

Cooperatives and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Think globally
– Act locally

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The anniversary of “Raiffeisen 200” in 2018 drew much attention not only to the person of Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen, but also to the fact that cooperatives have been an integral part of the economy in many countries worldwide for over 160 years. They are sustainable enterprises that guarantee income and jobs, especially in rural regions. In addition, they contribute to maintaining the quality of life, e.g. by supporting social commitments such as associations and schools. In agriculture, Raiffeisen cooperatives act as a bridge between members and the market, strengthening the position of the individual in production and supply chains.

That is not the case all over the world. Particularly in so-called developing countries, the living conditions of large parts of the population are poor. Small and micro farmers are still representing the typical agricultural structure in Africa, Asia as well as Central and South America. They are hardly organised, have no access to knowledge and modern technologies and thus no power in the market. Their chances of achieving fair prices for their products and thus a sufficient income are very low. The consequences are hunger, children who have to contribute to the families’ income instead of going to school, unemployment due to a continuous economic decline of the rural regions, social conflicts and migration.

We are all called upon to take action. What can cooperatives do to remedy the situation?

In September 2015, the United Nations adopted the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” in New York. Poverty, hunger, inequalities, a lack of education and the disadvantages of women and young people need to be overcome. 17 goals (Sustainable Development Goals, SDG) were set. These are specified in 169 subgoals.

The SDG have replaced the eight MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) from the year 2000.

While the MDGs were focused purely on improving eight key problem areas in the so-called developing countries, the SDGs are intended to guide national policies worldwide and also international cooperation. For the 2030 agenda is not only aimed at the world’s disadvantaged countries, it also places us all under an obligation. Hu-

manity can only achieve these ambitious goals together in a global partnership.

Consequently, for example the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) point out how cooperatives can contribute to the individual development goals. The website ‘Coopsfor2030’ serves as a platform on which cooperatives present themselves and their concrete goals and contributions.

According to Ed Mayo, General Secretary of Co-operatives UK, co-operative economies, based on the principles of co-operatives, are of high relevance for a sustainable future of humanity.

The experiences and successes of cooperatives in Raiffeisen’s tradition are highly significant in this discussion, which deals with concepts for overcoming economic and social challenges in national economies. With a functioning system of entrepreneurial cooperatives, partner countries can address structural economic and social problems and find promising, sustainable solutions. Cooperatives therefore have a future, especially in the 21st century, because we need a global sustainable development.

One thing is undisputed: Without the will of the individual to help him- or herself, it will not work, without trust in oneself and others, without the willingness for responsible cooperation among members in cooperatives, sustainable success will not occur.

That is what Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen already reminded us of. It is also the guiding principle for the cooperative development work of the DGRV-Deutscher Genossenschafts- und Raiffeisenverband e.V. [German Cooperative and Raiffeisen Confederation], the DGRV. The DGRV offers its own intensive experience with cooperative development to potential partners, giving them access to its networks, such as the IRU and the ICA.

The SDG also shape the activities of the DGRV as member of the IRU as part of its cooperative development work. For decades, the DGRV has been committed to strengthening the cooperative system worldwide. The guiding principle has always been sustainability. In practice, this is the entrepreneurial cooperative, which should support its

members in the long term in economic and social respects.

Cooperatives are a proven, adaptable institutional cooperation model that effectively and sustainably supports members' efforts to achieve economic and social objectives.

The DGRV and the IRU want the cooperative entrepreneurial idea to be used by broad, often disadvantaged sections of the world's population. The chance of economic participation should be increased for these people so that they can improve their living conditions sustainably by themselves. With regards to the need to achieve appropriate living conditions worldwide, while taking sustainability into account, especially cooperative organisations are called upon to become active in cooperative development projects. The DGRV, backed by the entire German cooperative organisation is meeting this challenge. They permanently promote cooperatives and other similar socio-economic structures in partner countries.

This work is in the tradition of the cooperative pioneer Raiffeisen. It is important to draw the right conclusions today from the work of our founding fathers and the wealth of 160 years of experience of the organisation. These experiences flow into the cooperative development work of the DGRV, not least through the regular deployment of experienced practitioners.

Cooperatives are of course not the only answer to these challenges. However, it is important to draw attention to the practical and worldwide visible experiences and positive effects of cooperatives in development projects. Cooperatives promote social interaction and integrate people. Equality, responsibility and democracy are the central rules of joint economic activities.

The DGRV approach also promotes cooperative association structures in the partner countries in order to achieve greater stability. With this work, the DGRV follows the tradition of the cooperative pioneers Raiffeisen and Hermann Schulze-Delitzsch. Own experience in cooperative development in Germany is made available to its partners.

Cooperative development work focuses primarily on the initiative and self-help of local people. Solutions must not come from outside, but must

be developed in the respective countries. This is crucial for sustainable international cooperation.

There are, therefore, good reasons that with the adoption of the SDGs the global development cooperation will focus again more on cooperatives. All cooperative organisations are called upon to emphasise the potential of the cooperative organisational and legal form when implementing the SDG and to play an active role in this work.

The examples of cooperative practice in countries with IRU member organisations presented in the following chapters are convincing evidence that cooperatives stand for sustainable management and are active in the interests of their members in a wide variety of contexts and development stages. Thus, in all member countries of the IRU, cooperatives contribute to the Development Agenda 2030.