

International Day of Cooperatives:

Innovative approaches to implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Side event to the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

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Creating Decent Jobs through Cooperative Enterprises for the Future World of Work

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Thank you, Ms. Bas, for the opportunity to address the cooperative community around the world in celebration of the International Day of Cooperatives.

It is widely known that while one of today's trends has led to a growing workforce, there are in fact fewer jobs - less stable employment and the worsening of working conditions are rampant. In this sense, SDG 8 call for decent work is extremely important. It is in this light that I would like to briefly discuss the role of cooperatives in furthering the decent work agenda according to ILO's four pillars: the *creation of jobs*, the *extension of social protection*, the *increase in social dialogue*, the *rights at work*, and to which I will also add *gender equality*.

On the Creation of jobs: cooperatives have been resourceful way of tackling the social and economic exclusion of marginalized groups, contributing to a reduction in the levels of vulnerability these groups experience. In many ways, as the ILO has noted, coops have also helped "*to advance the concept of moving out informality because they are not only an effective mechanism to provide economic and social security for rural and urban informal economy actors, but because they have a record of transforming marginal activities into legally protected work*"¹. When the waste pickers union KKP KP created the SWaCH coop, this enabled workers to provide waste collection services to the municipality, thus securing the livelihoods of thousands of waste pickers in Pune, India. In Belo Horizonte, my city, the creation of waste pickers' cooperatives in the 1990's helped establish a social accord whereby waste pickers were integrated as service providers in municipal source segregation schemes. Brazilian informal collectors of recyclables can choose to formalize themselves as a collective (cooperative) and thus access funding lines available for solidarity economy enterprises.

On the Extension of Social Protection: cooperatives are also known as a way to extend social protection. In many waste pickers' cooperatives in Brazil, for instance, workers have pooled resources to access social protection (they established their own crèches, medical assistance, payment of pensions etc). In this sense, coops may be able to decrease the impacts of extreme poverty and the lack of inclusion in social security schemes.

On the Increase in Social Dialogue: By pooling collective assets and strengthening cooperative members' economic and political voice, workers can seek to enhance their channels of social dialogue. This can be done in innovative ways through capacity building and knowledge sharing. For example, the cooperatives funded by SEWA, the Self-Employed Women's Association in India, have contributed to bringing greater respect and recognition for workers as service providers and opened paths for them to participate in policy dialogues with government agencies. In Brazil, waste pickers' coops have formed a national movement of waste pickers, which represent coops across the country, particularly in demands made to all levels of government. They have also created an

¹ For the ILO's analysis of how cooperatives are a stepping stone out of informality, see their report here: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_policy/documents/publication/wcms_210459.pdf

Observatory for Inclusive Recycling to support their cooperative movement with research and capacity building to assist in the processes of social dialogue.

On Guaranteeing Rights at Work: Workers from the most diverse sectors of the informal economy deal with precarious and hazardous work conditions. Coops can mitigate these problems by providing training to workers on issues such as occupational health and safety and workers' rights to avoid further exploitation. With regard to this last point, *Se Si Puede*, a coop of domestic workers in NY, has been fundamental in securing gainful employment and better wages for many women in the domestic sector.

On Gender Equality: Cooperatives are a key source for building women's economic empowerment given that many women find themselves choosing amongst different informal jobs. Cooperatives work for higher wages and better working conditions, member-controlled operations and decision-making processes, and greater bargaining power to leverage for improved wages and conditions. In Brazil, women waste pickers have reported how working in a cooperative gives them more flexibility than other formal or informal jobs. Recent gender training workshops with coop members in Brazil have also given women a space to voice their concerns and interests in attaining gender equality in the workplace and in increasing their political participation.

Thus, I believe that cooperatives are in a unique position to promote decent work, while also protecting livelihoods. And **Protecting Livelihoods is Key to Sustainable Urban Development**. It is worth calling attention to the fact that cooperatives are based on fundamental values such as liberty, equality, solidarity, and democracy, mutual struggle and mutual help. Coops' focus on mutual help and equality of opportunity can be a way for the marginalized to enter economic niches as collectives. This can enable coops to foster sustainable and participatory business because of their commitment to job security, the improvement of working conditions, profit-sharing and the support of members' social needs. Overall, there is a natural alignment between the principles on which cooperatives are founded and the sustainable development goals.

On this International Day of Cooperatives I call the attention of governments to build a policy and regulatory environment that is favourable to cooperatives so that they can continue fulfilling their role in meeting the sustainable development agenda.