability into their operating model and values, and that the United Nations can and should recognise this. Indeed, in a resolution adopted in December 2001, the UN urged governments to encourage and facilitate "the establishment and development of co-operatives, including taking measures aimed at enabling people living in poverty or belonging to vulnerable groups to engage on a voluntary basis in the creation and development of co-operatives".²

The United Nations is currently setting ambitious new targets for the period after 2015 and these will be called the Sustainable Development Goals. The co-operative movement touches one billion people worldwide and through our vision of sustainable development for all, we can be key partners in this.

We would like to urge co-operatives around the world to use 5 July to showcase how co-operatives are the best-placed enterprise model to develop and build sustainability in the 21st century.

¹ *Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade*, p. 15.

² UN resolution 56/114 adopted in December 2001