



# Transforming our world: A cooperative 2030

*Cooperative contributions to SDG 14*

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 14 – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

## 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](http://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’.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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



## The cooperative difference

Oceans and seas, along with coastal and marine resources, play an essential role in human well-being and social and economic development worldwide. One out of five people depend on fish as their primary source of protein, and eight countries depend over 50 per cent on fish, making fisheries a key component to achieving food security and nutrition.<sup>2</sup> SDG 14 aims to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, and is intrinsically linked to achievement of SDG 1 - no poverty, and SDG 2 - zero hunger. To achieve SDG 14, it is imperative to focus on the role of coastal communities in implementing conservation measures, to sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems. This is particularly key for small-scale fisheries communities in developing countries, who rely on these marine resources for their livelihoods. Small-scale fishing makes up more than 90 per cent of the world's capture fishers and fish workers, thus playing a key role for poverty alleviation, food security, and natural resource management.<sup>3</sup>

The sustainable management of coastal and marine resources however, can be hindered by a high incidence of poverty, different sources of vulnerabilities, such as climate and market changes, and lack of alternative livelihoods. In the absence of safety nets or affordable insurance mechanisms, fishers and fish workers may be circumstantially forced to engage in negative coping mechanisms, such as illegal, unreported and unregulated practices. This not only exacerbates their vulnerability status, engaging them in a negative cycle, but also further damages the coastal and marine ecosystems.

The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines)<sup>4</sup> recognize the importance of promoting and supporting the organizational and capacity development of cooperatives as well as other professional and informal organizations in the small-scale fisheries sector. Through service provision and empowerment of small-scale fishers, cooperatives and other forms of associations are contributing to lifting small-scale fishers out of poverty and to building their resilience to climate and market shifts. These organizations can support their small-scale fisher and fish worker members to gain access to resources, services and markets, enhance their income and increase their capacity to diversify their livelihoods. Often cooperatives can provide safety nets, including credit and insurance schemes.

Cooperatives can also provide small-scale fishers and fish workers with tools to both better manage and conserve the oceans, seas and marine resources and comply with fisheries management regulations, such as closed seasons. They have important roles to play in facilitating information exchanges, improving communities' negotiating power with market intermediaries, building partnerships, networks and linkages to other organizations, and fostering sharing of traditional and indigenous knowledge. Cooperatives and other professional and informal organizations can facilitate their members' involvement in policy- and decision-making processes relevant to small-scale fishing communities.

In empowering fishers and fish workers, cooperatives play a key role in helping to address unequal power relationships and in supporting and empowering marginalized populations within the sector, such as women. Women's membership in cooperatives can provide them with access to social security, help to strengthen their leadership and entrepreneurship skills, and enable them to voice their own interests and needs in decision-making processes that affect them.

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2 A. Bennett, P. Patil, K. Kleisner, D. Rader, J. Virdin, and X. Basurto. 2018. *Contribution of fisheries to food and nutrition security: Current knowledge, policy, and research*. NI Report 18-02 (Durham, NC: Duke University). Available from [https://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/sites/default/files/publications/contribution\\_of\\_fisheries\\_to\\_food\\_and\\_nutrition\\_security\\_0.pdf](https://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/sites/default/files/publications/contribution_of_fisheries_to_food_and_nutrition_security_0.pdf)

3 FAO. 2017. *FAO Working for SDG 14*. Available from <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7298e.pdf>

4 FAO. 2015. *Voluntary guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication*. Available from <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4356en.pdf>

Collective action in small-scale fisheries can also take the form of a Community Supported Fishery (CSF), which is an innovative marketing and distribution strategy that seeks to eliminate the middle men by linking fishers and fish workers to the final consumer. In a CSF, consumers pay an upfront share or a membership fee before the season or fishing period begins, and then they are provided with local seafood through either weekly or monthly shares, according to their preference and subscription (FAO GLOBEFISH). This reduces the uncertainty and instability of their income and decreases financial risk. It also ensures that fishers and fish workers comply with certain standards set by the market and consumers, and incentivizes the local economy, helping to reduce fishers and fish workers' poverty and vulnerability.

### From the field: how cooperatives contribute to SDG 14

In Costa Rica, CoopeSolidar, a small-scale fisheries management cooperative, has helped strengthen collective action through implementation of the SSF Guidelines and through the consolidation of the rights to sustainably use mollusks in the country. In collaboration with FAO, CoopeSolidar strengthened the capacity of small-scale fisheries organizations of Marine Responsible Fishing Areas (AMPR, due to their initials in Spanish) and supported the implementation of AMPR's annual plan of action. CoopeSolidar also supported the preparation of a draft bill for implementation of the SSF Guidelines, carried out workshops to explain this legislation and the SSF Guidelines, and initiated a process towards the traceability of mollusks and its value chain. The cooperative's actions helped strengthen the representation and participation of women and youth, promoted the organization of groups of fisher women and youth, and gave its members the tools to increase their resilience to climate and market shifts, while helping to alleviate their vulnerability and poverty.

