



# COOPERATIVES AND DECENT WORK The Kerala Experience

Deliberations at the  
Urban Action School 2021, Thrissur





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**act:onaid**  
ActionAid Association (India)

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Sponsored by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation e.V. with funds of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany.



Federal Ministry  
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First Published June, 2022

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## FOREWORD

The idea of promoting collective economic activities rooted in the spirit of cooperation and for the good for all has been around for long in India's development efforts. The path to cooperatives was laid out in the Constitution of India, which through the Directive Principles for State Policy, placed upon the state the responsibility to advance cottage industries on a cooperative basis, particularly in rural areas. Over the decades, quite like the promise of land reforms, cooperatives have remained confined to a few successes and a few states, despite the National Policy on Cooperatives and the passage of Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act in 2002.

In an economic trajectory of growing informalisation of the world of work and where the share of labour in formal sector has seen a long-term decline since the 1980s, it is a daily struggle for 50 crore informal workers of India to find decent working conditions, let alone a living wage with social protection. COVID-19 has only unmasked this precarity for all to see.

While such a precarity faced by informal workers of India needs resolution within a framework of creating decent wages and meaningful work for all, complementary approaches also need nourishment from the welfare state. These include undertaking land reforms in favour of landless agricultural workers and social groups with oppressed histories, enabling climate resilient small holder sustainable farming, and widely promoting collective synergistic efforts to create goods and services. In summary promoting collective enterprise and the solidarity economy.

At least in part, community-rooted cooperatives have the potential to provide a viable solution to address challenges of inequality, while simultaneously creating economic growth. Social solidarity economy and the engine of cooperatives also provide an answer to one of the most fundamental problems of human history, which has become even more pronounced the past decades – the division between capital and labour. When workers become owners of their enterprises and initiatives, it multiplies several fold the economic and social benefits, especially dignity, they can derive from these collective efforts, and with inspirations and imageries they create for others to emulate.

The focus on the Kerala experience locates itself to the social, political and economic context particular to the history of the state, which is in many ways conducive to the growth of such enterprises. We need to learn critically from the experiences of cooperatives in Kerala in terms of democratic worker-managed systems of production and organisation that has been able to achieve economic success, generated employment and addressed inequalities.

This publication emerges from the debates and discussions of the Urban Action School 2021. It was organised jointly by Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) South Asia and ActionAid Association (AAA), from 1st to 7th December 2021 at the Thrissur campus of KILA. The broad theme of UAS'21 was "Cooperatives and Decent Work – Model for Sustainable Economic Futures". We hope to integrate the findings and recommendations of the workshop in building our future strategies of intervention. We look forward to comments and suggestions so we can carry this conversation further.

**Sandeep Chachra**

Executive Director  
ActionAid Association

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Urban Action School is a learning and reflection space for addressing the policy environment and furthering the debate nationally around issues relating to poverty, exclusion, livelihood, and justice from a wide range of disciplines. The success of this UAS lies with the cross-pollination of ideas brought forward by the active participation of activists, practitioners, and scholars from all across the country. Our sincerest gratitude to all the participants of Urban Action School 2021.

We would like to express our gratitude to Shri VN Vasavan, the Honourable Minister for Cooperation and Registration, Government of Kerala for being a part of Urban Action School 2021 and delivering the keynote address. Our sincerest gratitude to Dr T M Thomas Isaac, former Minister of Finance, Government of Kerala for delivering the valedictorian address of UAS'21. Acknowledgments are due to all the course facilitators who engaged with the participants, shared their inputs and enriched the learning environment of UAS'21.

We would also like to thank the teams at Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS) and Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers' Central Cooperative Society for engaging with the UAS'21 team during the field visits to their establishments. In this regard, special note of thanks to Mr T Kishore, Project Coordinator at ULCCS, and Mr MK Dineshbabu, Chairperson and Mr K Prabhakaran, Secretary of Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers' Central Cooperative Society for facilitating the fieldwork.

