

12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030

Cooperative contributions to SDG 12

*This brief is part of the **Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030 series** produced by the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC). Through a series of 17 briefs, one for each Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), COPAC hopes to raise awareness about the significant contributions of cooperative enterprises towards achieving the 2030 Agenda in a sustainable, inclusive and responsible way, and encourage continued support for their efforts.*

This brief focuses on SDG 12 – ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns.

About the Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by world leaders in September 2015 during a historic summit at the United Nations. The SDGs set out a vision for countries to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

For more information, visit www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment.

About cooperatives

Cooperatives are defined as ‘autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise’.¹

All cooperatives subscribe to a set of values and principles that support the social and people-focused nature of their activities. They are operated democratically by their members. Whether customers of the business, workers or residents, members have an equal say and a share of the profits.

Cooperatives are a powerful economic and social force, present in most countries of the world and in most sectors of the economy. The cooperative movement counts more than a billion members.

¹ International Co-operative Alliance, *Statement on the Co-operative Identity* (Manchester, 1995). Available from <https://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>



The cooperative difference

Achieving sustainable development means that we will have to rethink the ways in which we produce and consume goods and services. For our planet to sustain a growing population, it will be necessary to protect and use the limited natural resources our world has to offer responsibly.

Cooperatives have sustainability in their DNA, with “concern for community” as the seventh of their guiding principles. Because their identity is based on ethics and values, cooperatives understand that their businesses cannot survive long-term without sound environmental practices. For this reason, many cooperatives have been innovators in sustainable resource management in their sectors – launching consumer awareness programmes, developing recycling policies and spearheading food waste reduction initiatives, to name a few.

In order to ensure sustainability along the supply chain, cooperation between producers and consumers is crucial. Cooperatives at both ends of the supply chain have been joining forces to shorten value chains, improve product traceability and adopt environmentally friendly practices. Strengthening cooperation between cooperatives can create more inclusive, transparent supply chains, result in mutual benefits for producers and consumers and accelerate a shift towards sustainability across the supply chain.

Because cooperatives put the needs of their members and their communities before maximizing profit, they are willing to invest in environmentally smart practices and raise awareness among their members and users/stakeholders to do the same. Cooperatives can therefore have a ripple effect in their communities by educating the public about the importance of sustainable consumption and production.

Benchmarking progress is an important part of achieving sustainable consumption and production, and cooperatives have made strides in sustainability reporting. The International Co-operative Alliance has a guidebook for cooperative-specific approaches, showing the commitment of the movement to prioritizing information about environmental and social responsibility.²

A good way to understand the cooperative difference is to learn from cooperatives making change happen in their communities. Here are a few examples of their contributions.

From the field: How cooperatives contribute to sustainable consumption and production

Coop Italy is a system of consumer cooperatives that operates the largest supermarket chain in the country. With environmental sustainability as a core activity of the cooperative, Coop Italy has committed to further developing its line of organic and Ecolabel-certified own brand products, using its own brand fruit cultivation methods to keep chemical residue below legal limits and monitoring the sustainability and resource use of its Coop brand production suppliers. On the consumer side, the cooperative educates shoppers by integrating the ideas of the three R's (reduction, reuse, recycling) in all of its Coop brand product packaging, including using recycled materials, minimizing packaging and setting up refill stations.³

² Sustainability Solutions Group, *Sustainability Reporting for Co-operatives: A Guidebook* (International Co-operative Alliance, Brussels, 2016). Available from <https://ica.coop/sites/default/files/publication-files/ica-sustainability-reporting-guidebook-1575997496.pdf>

³ International Co-operative Alliance, *Co-ops for 2030: A movement achieving sustainable development for all* (Brussels, 2017). Available from <https://ica.coop/en/media/library/co-ops-for-2030-a-movement-achieving-sustainable-development-for-all>

The Seikatsu Club Consumers' Cooperative (SCCC) of Japan combines good business practices with social and ecological principles and a vision of a community- and people-centred economy. SCCC began in 1965, when a Tokyo housewife organized 200 women to buy

300 bottles of milk. Seikatsu Club has since grown its buying activities to include production, distribution, consumption, disposal, social services, the environment and politics. The cooperative's goal is to create a new lifestyle that protects the environment and overall health of the planet. One of SCCC's mantras is "safe food at reasonable prices". When the Club cannot find products of adequate quality to meet its ecological or social standards, it produces them itself, as has been the case for milk and soap. The cooperative emphasizes direct contact between producers and consumers to humanize the market, particularly in food production.⁴

Non-sustainable farming techniques and post-harvest storing methods have resulted in the loss of large amounts of crops in South Africa. The **IMAI Farming Cooperative** is a women's cooperative that has partnered with non-profits and government institutions to turn surplus fresh vegetable produce into pickles. Through this initiative the cooperative increases the incomes of its members by adding value to their products while also reducing food waste. The members chop surplus vegetables into small pieces and store them in an acidic solution to create different types of "atchar", a kind of pickle for local consumption. IMAI Farming Cooperative also encourages organic farming as part of its activities.⁵

Tourism is a sector where unsustainable consumption and production patterns can impact the environment, including food waste, damage to natural reserves, excessive water use and carbon footprint of air travel, among others. The **Midcounties Cooperative** travel business is the third largest travel agent in the UK and promotes sustainable tourism in collaboration with the Travel Foundation charity. In the last ten years, they have funded more than £10 million for sustainable tourism promoting local culture and products, income generating opportunities and environmental protection in different areas around the world. Their initiatives include establishing linkages between local farmers and all-inclusive hotels in Turkey that are sourcing their produce from sustainable producers; helping Mexican women set up their own businesses and sell their honey-based beauty products to hotels and tourists; and developing an educational map to inform tourists about the threatened marine bays around Fethiye in Turkey to help reduce the environmental impacts of boat trips and coastal tourism on important habitats for turtles and other marine life.⁶



