



International Year
of Cooperatives
Cooperatives Build
a Better World

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the promotion
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of cooperatives

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Alliance

Building a Better World Together: Cooperative Contributions to the SDGs

Take urgent action to combat
climate change and its impacts



13 CLIMATE ACTION



THE CLIMATE CRISIS REMAINS THE DEFINING CHALLENGE OF OUR ERA.

The year 2024 was the hottest on record, with escalating greenhouse gas emissions pushing the world far off track from the 1.5 °C target set in the Paris Agreement.¹ Intensifying heatwaves, droughts, floods, and ecosystem loss are deepening social inequalities, threatening livelihoods, and reversing decades of development progress. Climate change is also reshaping the world of work, creating new opportunities in renewable energy and green industries while displacing traditional jobs in high-carbon sectors.

As the world convened for COP30 in Belém, Brazil, the first Conference of the Parties hosted in the Amazon, there is renewed urgency to accelerate inclusive, locally led climate action. The Global Stocktake underscores that mitigation and adaptation must advance together,² anchored in equity, just transitions, and resilience for those most affected. Within this critical moment, the International Year of Cooperatives 2025 (IYC 2025) shines a spotlight on cooperative enterprises as vital partners in linking global ambition with local action. Cooperatives empower communities to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from climate shocks, strengthening livelihoods, protecting ecosystems, and ensuring that climate justice and sustainable development advance hand in hand.

THE COOPERATIVE DIFFERENCE

Cooperatives are uniquely positioned to advance SDG 13 through collective, democratic, and locally rooted approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation. Their people-centred model ensures that environmental action directly improves members' livelihoods while building long-term community resilience. Across sectors, cooperatives are greening their operations and value chains, demonstrating that sustainability and profitability can go hand in hand.

Brazilian cooperatives played a prominent role at COP30, advocating for consistent public policies, adequate funding, and legal frameworks to support regenerative, low-carbon models. They hosted a dedicated Coop Pavilion and participated in sessions on green finance, low-carbon agriculture, renewable energy, bioeconomy, sustainable logistics, food security, and climate adaptation. These efforts showcased that cooperatives are already contributing significantly to the climate agenda, while emphasizing the need for broader support to expand climate-positive initiatives.

The Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB) was central to cooperative engagement at COP30. OCB highlighted how cooperatives link the real economy to global climate commitments, bringing innovation, sustainability, and inclusion to local producers. The OCB manifesto positioned cooperatives as essential partners in climate action, capable of decentralizing climate finance, accelerating the adoption of new technologies, and strengthening community resilience.³ Side events demonstrated practical initiatives, such as collaborations with Embrapa and credit cooperatives like Sicoob CCS, which advance low-carbon livestock farming and bioeconomy projects for local communities.

In the UK, Central Co-op's emissions reduction plan has been approved by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), confirming alignment with global climate goals. The co-op will cut direct emissions by 44% by 2030 and 90% by 2035, reduce indirect emissions by 97% by 2040, and eliminate deforestation from high-risk supply chains by 2025. The plan aligns with EU and global net-zero transition objectives and best practices for value-chain accountability, demonstrating cooperative leadership in science-based decarbonisation.

Cooperatives' local ownership structure creates competitive advantages in renewable energy through democratic control of production and use, community employment creation, and fair pricing. These features place cooperatives at the heart of a just transition, ensuring that climate action delivers decent work and equitable benefits. By aligning environmental responsibility with social inclusion, cooperatives turn the principles of sustainability

1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) "Goal 13 | Department of Economic & Social Affairs" (2025 update).

2 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). "Global Stocktake – About the global stocktake."

3 Manifesto of the Brazilian Cooperative Movement for COP30: <https://www.somoscooperativismo.coop.br/media/attachments/2025/08/04/manifesto-coop-in-cop-30-estilizado.pdf>

and solidarity into practical, measurable outcomes. Through the project *“Informed forestry decisions, sustainable forest management and forest certification in smallholder forests in Vietnam”* (2023-2026), Food and Forest Development Finland - FFD is currently supporting Vietnamese smallholder cooperatives in transforming traditional forestry practices into climate-smart models that contribute to both climate mitigation and adaptation.⁴ Cooperatives encourage members to prolong tree rotation cycles, diversify plantation species, and adopt sustainable forest management standards through forest certification. These practices increase carbon storage while reducing vulnerabilities to extreme weather. By pooling labour and resources, smallholders also help one another restore damaged forests after storms and floods, which are becoming increasingly frequent and severe in central Viet Nam.

In rural economies, agricultural cooperatives help members transition to sustainable and regenerative production by reducing deforestation, conserving soil and water, and restoring degraded ecosystems. Through shared investment and risk pooling, they enable smallholders to diversify crops, adopt green technologies, and access climate finance otherwise out of reach. COOP Czech Republic is deploying unmanned, energy-efficient stores in rural communities, developed in partnership with municipalities. These outlets reduce transport needs, energy use, and operational emissions while maintaining

access to essential goods in low-population areas, ensuring local resilience. In cities, recycling and waste-pickers' cooperatives contribute to circular economies that reduce emissions from unmanaged waste and create dignified green jobs.