Our sincerest gratitude to the team at Kerala Institute of Local Administration, Thrissur for hosting this UAS. In this regard we would like to thank Dr Joy Elamon, Director General KILA, Mr Mathew Andrews, Assistant Director (Training), Mr Babu KK, Assistant Director (Administration), and Dr Ajith Kaliyath, Urban Chair Professor, KILA. Special note of thanks to Ms Rakhi Rajan for coordinating all activities at KILA and ensuring the smooth conduct of UAS'21. We would like to thank all the staff members from KILA including those from IT, administration, housekeeping, hostels, mess, and security team who were always welcoming to all participants, facilitators, and organisers.

We would like to thank Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung for supporting Urban Action School 2021. A special note of thanks to Mr Jakob Littman, Resident Representative, RLS



South Asia for his contributions. We would also like to thank Mr Rajiv Kumar and Mr Jitendra Kumar for supporting us in organising this UAS.

We owe immense gratitude to Dr Alex George who has been integral to organising the Urban Action School 2021. He helped in developing the curriculum, identified success stories of cooperatives in Kerala, and coordinated with various course facilitators. He also organised and coordinated the field visits to ULCCS and Kerala Dinesh Beedi.

We would like to thank Vishy Teki and his team for photo and video documentation of the experiences of participants and facilitators of UAS'21. The videos of each session that they have produced are available at the YouTube channel of ActionAid Association (India).

Urban Action School 2021 could not have been possible without the efforts and dedication of all colleagues at ActionAid spread across various teams and regional units who have been part of the organising process of UAS'21. Our utmost gratitude to all of them.

## CONTEXT

With all the transformation in the world of work with respect to technology, demography, urbanisation, climate change and globalisation, to name a few, governments are struggling to achieve a future of work that ensures decent and sustainable opportunities for their citizens. India is also a part of this process with several reports underlining that the economy is unable to generate enough jobs for the millions that enter the job market every year and those that are being created are informal, precarious, and low paid. COVID-19 has only unmasked this precarity. Community-rooted cooperatives have the potential to provide a viable solution to address challenges of inequality, while simultaneously creating economic growth.

Cooperatives have had a long and chequered history in India. In the initial decades following independence from British rule, promotion of cooperatives was an integral part of the planning process. While many of these cooperatives failed due to various reasons, some have stood out in crafting their own success stories including Amul, Nandini and Milma among dairy cooperatives as well as marketing boards for coffee, rubber and coconut. To examine cooperatives as an alternative model of economic organisation and employment generation maintaining decent work standards, we need to look at a region which has seen much success. It is in this context, that the particular journey of the growth of the cooperative movement in Kerala plays an important role.

Keeping this in mind, 'Urban Action School 2021' (UAS'21) was organised jointly by ActionAid Association (India), Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) and Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung South Asia from 1st to 7th December, 2021 at the Thrissur campus of KILA. With the broad theme of "Cooperatives and Decent Work – Model for Sustainable Economic Futures", UAS'21 welcomed 25 participants from 16 states across India. The participants came from diverse backgrounds with diverse cooperative ventures like fisher folk cooperatives in Meghalaya, snake catchers' cooperatives from Tamil Nadu, dairy cooperative workers from the Gujar community of Himachal Pradesh and many more.

The UAS'21 was inaugurated by Shri VN Vasavan, Honourable Minister for Cooperation, Government of Kerala in the august presence of Shri MK Kannan, Vice President of Kerala Bank. The first three days of UAS'21 focused on classroom learning on the internationally accepted cooperative identity, the legal framework

within which cooperatives can operate across India and the social, political, and economic context particular to the history of Kerala, which is in many ways conducive to such enterprises. Acclaimed academics, leaders of cooperatives and trade unions including Prof Michael Tharakan, Prof Mini Sukumar, Prof Praveen Jha, Prof R Ramakumar, Com Amarjeet Kaur, and Mr Reveendran Vedavathy were part of the diverse pool of resource persons who conducted the different sessions during the week-long workshop.

