



Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030

Cooperative contributions to SDG 7

*This brief is part of the **Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030** series produced by the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC). Through a series of 17 briefs, one for each Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), COPAC hopes to raise awareness about the significant contributions of cooperative enterprises towards achieving the 2030 Agenda in a sustainable, inclusive and responsible way, and encourage continued support for their efforts.*

This brief focuses on SDG 7 – ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

About the Sustainable Development Goals

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development were adopted by world leaders in September 2015 during a historic summit at the United Nations. The SDGs set out a vision for countries to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

For more information, visit www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment.

About cooperatives

Cooperatives are defined as ‘autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise’.¹

All cooperatives subscribe to a set of values and principles that support the social and people-focused nature of their activities. They are operated democratically by their members. Whether customers of the business, workers or residents, members have an equal say and a share of the profits.

Cooperatives are a powerful economic and social force, present in most countries of the world and in most sectors of the economy. The cooperative movement counts more than a billion members.

¹ International Co-operative Alliance, *Statement on the Co-operative Identity* (Manchester, 1995). Available from <https://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles>

The cooperative difference

Access to energy is key to ending poverty, while committing to clean energy sources is crucial for ensuring environmental sustainability. There is much progress to be made: more than a billion people in the world do not have access to electricity, and more than three billion still use fuels like wood, charcoal, coal and dung for cooking and heating.² With the ongoing revolution in renewable energy, clean energy is becoming more affordable and more accessible, broadening the potential for SDG 7 to be achieved by 2030.

Cooperatives are important contributors to SDG 7. Electric cooperatives bring energy to many rural areas where other companies may not be willing or able to invest in the infrastructure. They can contribute to the goal of 'energy for all' – the drive to bring clean, modern energy to the 1.3 billion people in developing countries without access to electricity. Being enterprises run by their members, cooperatives also democratically manage their businesses, meaning that they work to ensure energy remains affordable and reliable for their communities.

Cooperatives are driven by concern for community, their seventh founding principle, so clean and renewable energy sources are a priority for many cooperatives. For example, consumer cooperatives try to integrate sustainable energy into their retail spaces, by introducing closed refrigerators, switching to biofuel to power their stores or making their buildings more energy efficient.

To better understand the cooperative difference, the following cooperatives illustrate how they make change in their communities.

From the field: How cooperatives contribute to accessible and sustainable energy

REScoop.eu is the European federation of 1,500 renewable energy cooperatives and one million citizens who are active in the transition to a more sustainable energy system. Set up in 2013 as a Belgian non-profit association, it provides start-up support and technical services for renewable energy cooperatives and represents their voices.³

Ecopower in Belgium is one of the biggest members of REScoop.eu with almost 50,000 members currently owning 17 wind turbines, 320 solar panels, three hydropower installations and one cogeneration installation using rape seed oil. It was established in 1991 to fund citizen-owned renewable energy projects and when the national energy market opened up in 2003, it started supplying renewable energy to Flemish households. The cooperative also sells to consumers sustainable wood pellets and briquettes and professional energy analyses of dwellings through its Ecotraject programme.⁴



Another REScoop.eu member is Energy4All in the United Kingdom, which supports development, financing and management of renewable energy cooperative projects. Owned by the cooperatives it supports, Energy4All has grown to a network of 23 cooperatives with 13,250 individual members and created 30MW of electricity capacity.⁵

² <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/energy/overview>

³ www.rescoop.eu

⁴ www.ecopower.be

⁵ <https://energy4all.co.uk/>

**Want to see more examples of
how cooperatives contribute to the SDG 7?**
Visit the Coops for 2030 campaign at
www.coopsfor2030.coop

In Bangladesh, the Rural Electrification Board (REB) has been working with communities since 1977 to establish rural energy cooperatives to generate and distribute electricity. Today, 70 of these cooperatives (known as Palli Bidyut Samities or PBSs) exist, with significant results: 30 million people with access to electricity, 47,650 villages connected to the grid, over 219,000 kilometres of distribution lines installed, 170,000 rural irrigation pumping stations powered and more than 16,000 jobs created. Each PBS is governed by representatives elected to the governing body by members (the rural consumers).⁶ Also in Bangladesh, the Coastal Electrification and Women's Development Cooperatives (UBOMUS) established in 1999 through funding by the World Bank started manufacturing solar lamps to provide power to households in Char Montaz, a very remote island outside the country's electricity grid. With the income earned from solar lamps, women members started up small businesses by themselves. As the cheaper products had started trickling into the local market, UBOMUS started to focus on selling solar panels and solar powered devices and systems. The cooperative now covers most of the Southern part of Bangladesh and has helped to install 73,000 solar systems.⁷

The first electricity cooperative in South Sudan was founded in Yei, within USAID's Southern Sudan Rural Electrification Program. The initiative resulted in the construction of a power plant, the installation of a street lighting circuit and skills training for residents to set up and operate an electricity distribution utility. Before the project, only three towns in Southern Sudan had electricity. Today, the Yei Electric Cooperative serves more than 325 accounts, benefiting more than 16,000 people. The community enjoys greater business opportunities and growth, and 22 people are directly employed by the cooperative.⁸

COOPERBIO is Brazil's first biodiesel cooperative, founded in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in 2005 by a group of small farmers and landless workers. With the involvement of 25,000 families, the cooperative collects biomass and produces biodiesel and ethanol. COOPERBIO uses castor bean, jatropha, sunflower and other plants in the production of biodiesel, with raw materials coming from the farmers and land owners who operate the cooperative. In addition to generating jobs and incomes in the production chain, the cooperative advocates for the environment, in particular for promoting healthy diets for rural families and the protection of water resources and biodiversity.⁹



⁶ International Labour Office, *Providing clean energy and energy access through cooperatives* (Geneva, 2013). Available from http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/publications/WCMS_233199/lang-en/index.htm

⁷ David Bergman, "Women Power in Bangladesh", 28 January 2017. Available from <https://www.wartsila.com/twentyfour7/environment/women-power-in-bangladesh>

⁸ See footnote 6.

⁹ See footnote 6.



UNITED NATIONS
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**International
Co-operative
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International
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Organization



**Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations**

About COPAC

COPAC is a multi-stakeholder partnership of global public and private institutions that promotes and advances people-centered, self-sustaining cooperative enterprises, guided by the principles of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – in all aspects of its work. The Committee's current members are the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Co-operative Alliance and the World Farmers' Organisation.

For more information, please visit
www.copac.coop.