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# Women and Youth Participation in Cooperatives

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India has become the fifth largest economy in the world and can channelise its demographic advantage in its quest to become one among the world's top three largest economies. Co-operative movement is one such window that can bring youth and specifically more women in the mainstream to contribute constructively to sustainable economic development. Cooperatives in India are carving its niche in almost every field of economic activities. In the 75th year of Independence, a new- Ministry of Cooperation has been set-up to realise the vision of Cooperatives as having immense potential to drive socio-economic developmental goals towards the ambit of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat and rural development. Promotion of inclusive cooperative models that integrate capacity building, education, skill training, engagement of youth and women, can lead in realising true cooperative development models and achieving dual targets of becoming a USD \$ 5 trillion economy whilst fulfilling commitments of UN-SDG's targets.

**C**ooperatives of India are an integral part of a country's socio-economic development. The Cooperative movement in India was borne in pre independence era. Cooperative, defined as, an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise (ILO). Post-independence, the Indian cooperatives have evolved and become operational across various sectors of the economy.

Livelihood opportunities for citizen's especially rural women, men and youth are improved due to rising cooperative societies, microenterprises, self-help groups etc. Globally, there are more than 30 lakh cooperatives that engage more than 12 percent of the world's population (Ministry of Cooperation, 2022c).

India has 8.55 lakh Cooperatives and about 13 crore people are directly associated with them. There are two types of co-operative structures in India i.e. State Cooperative Societies and Multi-



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State Cooperative Societies. Among 300 largest cooperative societies of the world, three societies of India namely Amul, IFFCO and KRIBHCO are included in list.

Several measures were taken by the Government that can leapfrog cooperative expansion and development. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, a new Union Ministry of Cooperation was set up on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2021 with an objective to provide renewed impetus to the growth of Cooperative Sector and realisation towards the spirit of Cooperation to Prosperity. The vision of government based on "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas" is committed to synergise overall human resource development. Promotion of inclusive cooperatives models that integrates capacity building, skill, engaging youth and women, can lead in realising true cooperative development models and achieving dual targets to become a US \$ 5 trillion economy and fulfilling commitments UN-SDG's targets.

### **National Cooperative Policy: "Sahkar Se Samridhi"**

India has become fifth largest economy in the world (IMF, 2022). In the 75<sup>th</sup> year of independence, a magnificent initiative of dedicated Ministry of Cooperation implemented by the present Government, to enroute towards a development of the country and creation of a statement of new social capital.

The New National Cooperative Policy and schemes of the Ministry of Cooperation aimed to penetrate co-operatives as a true people-based movement reaching up to the grassroots and ensuring 'Ease of doing business' for co-operatives. Also, it focuses on developing a cooperative based economy model that can significantly boost the 'Make in India' initiative of the Government of India. The Ministry of Cooperation comprises of separate administrative, legal, digital technology and policy framework to synergise the cooperative movement in the country (Ministry of Cooperation, 2022b). The dedicated framework will bring transparency and may promote competition, cooperative marketing and accessibility till every remote rural area. Every village will be connected to cooperatives, making every village prosperous with the mantra of "Sahkar

se Samridhi" (Prosperity through cooperatives) (Ministry of Cooperatives, 2022d).

Here, Cooperative Institutions can play a key role in the creation of opportunities for income generation, empowerment of women and less/under privileged section of the society. It can support in bridging urban-rural divides in the country. Skilling, education, financial assistance etc. can be imparted to rural population through cooperatives institutions.

Cooperatives have made significant contributions in areas related to agriculture finance distribution and allied sectors. Government has been emphasising on increasing contribution of Cooperative societies, especially Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS), in setting up Agriculture Infrastructure in the country through schemes such as Agricultural Infrastructure Fund. Various schemes/programmes are implemented by many government departments to encourage participation of youth and women in cooperatives. The Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana, Mudra Scheme provides an opportunity for cooperatives to collaborate with the government and reap multiple benefits.

### **Cooperatives Niche**

Cooperatives have made significant contributions in areas primarily related to agriculture and allied sectors. About 8.5 lakh cooperative units exist across different parts of the country. It comprises of 1.5 lakh dairy and housing societies, 97,000 PACS, 46,000 honey cooperative societies, 26,000 consumer societies, fisheries cooperatives and cooperative sugar mills. Fifty-one percent villages and 94 percent farmers are associated with cooperatives in some form or the other (Ministry of Cooperation, 2022a). Cooperatives provide financial assistance to farmers and micro entrepreneurship ventures. Cooperative sector offers about 20 percent of the total agricultural credit of the country, 35 percent of the fertiliser distribution, 25 percent of fertiliser production, 31 percent of sugar production, more than 10 percent of milk production, more than 13 percent procurement of wheat and more than 20 percent of the procurement of paddy. More than 21 percent of the fishermen businesses are carried on by cooperative societies (Ministry of Cooperation, 2022a)