Participants were also introduced to the experience of cooperatives in Kerala in terms of democratic worker-managed systems of production and organisation, economic success, employment generation, and addressing inequality. Representatives from many successful cooperative stories from Kerala including Kerala Bank, Kochi Auto Rickshaw Co-op Society, and Indian Coffee House Co-op Society among others, shared their perspectives related to the development, management and challenges regarding their respective cooperative societies.

The fourth and the fifth day were reserved for field visits to two widely known and diversified cooperative societies from Kerala - Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS) and Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers' Central Cooperative Society. Both ULCCS and Kerala Dinesh have moved ahead from their humble beginnings and have now evolved into two vast and diverse enterprises focusing not only on construction and beedi rolling but also on food processing, education, textile industry, and IT services among many others. The instance of Kerala cooperatives opened a dialogue into the mosaic of broader contexts, challenges and successes of such enterprises across the country including a discussion on the efficiency of cooperatives (both in Kerala and other states) and outlining the reasons for the same, and highlighting the vulnerabilities of the labour force across the intersectionality of gender, caste, communal, and regional considerations.

The final two days mainly facilitated the cross-pollination of ideas and experiences among the participants. After being trained to plan for the development and sustenance of cooperative societies, participants presented their own plans on the final day of UAS'21. With that, the Urban Action School 2021 tried to establish long-lasting communities of practice and knowledge in various disciplines by creating a forum for cross-sectoral learning. The valedictory address was delivered by Prof Thomas Isaac, former Minister of Finance, Government of Kerala who spoke on the future of the social and solidarity economy.

The weeklong deliberations on cooperative enterprises and the larger social and solidarity economy have emphasised the need to remove roadblocks, create enabling conditions, and promote cooperatives' focus on the needs of the most marginalised and disadvantaged, such that they become owners of their own and

collective enterprises, and of factories, plantations, and estates whose owners have long abandoned their workers.

This publication is an effort to document the cross-learning from a diverse pool of participants and course facilitators of UAS'21. This can act as a guiding framework for stakeholder actions for forging of new collaborations and strategies for more effective interventions.



# THE LABOUR SITUATION IN INDIA<sup>1</sup>

## From 'Jobless Growth' to 'Job loss Growth': A Statistical Overview

The rate of growth in employment in India in the 1980s was approximately around 2.4 per cent per annum<sup>2</sup>. Then, during the 1990s, the employment growth rate halved to around 1.2 per cent and even fell further during the latter half of the decade. The trend of employment growth rate has remained almost the same since then, except for some time between 2005 and 2010, when the rate improved but it never reached the level present during the 1980s. Since 2012, there has been a period of labour shedding – lower numbers of people are being able to participate in the workforce every year. In other words, what began as 'jobless growth' in the 1990s has now become 'job loss growth' in the past decade. This is not just a phenomenon limited to India but has been the trend almost all over the world.

In economic parlance, there is a term called 'employment elasticity', which refers to the number of jobs being created for every unit of economic growth. In the previous years, even before the pandemic, the elasticity of employment had been going down constantly<sup>3</sup>. Enough jobs are not being created, whether they are in regular employment, casual employment, or even self-employment. As per official estimates, even with whatever their biases might be, the rate of youth unemployment in FY 2017-18

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1. Based on the lectures by Comrade Amarjeet Kaur and Professor Praveen Jha as part of UAS'21
  2. Data on Employment Growth Rate in India is from Jha, P. (2019). Prospects for Labour and Contemporary Capitalism: An Assessment with Reference to India. The Indian Journal of Labour Economics, 62, 319–340.
  3. Misra, S., & Suresh, A. K. (2014). Estimating employment elasticity of growth for the Indian economy. RBI Working Paper Series 06/2014.

was triple of what it was in FY 2011-12<sup>4</sup>. During more or less the same period, per capita consumption in rural India, almost two-thirds of India's population, declined by almost 9 per cent<sup>5</sup>. This has been unprecedented since independence.

