



United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs  
Division for Inclusive Social Development

**Expert Group Meeting**

**Harnessing the Power of Cooperatives to achieve Sustainable Development for all:  
Successes, Challenges, The Road Ahead**

26 – 28 March 2019

Conference Room 11 | United Nations Office in Nairobi  
Nairobi, Kenya

**Draft Concept Note**

**Background**

In the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, Member States recognised the important role of cooperatives, stating that: “we acknowledge the role of the diverse private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to *cooperatives* in the implementation of the new Agenda.” The United Nations has also consistently called for the promotion and development of cooperatives as inclusive and socially responsible enterprises with a huge potential for growth.

In its resolution A/RES/72/143 titled Cooperatives in Social Development, adopted in December 2017, the General Assembly recognized that cooperatives, in their various forms, promote the fullest possible participation in the economic and social development of local communities and all people, including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, and are becoming a significant factor of economic and social development and contribute to the eradication of poverty and hunger; and further recognised the important contribution and potential of all forms of cooperatives to the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development.

There has been notable progress achieved, with many programmes of action, developed by governments and the cooperative movement over the years to realise the potential of cooperatives. To give further impetus to these developments, the General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/64/136 declared 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives, to increase awareness and provide impetus for actions to create enabling environments for cooperatives.

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) developed its 2020 Vision as a strategy for making the decade from 2011 – 2020 a Cooperative Decade of confident growth and development<sup>1</sup>. The intention was to make the cooperative model:

- The acknowledged leader in economic, social and environmental sustainability
- The model preferred by people
- The fastest growing form of enterprise

The cooperative model is also part of the broader social and solidarity economy, which has been gaining more traction recently due to growing inequalities and market failure in many countries. The global economic crisis and ensuing anaemic growth, fiscal austerity measures and the rise of populism all point to the potential of cooperatives to reinvigorate the social contract and democratic

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ica.coop/en/media/library/blueprint-co-operative-decade-february-2013>

self-governance. The EGM will have a particular focus on eradication of rural poverty and the role of cooperatives in providing health care for the following reasons:

1. The overriding aim of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is the eradication of poverty and UNGA resolution A/RES/73/244 entitled “Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” reiterated the urgent need to eradicate rural poverty. A majority of cooperatives, particularly in developing countries, are making a major contribution to the eradication of rural poverty. Experts will examine the potential to further enhance their contributions in the rural setting.

2. Furthermore, the in recognising that health is a precondition for and an outcome and indicator of all three dimensions economic, social and environmental of sustainable development and that, despite progress made, challenges in global health, including major inequities and vulnerabilities within and among countries, regions and populations, still remain and demand persistent attention, the United Nations general assembly has decided to convene a high-level meeting on Universal health coverage, to take place on the eve of the 74<sup>th</sup> high-level segment of the UNGA general debate. The role of cooperatives in providing healthcare will be examined in this context.

### **Objectives of the Expert Group Meeting**

The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) will be organised by the Division for Inclusive Social Development of the Department of Economic and Social Development; in Nairobi, Kenya, from 26 to 28 March 2019. The EGM will bring together a group of experts on cooperatives, with the view to review and reflect on experiences and lessons gained since the International Year of Cooperative (2012), analyse to what extent previous plans of action have achieved their desired impacts and make policy recommendations in the changing global contexts in particular the 2030 Agenda. The outcome of the EGM, will provide, among others, an expert analysis and policy recommendations that shall inform the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on the issue concerning cooperatives in social development in 2019.

Specifically, the EGM will focus on the role of cooperatives in providing universal health care and eradicating rural poverty. It will re-establish the social and economic argument for cooperatives, particularly the role played by cooperatives to reduce poverty, employment creation, food security and nutrition, women’s empowerment, and promotion of social inclusion. The EGM will also deepen the understanding of the relationships between the cooperative enterprise model and the SDGs and delivering the outcomes of the world summit on social development.

The meeting will be a three-day event that will allow a robust exchange of national experiences and new ways of thinking that can contribute to achieving the development of the cooperative model of doing business.

### **Questions being addressed:**

1. Does the economics of cooperation work in a competitive environment or is cooperation relatively inefficient compared to traditional business models?

2. Are there other benefits beyond market failure for choosing the cooperative model of doing business? Are there particular settings, for example the rural economy, where cooperatives are most effective?

3. What are the arguments in favour of giving special legislative treatment for cooperative development?
4. How can we promote common standards for statistical data on cooperatives with national statistical offices?
5. What role can cooperatives play in extending financial inclusion to underserved communities?
6. How successful was the international year of cooperatives and is there a need for a international year plus 10?
7. What are the preconditions for extending the cooperative health care model to all countries of the world?

### **Outcomes**

The EGM and Workshop will aim for the following outcomes:

1. Papers prepared by experts
2. A final report of the meeting
3. Recommendations to further enhance development of the cooperative sector

### **Organization and Administration**

The event will take place at UN Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya from 26 – 28 March 2019.

Each EGM session will include presentations by lead experts who will present papers on the topics of the sessions, which will be followed by in-depth discussions.

At the end of the meeting, participants will outline the major conclusions and recommendations of the meeting.

All inputs to the meeting will be made available as a resource guide on the website of DISD <http://social.un.org/> as well as a summary of discussion

### **Documentation and the Language of the meeting**

The documentation of the meeting will comprise of relevant publications and documents related to the topics of the sessions, and a 5-10-page paper from each expert participant. Expert participants will be invited to provide their contributions in advance and all documentation will be made available on the website of DISD <http://social.un.org/>.

The working language of the meeting will be English. Documentation for the meeting will be provided in English.

### **Passports and Visas**

Participants will be expected to make necessary arrangements with regard to passports, visa and health certificates for travel. An information note will be sent out to participants to assist them with travel arrangements.

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