⁴ International Co-operative Alliance, *Co-operatives and Sustainability: An investigation into the relationship* (Brussels, 2013). Available from <https://ica.coop/sites/default/files/basic-page-attachments/sustainability-scan-2013-revised-sep-2015-559438094.pdf>

⁵ SEED, *IMAI Farming Cooperative: Preserving vegetables to build self-reliance among South African farmers* (Berlin, 2015). Available from: https://www.seed.uno/images/casestudies/SEED_Case_Study_IMAI_SouthAfrica.pdf

⁶ Susan Press, "Travel co-ops and the rise of sustainable tourism", 28 March 2017. Available from <https://www.thenews.coop/114693/topic/environment/travel-co-ops-rise-sustainable-tourism/>



In Togo, the **Cooperative of Young Professional Producers of Organic Pineapple (CJPPAB)** produces a special type of pineapple called *pain de sucre* (sugar bread) destined for the Italian market. The CJPPAB has 1,018 young members, of which 367 are women. The members produce 10,000 tonnes of pineapple in a year and use only organic farming practices without any application of chemicals. Assistance and training was provided by Coopermondo, the international development cooperation association of the Confederation of Italian Cooperatives, and the project received funding from six Italian cooperative banks and Federcasse, the apex organisation for cooperative banks in Italy. The cooperation between the cooperative movements in Togo and Italy allowed them to exchange experiences and resulted in new market opportunities for the Togolese farmers.⁷

The speed by which people replace their old devices with new ones has created huge amounts of electrical and electronic equipment waste (e-waste). E-waste is the fastest growing waste stream, and it is hazardous, complex and costly to treat. Heaps of e-waste end up in landfills or are exported to and dumped in developing countries. In Bolivia, formal mechanisms for waste management are limited, so most people store their old electronic equipment or leave it to be picked up by informal collectors. A group of solid waste pickers in La Paz (**the Association of Recycling Collectors and Sorters of La Paz, ARALPAZ**) formed a cooperative in 2006 to overcome the waste collection challenges. Their 40 members earn a better income through recycling in total about 194 tonnes of solid waste on a daily basis, including plastic, cardboard, metals, used clothing, glass and occasionally e-waste. The collectors do not focus on e-waste alone, because this requires more specialization and involves higher costs to collect and disassemble. They sell the e-waste at an informal market and looking into supply it to recycling companies. The collective massing of other recyclable material has enabled individual waste pickers to accumulate sufficiently large volumes to sell directly to businesses and negotiate better prices.⁸

In Switzerland, the major retail cooperative **Coop** has developed its own line of fair trade organic clothing called Coop Naturaline. In 2013, they adopted the Guideline on Textiles and Leather, which regulates the minimum social, ecological and toxicological requirements in both the cultivation of raw textile materials and their further processing and improves transparency in the supply chain. They advocate for reducing the use of chemicals, recycling old textiles and promoting the use of fairly traded organic cotton.⁹

⁷ Anca Voinea, "Putting young people at the centre of international co-operative development", 14 August 2017. Available from <https://www.thenews.coop/120610/topic/putting-young-people-centre-international-co-operative-development>

⁸ International Labour Office, Tackling informality in e-waste management: The potential of cooperative enterprises (Geneva, 2014). Available from http://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/publications/WCMS_315228/lang-en/index.htm

⁹ <http://www.coop.ch/content/act/en/principles-and-topics/main-topics/textiles.html>

**Want to see more examples of
how cooperatives contribute to SDG 12?**

*Visit the Coops for 2030 campaign at
www.coopsfor2030.coop*

In India, the **Chetna Organic** cooperative has organized 15,279 cotton farmers into 978 farmer self-help groups which are clustered into 13 district cooperatives. An international supply chain coalition was created (ChetCo) linking the organic cotton cooperative farmers with 16 ethical textile brands, such as Loomstate in the US, to promote sustainable clothing production from seed to cloth. Chetna Organic trains farmers in applying eco-friendly production practices, such as the production of bio-inputs like organic composting and bio pesticides such as chili-garlic solution. The cooperative also promotes collective ownership

of machinery that improves productivity, like tractors, tillers, seed cleaners and graders. Inefficient water use is an important challenge in Indian cotton production. Different measures are taken by the cooperative to protect natural resources, manage watersheds and harvest water for supplemental irrigation. The variety of seeds is also under threat with the dominance of GMO seeds in cotton production. Chetna Organic wants to protect local varieties from extinction and is working to preserve seed sovereignty. The establishment of seed banks is one of their strategies to collect and maintain local seeds.¹⁰



¹⁰ Esha Chhabra, "Could This Small Cohort of Startups Transform The \$3 Trillion Fashion Industry?", 30 November 2016. Available from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/eshachhabra/2016/11/30/could-this-small-cohort-of-startups-transform-the-3billion-fashion-industry/#2b8a3d3d50c5>
<http://www.chetnaorganic.org.in/about-us>
<https://www.loomstate.org/chetco>



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**International
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About COPAC

COPAC is a multi-stakeholder partnership of global public and private institutions that promotes and advances people-centered, self-sustaining cooperative enterprises, guided by the principles of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – in all aspects of its work. The Committee's current members are the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Co-operative Alliance and the World Farmers' Organisation.

For more information, please visit
www.copac.coop.