If the data from the past two years is also looked at, the situation is far worse due to the pandemic. As per the Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Institute and the United Nations Development Program, between 2006 and 2016, 271 million people were lifted out of poverty in India<sup>6</sup>. As per the State of Working India 2021 Report released by Azim Premji University, this gain has almost been wiped out in the past two years due to the pandemic<sup>7</sup>.

Essentially, in the past half a century or so, the employment possibilities of workers have come under huge pressure due to the developing structural conditions promoted by the neo-liberal school of thought. This has been the phenomenon across the developing world, even though economic growth continues to rise. Countries in the global south, including India, need to deliberate on the structure of growth and keep labour absorption at the centre stage of the growth discourse. A four per cent economic growth accompanied by 1-2 per cent labour absorption is better than an 8 per cent economic growth with 0.5 per cent labour absorption.

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4. <https://www.deccanherald.com/specials/insight/india-has-failed-to-capitalise-on-its-demographic-dividend-838474.html>
  5. [https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/consumer-spend-sees-first-fall-in-4-decades-on-weak-rural-demand-nso-data-119111401975\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/consumer-spend-sees-first-fall-in-4-decades-on-weak-rural-demand-nso-data-119111401975_1.html)
  6. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-lifted-271-million-people-out-of-poverty-in-10-years-un/article28397694.ece>
  7. <https://cse.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/state-of-working-india/swi-2021/>

## **The Global Structure of Contemporary Capitalism**

The neo-liberal policy regimes have led to a compression of public expenditure. It has restructured the role of the state in favour of those with capital and power. Since the 1970s, the world has seen a massive increase in the power of finance capital. Although finance capital has always been an important part of economic discourse since the beginning of capitalist societies, the power and utilisation of this capital has seen a massive shift in the last half century. Now, growth in finance capital is being brought out by circulation of money and not by production of goods or services. This has often been described as ‘casino capitalism’ – making money through speculation. Finance capital has now emerged as the most powerful actor in the world. It is not only more powerful than production capital but is even becoming more powerful than the state as well.

The second important aspect of the global neo-liberal policy regime has been the shift of manufacturing activities from the global north to the global south. This has both positive and negative implications on the growth of the global south. Even high-tech manufacturing activities, which were preserves of the global north, are being shifted out to the countries in east and south-east Asia as well as India. This has been in two forms – one is direct investment in the said countries and regions. Secondly, and more importantly, in the form of incorporating the manufacturers in the global south without any shift of capital gains from the north to the south. Such activities produce goods only for consumer demands in the developed world without any capital growth in the global south. This has led to fragmentation and decentring of manufacturing and service activities from the global north to the south.

The third change that the world has seen in the past half century has been the continuous assault on small actors whether in manufacturing, agriculture, or the services sector. In the whole range of activities, there has



been a weakening of the support to small producers and small businesses. All the three aspects mentioned have evolved in a synergic fashion over the years with interlinkages among them to define the major features of contemporary capitalism. The net impact of all these taken together has been the massive squeeze on decent employment opportunities. The 'theology' of neo-liberalism that 'leave everything to the market and markets will take care of everything' has been at the core of all these developments throughout the last four to five decades.

This 'theology' has resulted in massive wealth and financial capital accumulation in the global north. If one looks at the list of the largest 100 companies across the world, 59 are based in USA, 18 in western Europe, three in Japan, and one each in Australia, Canada, and South Korea<sup>8</sup>. Many powerful countries are also finding it difficult to counter the power of finance capital. If one looks at the list of 100 largest economic entities ranked by the annual revenue generated, in that list 71 are multinational corporations and only 29 are sovereign states<sup>9</sup>.

## Policy Ecosystem in India

The world of work has seen huge increase in the push for flexible labour market policies that aim to remove all regulations related to labour market activities. Protection of workers guaranteed by the state has seen rapid reduction as a result of this push.

