



International Co-operative Alliance



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Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade

Frequently Asked Questions

What is this blueprint intended to do?

The blueprint is a plan for the global co-operative movement spanning the decade we are in. It outlines a strategic agenda for the co-operative sector led by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) and it follows up this five-point-plan with individual strategies.

It aims to:

1. Elevate participation within membership and governance to a new level.
2. Position co-operatives as builders of sustainability.
3. Build the co-operative message and secure the co-operative identity.
4. Ensure supportive legal frameworks for co-operative growth.
5. Secure reliable co-operative capital while guaranteeing member control.

What are the main goals of this co-operative decade strategy?

This strategy intends to take the co-operative way of doing business to a new level. At the heart of this blueprint is the "2020 challenge" which is that by 2020, co-operatives will become:

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

Where does the co-operative movement see there needs to be change?

The leader of the global co-operative movement – the ICA – has witnessed the growing social unrest, economic stagnation and the insecurity that future generations face in terms of jobs, essential social services and even just meeting their basic needs.

The ICA, in the Blueprint for the Co-operative Decade, has identified the following key issues facing society; issues which co-operatives can help to address:

- Environmental degradation and resource depletion.
- An unstable financial sector and increasing income inequality.



- A growing global governance gap.
- A seemingly disenfranchised younger generation.

Why are co-operatives going to help the global economy climb out of this worldwide financial crisis?

- Co-operatives bring economic resources under democratic control, and they do so uniquely among corporate governance structures; there are no other business models which do this.
- The co-operative model is a commercially efficient and effective way of doing business that accounts for a wider range of human needs, time horizons and values in decision-making.
- Co-operatives have the advantage of being able to work effectively on both a very small, and on a very large scale.
- The co-operative movement is worldwide, providing millions of jobs around the globe.
- Co-operative institutions create long-term security; they are sustainable, long-lasting and successful.

Why just the co-operative *decade* – isn't this a business model you want to see go beyond the end of this decade?

Absolutely, one of the strongest features of co-operatives is that they are sustainable businesses.

But the 'co-operative decade' is about us as a global movement recognising that we have a window of opportunity now. Since 2008 the world has been caught up in financial turmoil, from which there is no apparent exit. Not only that, but developing economies have also not been able to fight some of their most pressing problems like poverty and hunger.

Aren't there many challenges to the expansion of co-operatives around the world?

Yes, and the blueprint identifies two of the foremost challenges.

- Co-operatives in every jurisdiction sit within a **legal framework**. This framework plays a critical role for the viability and existence of co-operatives.
- Co-operatives need access to **capital** if they are to be established, to grow and flourish.

Who came up with this strategy for the Co-operative Decade?

The ICA has led the overview of the drawing up of the blueprint. It established a Planning World Group the members of whom include: Stéphane Bertrand: Desjardins (Canada), Nelson Kuria: CIC Insurance Group (Kenya), Zhang Wangshu: All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Co-operatives (China), Mark Craig: The Co-operative Group (UK) and Dame Pauline Green: President of the ICA.

The strategy itself has been drawn up by co-operative law expert Cliff Mills and economic sociology expert Dr Will Davies of the Centre for Mutual and Employee-owned Business, which is part of the University of Oxford.

Who is going to be implementing the co-operative decade strategy?

This is a strategy which the ICA cannot take forward on its own. The ICA certainly has its own role to play, and has every intention of rising to the challenges presented.

But for this Blueprint to be meaningful and effective, it needs to be taken up and endorsed by national bodies, by individual societies, and by all people who believe in the co-operative way of doing business. All of us have to rise to the 2020 Challenge.

Bold initiatives and clear implementation plans must be developed to meet the 2020 Challenge, and that will need to follow in the months and years ahead.

What is the ICA exactly and who does it represent as the leader of this co-operative decade strategy?

The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) is an independent, non-governmental organisation that unites, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. It exists to provide an effective and efficient global voice and forum for knowledge, expertise and co-ordinated action for and about co-operatives.

ICA members are international and national co-operative organisations from all sectors of the economy including agriculture, banking, consumer, fisheries, health, housing, industry, insurance and tourism.

The ICA has member organisations from almost 100 countries, representing approximately one billion individuals worldwide. Around 100 million people work for a co-op globally.

The co-operative movement often talks about “principles”, what are these principles and what do they mean?

First of all co-operatives are run on a basic set of values: self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. They also follow the tradition of the founders of the co-operative movement, believing in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

The seven principles under which the global co-operative movement works are:

1. Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

3. Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

5. Education, Training and Information

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6. Co-operation among Co-operatives

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. Concern for Community

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.