Increasingly consumers are interested to know that seafood products are sourced and managed sustainably. Sustainable fishing cooperatives can create direct links between fishers and customers. One example is the Catchbox cooperative in the United Kingdom – a community supported fishery that connects people with their local fishermen and fish in the towns of Brighton and Chichester.<sup>5</sup> The scheme aims to both encourage responsible fishing, sustainable consumption of a wider variety of fish, and help people get to know the fish in their seas.<sup>6</sup>



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<sup>5</sup> *Fishing co-operatives offer a more sustainable catch*, The Guardian, 2014. Available from <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2014/dec/22/fishing-cooperatives-sustainable-catch>

<sup>6</sup> *UK's first community supported fishery shortlisted for observer ethical award*, The Fish Site, 2013. Available from <https://thefishsite.com/articles/uks-first-community-supported-fishery-shortlisted-for-observer-ethical-award>

Co-op Sanchoku in Japan is another specific type of community-supported agriculture that was developed by the Japanese Consumer Co-operatives in the early 1970s. Co-op Sanchoku promotes locally based, self-reliant food economies that build direct links between local food producers and consumers. The cooperative aims to ensure a consistent supply of good quality and safe products, while also incorporating social and environmental elements into its business activities to support the vibrancy and health of local communities. Within the Sanchoku scheme, cooperative members incorporate the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources in their activities. The Notsuke Fisheries Co-operative in Hokkaido Prefecture adopted environment friendly fisheries techniques and also supports forestation in the sea and on land in coastal areas. The Onnason Fisheries Co-operative in southern Japan works to enhance the productivity of mozuku seaweed by engaging in efforts to conserve the tropical marine environment, in particular coral reefs.<sup>7</sup>

The Cananéia Oyster Producers' Cooperative (COOPEROSTRA) in Mandira on the southern coast of São Paulo, Brazil, supported the community in establishing new rules and practices to reconcile oyster harvesting with the conservation of local mangrove forests and their high biodiversity. Cooperative members are allowed three harvests a year (Diegues, 2008) and receive twice as much for their oysters as they received from market intermediaries. Before the cooperative was established, intermediaries dominated the oyster market chain and paid little attention to local regulations, sanitation and health standards for shellfish processing. Mandira's oysters have enhanced appreciation of artisanal production, and the availability of high-quality local seafood has encouraged tourism.<sup>8</sup>

In Aceh Province of Indonesia, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the American Red Cross (ARC) collaborated to initiate a development assistance programme that fostered a new co-management initiative aimed at reviving small-scale fishery and coastal communities in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami. The co-management structures set in place integrated vulnerable coastal communities into society after the tsunami, improved the capacities of youth, fishers and government officials to address community challenges, and created partnerships among different co-management organizations. Overall they helped to create the enabling conditions to facilitate sustainable livelihoods in coastal communities.



Fishmarc, the Fisheries Management Resource Centre, is a NGO in India, focused on building the capacity of fishers' organizations, promoting sustainable and equitable management of fishery and coastal resources, and protecting and enhancing the livelihoods of fisheries communities. In collaboration with FAO, it has imparted training to Fish Marketing Societies on staff management, fish marketing, credit management, and accounting and finances. The organization provided training for fisher women on hygienic fish handling and value-adding procedures. Fishmarc also helped set up a scheme for fisher women to access ice boxes through a half-subsidized, half-loan scheme, enabling them to better preserve the fish, and thereby increasing their income.

7 JCCU. 2012. *Co-op Sanchoku: A unique business practice developed by the Japanese Consumer Co-operatives*. Available from [https://jccu.coop/eng/public/pdf/coop\\_sanchoku.pdf](https://jccu.coop/eng/public/pdf/coop_sanchoku.pdf)  
8 FAO and IFAD. 2012. *Cooperatives in small-scale fisheries: enabling successes through community empowerment*. Available from <http://www.fao.org/3/ap408e/ap408e.pdf>

**Want to see more examples of  
how cooperatives contribute to SDG 14?  
Visit the Coops for 2030 campaign at  
[www.coopsfor2030.coop](http://www.coopsfor2030.coop)**

The South African small-scale fisheries women's cooperative, enabled and empowered by a Nature Conservancy project, manages the supply chain of fisheries operations in Pringle Bay, Betty's Bay and Kleinmang Harbour, and directly connects fishers with the market, eliminating any middle-men transaction costs, and empowering development from the bottom up. Through the use of a smartphone application developed by the University of Cape Town, the women can access and manage an integrated monitoring system, through recording catch data, supporting supply chain traceability efforts, and informing co-management discussions with key partners. Women in the cooperative have also improved their business capacities, which will allow them to continue developing their entrepreneurship opportunities, including the setting up of a restaurant value chain project. Overall, this project has reinvigorated the local fisheries economy and allowed women, as well as the small-scale fishers involved in the supply chain, to generate their own income.

In Kenya, the Dunga Fishermen Cooperative Society is addressing the low stock levels resulting from overexploitation and climate change impacts, through breeding thousands of fish through an aquaculture development initiative and then releasing them into the lake. This initiative was the result of receiving a grant by the ILO COOP Africa project, which aimed to address the decline of fish production that has contributed to poverty and food insecurity along Lake Victoria. The cooperative is also actively discouraging fishers from using trawling nets and other gears that can deplete fish. In these ways, the cooperative is helping to ensure more sustainable natural resource management in the area.



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<sup>9</sup> South Africa – Fisheries management: South African small-scale fisheries project links fishing co-op to markets and models value chain innovation for new fishery law, Reef Resilience Network, 2016. Available from <https://reefresilience.org/case-studies/south-africa-fisheries-management/>  
<sup>10</sup> Vanishing fish income forces livelihood switch, The New Humanitarian, 2012. Available from <http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/95617/kenya-vanishing-fish-income-forces-livelihood-switchcorrection>



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## About COPAC

COPAC is a multi-stakeholder partnership of global public and private institutions that promotes and advances people-centered, self-sustaining co-operative 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.

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