Although India was a latecomer when it comes to neo-liberal reforms, but even before such reforms were enacted, a good 90 per cent of the workforce was unprotected by the state labour regulations. Even the minimum safeguards that have existed for the workers in the informal sector, like minimum wages for agricultural or construction labourers

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8. <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/audit-services/publications/assets/pwc-global-top-100-companies-2021.pdf>

9. <https://theconversation.com/who-is-more-powerful-states-or-corporations-99616>

have been routinely flouted by the employers and not enforced by the implementing agencies. Since the 1990s, the limited protection that was enjoyed by the organised sector workers has faced attacks from the neo-liberal policy regime.

Labour legislation in India has always evolved in the form of knee-jerk reactions to unrest in some parts of the country. This had made the development of labour laws very ad-hoc in nature and often limited to certain segments of workers. The term 'worker' was also defined in different ways in different laws. Therefore, there emerged a need to rationalise the more than 40 labour laws of the union government and almost 175 labour laws of different state governments. As a result of this, 29 labour laws of the union government were merged to four codes: code on wages, code on social security, code on occupational safety and health, and code on industrial relations. Although these codes have been passed as acts of parliament, their rules of operations have not yet been formulated.

While there was a felt need to rationalise the labour law environment in India in order to ensure the protection of the workforce, the labour codes seemed to have done the opposite. Even the parliamentary standing committee on labour noted that there is a large-scale dilution of existing coverage and protection of the labour force in India. The codes have been prepared in such a way, that definition of important terms has been kept ambiguous and flexible. For example, the terms 'employee' and 'worker' has been defined differently in three of the codes but in the case of the provisions of the code, they have been used inter-changeably.

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10. <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/national/labour-code-bill-ignores-parliament-committee-report/article28691338.ece>

11. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/small-biz/sme-sector/over-one-third-msmes-start-shutting-shop-as-recovery-amid-covid-19-looks-unlikely-aimo-survey/articleshow/76141969.cms?from=mdr>

Not just labour laws, recent policy changes have also hurt the MSME sectors disproportionately. With policies like demonetisation and GST, the MSME sector was already badly affected. Then, due to the added effect of the pandemic, almost 35 per cent of the enterprises in this sector have faced shutdown . The overall objective seems to be to make the architecture of those protected weaker and not take into account those who are unprotected.

# HISTORY, GROWTH AND FUNDAMENTALS OF COOPERATIVES<sup>1</sup>

## Growth of Cooperatives over the World

As a people-centred enterprise model that is more than a century old and in existence for almost as much time in countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, India, Japan, and South Korea, cooperatives are intrinsically intertwined with the development of people and hence, nation states as a whole. Irrespective of whether the cooperative movement was born as a result of injustice faced by workers, administrative policies of colonial governments, economic turmoil created by the World Wars, or transitions in national markets and economies, the cooperative model has emerged as a need-based model whose success and sustainability have withstood the test of time.

The earliest record of a cooperative comes from Fenwick, Scotland where, on March 14, 1761, in a barely furnished cottage local weavers hauled a sack of oatmeal into John Walker's whitewashed front room and began selling the contents at a discount, forming the Fenwick Weavers' Society. In 1844, a group of 28 artisans working in the cotton mills in the town of Rochdale, in the north of England established the first modern cooperative business, the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society, also known as the Rochdale Pioneers. They are regarded as the prototype of the modern cooperative society and founders of the cooperative movement. The weavers in these cotton mills in Rochdale faced miserable working conditions and low wages, and they could not afford the high prices of food and household goods. They decided that by pooling their scarce resources and working together they could access basic goods at a lower price. Initially, there were only four items for sale: flour, oatmeal, sugar, and butter.

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1. Based on lectures by Ms Simren Singh and Prof G Veerakumaran and the notes shared by them as part of UAS'21

The Pioneers decided it was time shoppers were treated with honesty, openness, and respect, that they should be able to share in the profits that their purchase contributed to, and that they should have a democratic right to have a say in the business. Every customer of the shop became a member and so had a true stake in the business. At first, the cooperative was open for only two nights a week, but within three months, the business had grown so much that it was open five days a week.

