

COOPERATIVES FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

It is well recognized that cooperatives' egalitarian values, collective decision-making processes and common-ownership model can broaden economic, social and political opportunities for women, making them a preferred pathway for women's empowerment.

Women's participation in agricultural cooperatives is also an excellent way to fight hunger while reducing inequalities. According to the FAO's 2023 report, *Status of Women in Agrifood Systems*, "collective action and group-based approaches are important tools for more inclusive development."

Membership in farmers' organizations, including associations, co-ops, self-help and women's groups, is associated with positive and significant effects on farmers' incomes in a majority (57 percent) of cases reviewed across 24 countries. Women's groups, in particular, have consistently been shown to improve women's economic empowerment and broader wellbeing."



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality stipulates that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.

Supporting efforts to strengthen women's empowerment and participation in cooperatives, which also provide a social safety net for the most vulnerable individuals, is an excellent pathway to achieving the United Nations' SDGs.

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Reasons why cooperatives help foster women's empowerment

1 As members and as elected representatives, women can exercise their right to vote on equal footing with men.

2 Women can put forward their point of view and have their specific needs and interests be better understood during meetings.

"We have improved our self-esteem. The training allows us to be good leaders and help our colleagues in the communities so that they shed the fear of giving their opinion, asking for permission to speak up, and participating in all the activities!"

- Silvia Padilla Céspedes, delegate of the local committee of Alto Seco tara producers in Bolivia

3 In co-ops, women also have greater access to resources and to the benefits of development, as well as being able to exercise control.

4 New opportunities are available to women to strengthen their knowledge and capacities as entrepreneurs.

"I have always been convinced that the co-op model, in conjunction with developing members' entrepreneurial skills, is the most sustainable model. My confidence has only increased now that I see how co-ops are coping with the war environment."

- Irina Volovyk, Ukraine



5 Co-ops facilitate women's integration into the formal economy thanks to the employment and economic opportunity that they create.

6 Cooperatives facilitate access to capital and markets, enabling women to start up or develop their own enterprises.

7 Co-ops have the potential to concretely support women's leadership and help advance their participation as decision-makers.

"My wife has become a model leader, because after each leadership training, she organizes sessions where the men and women in the village can talk and share their views. Thanks to her awareness efforts, men have started to accept for women to hold certain positions in the village authorities, despite the fact that we are a very conservative community."

- Sountoukoug Gomis, apicultrice au Sénégal.



8 Cooperatives make a concrete contribution to inclusive development for communities, benefitting both women and men.

9 By supporting the emergence of women leaders, co-ops can provide youth, and especially young girls, with inspiring models of competent, influential, and ambitious women.



"Many people still find it hard to believe that this mill is run by a woman. I broke through the glass ceiling thanks to SOCODEVI's training, especially in leadership."

- Jenny Sofía Rivas, a young member of the Fronteras de Oriente coop and manager of the sawmill—the only woman to hold such a position in Honduras to date.

10 Thanks to cooperatives, women become agents of change who can improve their socio-economic situation as well of that of their families and their communities.

"I've regained confidence in my own skills. I know that my opinion counts. My contribution is key to the development of my Farmers Hope Cooperative (FAHO) and my village. That's why I ran for and was elected to the FAHO Supervisory Board. I also became a promoter for three groups in my village savings and loan association. I organize the meetings and train the 90 members (78 of whom are women) on various topics, including gender equality. The association helps us a lot in our projects, with credits for carrying out our income-generating activities. I am a woman leader!"

- Valentine Brou Asso, leader, cocoa producer and member of the FAHO cooperative in Côte d'Ivoire.





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