



International Day of Cooperatives

## Message by ILO Director-General Guy Ryder: “Cooperatives for sustainable development”

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I am pleased to join the cooperative community around the world in celebrating this International Day of Cooperatives.

Cooperatives are an old idea, but one that is more relevant than ever if we look ahead at the development challenges and opportunities the world faces over the coming decades.

As the United Nations are about to agree Sustainable Development Goals which will set a global agenda, there is a real chance to make extreme poverty and deprivation history, to secure social inclusion and to reconcile economic and social objectives.

What would it take? Key measures would include:

- The creation of some 50 million jobs per year for some time ahead to absorb new entrants to the labour market and to make significant progress in absorbing the 200 million or so already unemployed;
- Overcoming the working poverty of over 800 million workers living with their families on less than US\$ 2 a day;
- Ending hunger and under-nutrition affecting over 800 million today;
- Extending basic social protection to the over 5 billion people – almost three quarters of the world’s population who lack such protection;
- Assuring financial inclusion, access to financial services and economic opportunity to the ‘bottom billion’;
- Giving access to modern forms of energy to the 1.3 billion people still living without electricity;
- Reducing the often alarming levels of inequality in rich and poor countries alike; and
- Finding viable solutions for care in developed and some emerging economies with rapidly ageing populations and often stretched public budgets and social security systems.

In tackling all of these challenges, cooperatives and mutuals can play a valuable role in turning the tide. Many of the poor and excluded are reached neither by conventional markets for goods and services nor by government. Cooperatives and other social economy enterprises have shown that they have the necessary reach.

A recent study by the ILO and the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) “Cooperatives and Sustainable Development Goals” highlights the contributions that cooperative enterprises are making to sustainable development and their potential to do much more: from creating employment and enhancing gender equality to providing clean energy and financial inclusion to ensuring food security and extending social protection. Many of the working poor, the hungry and the excluded are rural workers, often smallholder farmers. Cooperatives have an outstanding track record in overcoming multiple forms of exclusion in rural areas, but not only there. Cooperatives are present in all sectors of the economy and adaptable to a range of contexts. They respond to the triple bottom line of sustainable development: economic development, social justice, and environmental protection.

For all these reasons, cooperatives and mutuals are very much enterprises of the future which play an essential role in complementing conventional markets and government action. This is acknowledged explicitly in the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference ‘The future we want’. The international community should bear this in mind when setting out the strategies and the means through which the Sustainable Development Goals can be realized.

The ILO looks forward to continuing its collaboration with the cooperative movement to help ensure that cooperative enterprises find their place as enterprises of the future and motors for social inclusion and sustainable development.

Tags: green jobs, human development, sustainable development, cooperatives, multilateral system, ILO Director General  
Unit responsible: [Department of Communication \(DCOMM\)](#)