Energy cooperatives are leading the community-driven transition to renewables, enabling citizens to co-own wind, solar, and bioenergy infrastructure. Financial and insurance cooperatives mobilize resources for adaptation through microinsurance, green credit, and rapid-response mechanisms that protect vulnerable households from climate shocks. [RESCOOP.eu](https://rescoop.eu), the European Federation of Energy Communities, is a growing network of 2,500 energy cooperatives across Europe, engaging more than 2 million citizens in climate action and the energy transition. By promoting citizen-led, local, and green energy, these cooperatives not only help reduce carbon emissions but also strengthen public support for renewables and foster local economic and social development.

Unlike conventional enterprises driven by short-term profit, cooperatives balance economic viability with social and environmental sustainability. Their democratic governance and local accountability foster trust, participation, and long-term stewardship of natural resources. By aligning environmental responsibility with community well-being, cooperatives translate climate commitments into practical, people-centred solutions that ensure no one is left behind.

4 FFD is partnering with Thua Thien Hue Cooperative Alliance (TTHCA) and Center for Climate Change Study in Central Vietnam (CCSC) as well as the Finnish twinning partner Forest Management Association (FMA Savotta) in the project.



European Energy Communities Forum in Kraków, 2025. © REScoop.eu.

CASE STUDIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



Cooperative Bank of Kenya

As embedded in its [Environmental, Social & Governance Policy](#), the Cooperative Bank of Kenya (Co-op Bank) contributes significantly to SDG 13 – Climate Action by mobilizing climate finance and supporting low-carbon transitions across cooperative enterprises. Leveraging its strong network of cooperatives and SACCOs, the Bank provides targeted financing for renewable energy, climate-smart technologies, and resilience-building investments in key economic sectors.

In agriculture, Co-op Bank has expanded access to Productive Use Renewable Energy (PURE) technologies, particularly solar-powered systems for dairy, maize, and potato value chains. More than 65 dairy cooperatives now use solar-powered cooling and processing equipment, while over 500 maize farmers and 200 potato farmers have adopted solar irrigation and other clean-energy assets that enhance productivity, reduce emissions, and lower operating costs. These investments strengthen smallholder climate adaptation and accelerate the uptake of clean energy in rural communities.

In transport, the Bank supports e-mobility adoption among SACCOs by financing electric vehicles and related infrastructure. Early adopters report improved income stability from reduced fuel and maintenance costs, demonstrating the economic and environmental benefits of transitioning to low-emission transport.



Creando Conciencia, Argentina

Creando Conciencia began in 2005 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, when a small group of neighbors and informal waste pickers ("cartoneros") decided to address two urgent problems: the growing waste problem in the city, and the precarious conditions of informal recyclers. Over time, the cooperative has grown significantly: between 2019-2023, they increased the volume of materials processed by nearly 135%, from about 2,683,573 kg to 6,275,000 kg. Today, they run waste-collection services (door-to-door and at EcoPoints), sorting and recycling of many types of materials (plastics, glass, paper, cardboard, metals, etc.), and they transform much of that recycled material into new products – for example, plastic furniture and everyday items such as trays, organizers, bins, school supplies, and household accessories.

The environmental and social impact of Creando Conciencia is impressive. Over their first ten years, they recycled more than 7,300,000 kg of waste, including glass, PET plastic, cardboard, and more – which reportedly saved nearly 20,000 trees and conserved hundreds of millions of liters of water. More recently (2022), the cooperative's recycling efforts avoided the emission of thousands of kilos of CO₂, saved tens of millions of kilowatts of electricity, and prevented the extraction of large volumes of petroleum. Beyond climate impact, Creando Conciencia has had a strong social outcome: many former informal recyclers now work as salaried cooperative members under safer, more dignified conditions; the cooperative also provides training, stable work, and

social inclusion, showing how climate action and social justice can go hand in hand.



Asia Pacific: Osaka Prefecture Forestry Association

The Osaka Prefecture Forestry Association (Osaka Shinrin Kumiai Rengōkai), created in 2001 through the merger of 16 forest unions, represents nearly 7,000 forest owners, employs about 50 staff, and has a capital of roughly \$1.3 million. Guided by the philosophy "Protect the mountains and grow the forest," it manages forestry, timber sales, recycling, and disaster recovery across Osaka. On July 14, 2020, it also helped establish the Osaka Cooperative and Non-Profit Sector Liaison Council (OCoNoMi Osaka) to strengthen collaboration across cooperatives.

Committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the association obtained Sustainable Green Ecosystem Council (SGEC) Forest Management/Chain of Custody (FM/CoC) certification in 2017 to ensure sustainable forest practices and a reliable timber supply. It promotes decarbonization through biomass power, encourages forest recreation, and advances forest education (ESD) for children and volunteers, linking sustainability with community resilience.

Through these initiatives, Co-op Bank illustrates the pivotal role of financial institutions in advancing actions to combat climate change and its impacts. Its climate-responsive financing model enables cooperatives to adopt sustainable technologies, promotes

low-carbon growth, and reinforces the resilience of cooperatives.