Transformation of PACS to multipurpose model i.e. these PACS will offer multiple functions/roles such as, dairy, FPO, water and gas distribution, gas distribution, biogas production and distribution etc. At present about 65,000 PACS are under implementation and the government has targeted to make 3 lakh new PACS in 5 years. Besides, there are a large number of cooperatives at the state level, like urban cooperative banks, primary agriculture cooperative societies, housing, fishery and other forms of cooperatives which are making untiring efforts to improve the socio-economic condition of the people

### **Women and Youth Participation: A Catalyst to Cooperative Movement**

Cooperatives have strengthened agricultural activities, rural activities and rural development. Cooperatives are ideal institutions to formalise more youth and women participation in economic activities. Rural India has immense human capital with 68.8 percent of the country's population and 72.4 percent of the workforce residing in these areas (Census, 2011). The rural and urban population recorded in 2001 was 74.3 crore and 28.6 crore; whilst in 2011 it was 83.3 crore and 37.7 crore, respectively (Census, 2011). At the same time, workforce participation rate of rural women was significantly higher than urban women. In 2011-12, workforce participation rate for urban female was 14.7 percent whilst rural female was 24.8 percent, respectively (Neelam Patel and Tanu Sethi, 2021).

The Government has taken various steps to improve women's participation in the labour force and quality of their employment. As per the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report available for year 2020-21, the estimated Worker Population Ratio (WPR) for male and female was 73.5 percent and 31.4 percent respectively (estimated on usual status basis for aged 15 years and above both) (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2022). The female Worker Population Ratio (WPR) (in percent) has increased to 31.4 percent in 2020-21 from 28.7 percent estimated during 2019-20 (Ministry of Labour & Employment, 2022a).

However, out of 8, 54,300 cooperatives in India, only 2.52 percent of these cooperatives solely comprise women (International Co-operative

Alliance Asia Pacific, 2021). Women played a significant role in the success of many cooperative movements like Anand Milk union limited (AMUL) and Lijjat. Around 45,000 women were associated with Lijjat's cooperative movement while Amul cooperatives have engaged 36 lakh farmer families, especially women farmers. These women cooperatives have successfully transformed lives of rural women. Successful Women Cooperatives viz. Women's Industrial Cooperative Society Limited, Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Cooperatives, Swashrayi Mahila SEWA Bank, Mahila Sewa Lok Swasthya Cooperative, Krishna Dayan (mid wife) cooperative, Sangini Child-Care Workers Cooperative, Abodana Mahila Kapad Chapkam Utpadak SEWA Sahakari Mandali Limited, Mahila Super Bazar, Bhramaramba Mahila Cooperative Banking Society, Usha Cooperative Multi-Purpose Store Limited etc. has contributed in holistic empowerment of women in society (Muzamil, 2008; Dash et al., 2020)

As envisioned in the new cooperative movement, promoting more village level cooperatives can mainstream women participation towards empowerment and socio-economic development. The rural women are primarily engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Therefore, cooperatives need to take up gender-responsive initiatives viz. parity in payment, promoting local products of rural women's cooperatives, increasing awareness among cooperative leaders and ensuring favourable cooperative legislation.

At the same time, there is an opportunity to channelise prime demographic window i.e youth participation in cooperative movement. India has the largest cohort of youngest populations with an average age of 29 years that provides a demographic window of opportunity - a "youth bulge" that can lead economic and social reforms. Youth can be a positive force to steer cooperative development when provided with the knowledge, skill and opportunities that can absorb them into the labour force. Many countries have drawn age brackets to define Youth. In India, as per National Youth Policy-2003, 'youth' was defined as a person of age between 13-35 years while National Youth Policy 2014, mentions any persons between the age group of 15 and 29 years are considered youth (Youth in India, 2022).



In 2021, youth in the age group of 15-29 years in the country comprise of 27.2 percent of the population (Youth in India, 2022). As per the Report of Technical Group on Population Projections, constituted by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, youth in the age group of 15-29 years is expected to decrease to 22.7 by 2036. During 2017-18, young people's participation rate in labour force was at low levels of 38.2 percent which rose up slightly to 41.4 percent during 2020-21.

Also, young women's labour force participation was far below young men's. Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) of female youth increased more in rural than urban areas. In the 15 years and above age group also, maximum increase in LFPR was of rural females i.e from 24.6 in 2017-18 to 36.5 in 2020-21 (estimated in Usual Status) (Youth in India, 2022).

Cooperatives can support in absorbing a section of youth bulge as it enable young people to pool financial resources, skills, knowledge to establish an enterprise. The Young people often cite that it is the cooperative values and principles that make cooperatives attractive to them both a means to create their own enterprises. Also, cooperative education budget allocated for cooperative education i.e Rs. 55 crore will benefit participation of cooperatives.

Also, cooperative model of enterprise contributes to youth employment and facilitating job creation through self-employment. The model lends itself to both rural and urban areas and for persons of all academic and skill levels including recent graduates who have limited prospects of finding jobs.

## Conclusion

Cooperatives generate a significant source of employment and support formalisation of informal employment through collective voice and economies of scale and extension of social protection. India has the largest cohort of the youngest population and significant female inhabitants that can be mainstreamed to enhance their contribution in transforming society at large. The mission mode grass root level penetration of cooperatives will leapfrog the vision of country's development to a New India.

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