

Commission for Social Development
Side Event *Assessing the Contribution of Cooperatives to Social Development:
Successes, Challenges, The Road Ahead*
UN headquarters, New York, USA
19 February 2019

The United Nations recognizes 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 that cooperatives are becoming a significant factor of economic and social development and contribute to the eradication of poverty and hunger¹.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda both recognize the potential contribution of cooperatives to sustainable development and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Cooperatives operate in all sectors of the economy, including production, retail, marketing, financing right through to consumer cooperatives. They often operate in places where markets are absent, providing employment to tens of millions of people. They are prominent in both developing and developed countries and still have a huge potential for growth.

Despite their enormous potential, cooperatives continue to face acute challenges to growing their operations, including the lack of awareness by the business community and the wider public of the benefits of the cooperative model; the lack of legislation that could establish an enabling environment for the formation and development of cooperatives; the lack of internationally comparable data on their operations to inform policy; and the need for technical support for smaller cooperatives to enable them to professionalize their operations.

Despite these challenges, there have been many successes around the world. Many of these lessons are transferrable and can provide the basis for establishing cooperatives in other sectors and in other countries. And many cooperatives are establishing forward and backward linkages that can further promote their growth in competitive environments.

Cooperatives are central to social development and provide a model for social inclusion and for tackling growing inequalities in the world. It is therefore fitting to organize an event during the Commission for Social Development, where ministers and other stakeholders from around the world will be at the United Nations headquarters discussing the theme: *Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies*.

There have been many programmes of action, developed by governments and the cooperative movement over the years to realise the potential of 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 development². The intention was to make the cooperative model:

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

¹ A/RES/72/143

² <https://www.ica.coop/en/media/library/blueprint-co-operative-decade-february-2013>

The side-event will address successes, challenges and the road ahead and demonstrate the central role of cooperatives in addressing inequalities. Cooperatives will have the opportunity to address Member States directly on the kinds of support needed to create growth and success; and will also be able to network and learn from each other's activities. The overall objective is to accelerate progress towards realizing the *cooperative decade*.

Draft Programme:

1. Daniela Bas, Director, Division of Inclusive Social Development, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Introductory remarks (5 minutes)

2. Keynote address by Doug O'Brien, President and Chief Executive Officer, National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International.

The cooperative advantage and key elements to growth and development (10 minutes)

3. H.E. Sukhbold Sukhee, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations (TBC).

Enabling environment for cooperatives: The case of Mongolia (7 minutes)

4. Cooperatives Addressing Unequal Access to Healthcare.

Britt Alexander Cruz, Program Manager for International Development, Health Partners (7 minutes)

5. Cooperatives Addressing Unequal Access to Finance (TBC).

George Ombado, Chief Executive, African Confederation of Cooperative Savings and Credit Associations. (7 minutes)

6. General discussion. Moderator.

Jessica Gordon Nembhard, Professor of Community Justice and Social Economic Development at John Jay College, City University of New York

Background:

The Commission for Social Development (CSocD) was established in 1946 to advise the United Nations on social policies in general. Since the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, the Commission has been the key United Nations body in charge of the follow up and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. It is also the main forum for discussion on the social dimensions of sustainable development.

CSocD meets annually in New York, usually in February. The fifty-seventh session will take place from 11 to 21 February 2019, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. The priority theme for this year is "*Addressing inequalities and challenges to social inclusion through fiscal, wage and social protection policies.*"

Participants include government officials, social policy experts and civil society organisations. The Commission produces a report following each session and adopts several resolutions. For more information: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/united-nations-commission-for-social-development-csocd-social-policy-and-development-division.html>

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