Genç İşi Kooperatif, Türkiye

Genç İşi contributes to SDG 13 (Climate Action) by equipping young cooperators with the knowledge, tools, and leadership skills needed to drive low-carbon and climate-resilient transitions in their communities. Through the *CIRCLE Project*, they build capacities in sustainability and climate risk assessment, climate-adaptive governance, and evidence-based decision-making for social and solidarity economy actors, particularly those operating and trading in the agri-food sector. Their new Youth4Coops initiative, with the cooperative development organisation Haliéus (IT) as one of their partners, further strengthens this contribution by mapping green transition good practices across Türkiye, Italy, and Spain, developing a practical guide, and training young members of agri-food cooperatives on digital and green transformation pathways. Together, these efforts empower youth to lead climate action within cooperatives, promote just and inclusive transitions, and accelerate the adoption of climate-friendly practices across the cooperative ecosystem.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite their proven impact, cooperatives face public and private sector barriers that limit their contribution to climate action. Access to climate finance remains a major challenge, as existing mechanisms often prioritise large-scale private actors and impose complex reporting requirements. Many cooperatives, particularly in developing countries, lack the technical capacity and climate data to qualify for adaptation and mitigation funds. Limited integration into national policy frameworks, worsened by weak legal recognition, hinders cooperatives from contributing to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and local adaptation plans.

At the same time, global momentum around just transitions, nature-based solutions, and locally led adaptation presents new opportunities. COP30's emphasis on inclusion and indigenous leadership aligns with the cooperative movement's values of participation and equity. Digital innovation, carbon measurement tools, and inter-cooperative partnerships can accelerate the scaling of sustainable production and circular economy models. Strengthening collaboration between cooperatives, governments, and international institutions would unlock their full potential as trusted partners in implementing climate and development agendas. COP30 also saw the launch of transformative programmes like *Coopera+ Amazônia*, which will invest R\$107 million in 50 extractivist cooperatives, benefiting over 3,000 families.⁵ Such initiatives illustrate how cooperatives act as catalysts for sustainable development, generating income, protecting ecosystems, and scaling climate solutions from local to global levels. The cooperative presence at COP30 reaffirmed that when communities collectively own the institutions delivering energy, finance, and food, climate action becomes more equitable, durable, and locally grounded.

⁵ CoopNews article on cooperatives making their voices heard at COP30: <https://www.thenews.coop/cooperatives-make-their-voices-heard-at-cop30-in-brazil/>



Tree nursery to provide high quality seedlings for certified acacia plantation in Vietnam. © Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tran Thi Phuong, CCCSC/FFD.

CALL TO ACTION

To unlock the full potential of cooperatives as agents of climate action, governments, development partners, and multilateral institutions should take the following steps:



1. Recognize and integrate cooperatives in national climate planning

Explicitly include cooperatives in climate strategies, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and local adaptation plans as key delivery partners for mitigation and adaptation.



2. Expand and adapt climate finance

Create tailored financing instruments, concessional windows, and simplified application and reporting procedures that suit cooperative enterprises and federations. Provide blended-finance options and de-risking tools to increase access for smaller and rural cooperatives.



3. Invest in capacity and technical support

Fund training, extension services, and knowledge exchanges on green innovation, climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, and digital monitoring (including carbon measurement and reporting tools). Support cooperative-to-cooperative learning and technical links with research institutions.



4. Put in place enabling legal and policy frameworks

Reform laws and regulations to strengthen legal recognition, tax treatment, and operational flexibility for agricultural, energy, financial, and other climate-relevant cooperatives. Ensure policies remove barriers to scaling community-led solutions.



5. Foster multi-stakeholder partnerships

Promote partnerships that connect cooperatives with governments, research organisations, private sector actors, and donors to pilot, scale, and finance proven climate solutions. Leverage public procurement, value-chain linkages, and technical cooperation to accelerate uptake.



6. Use cooperative governance for equitable stewardship

Harness cooperatives' democratic governance models to distribute ownership, benefits, and stewardship of natural resources fairly, ensuring climate investments reach and empower local communities.

By implementing these actions, policymakers can translate global climate commitments into inclusive, locally grounded outcomes that advance both the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda. As the International Year of Cooperatives closes, 2025 should be treated as a launchpad—not a finish line—for scaling cooperative solutions that deliver resilient livelihoods, protect ecosystems, and ensure that climate action serves the people who depend on the land and the sea.



This brief is part of the ***Building a Better World Together: Cooperative Contributions to the SDGs*** series, produced by the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) and the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), together with its regional organizations, Cooperatives Europe, ICA Africa, ICA Americas, and ICA Asia Pacific in support of the UN International Year of Cooperatives 2025 (IYC 2025).

Under the theme “*Cooperatives Build a Better World*,” IYC 2025 aims to raise awareness, promote growth, and inspire leadership in the cooperative movement. This series explores how cooperatives drive progress toward the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by fostering economic inclusion, democratic participation, and social solidarity for over one billion members worldwide.

Established in 1971, the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) is a multi-stakeholder partnership that champions and supports people-centered and self-sustaining cooperative enterprises. Its current members include the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the International Trade Centre (ITC).

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