An independently formulated cooperative model was developed in Germany by Friedrich Wilhelm Raiffeisen and Franz Hermann Schultz-Delitsch. Raiffeisen and Schultz-Delitsch originally formed credit unions in 1862. Since then the model has grown into other sectors and inspired the growth of financial cooperatives across the world.

Cooperatives in most countries of the Asia and Pacific region were established during the colonial rule. For example, in India, cooperatives were introduced under the British colonial administration. The first credit cooperative society was formed in India in 1903 to safeguard poor farmers from the harassment of money lenders. It was formed with the support of the Bengal government and was registered under the Friendly Societies Act of the British Government. Subsequently in 1904, the Cooperative Credit Societies Act of India was enacted. In Sri Lanka, cooperatives were promoted by the British administration to train farmers in scientific agricultural practices and methods, credit disbursement, and to simplify produce distribution. The first organised cooperative was set up in 1906 by dissatisfied rural workers in Teldeniya, Kandy. Their refusal to go to private moneylenders saw the formation of the Dumbara Credit Cooperative Society. In Indonesia, the seeds of the cooperative movement were first sown during the Dutch occupation. The first cooperative, the Bank of Civil Servants (now called BRI- Bank Rakyat Indonesia), was established in 1896 to address indebtedness of citizens to money lenders. Cooperatives in Malaysia were introduced by the British government in 1907 to combat the problem of chronic rural indebtedness and deficit spending among

wage-earners in places of employment. Even in countries like Singapore, the concept of cooperatives was introduced with the passing of the Straits Settlement Cooperative Societies Ordinance in 1924 by the British colonial authorities. Credit cooperatives were the first cooperatives to be registered in 1925. They were established as an alternative source of funds for workers to meet their basic financial needs. The modern cooperative movement in South Korea began with finance and agricultural cooperatives that were set up by the Japanese colonial authority. If we go to the Pacific side, by the 1850s, the Rochdale Principles had been popularised by the British colonists in Australia.

However, in some cases, cooperatives were not a handover by the former colonial authorities but were introduced by the government itself to support the people, especially farmers and/or workers. For example, in Thailand, the cooperative movement, unlike its other Southeast Asian counterparts, had been a state sponsored initiative. The movement began in 1916 with the government setting up small village credit cooperatives for severely indebted farmers who suffered from the brunt of a transitioning economy, natural disasters, and money-lenders beginning to foreclose on their lands. The modern cooperative movement in Nepal began after the end of the Rana oligarchy in 1951. In 1953, the Department of Cooperatives (DoC) was established under the Ministry of Agriculture for Planning and Development. From 1954 onwards, credit cooperatives with limited liability, such as the Bakhan Credit Cooperative (BCC) in Chitwan district were formed. They were promoted by the government as part of a flood relief and resettlement programme.

First established in the early 20th century, cooperatives in South Korea continue to play a vital role to drive community-based initiatives to strengthen the rural and urban economy. Post 2000, the government of South Korea has even recognised the role of cooperatives, along with social enterprises, as a means to ensure jobs and reduce dependency on the welfare economy. Similarly, in Japan, the roots of the cooperative

movement date back to the early 1800s but cooperatives continue to be the mainstay of the Japanese rural economy through their dominant presence in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry sectors.

Cooperative business enterprises continue to be driven by a social mission yet ensure that they contribute to national development effectively. In some countries, cooperatives contribute more than 10 per cent of the GDP such as in New Zealand (19 per cent, 2018<sup>2</sup>) and Thailand (13 per cent, 2017<sup>3</sup>). Regardless of their economic classification, countries continue to benefit from the presence of cooperatives that have the capacity and experience in reaching out to the masses, marginalised, and most vulnerable, beside others. Some countries have also officially recognised cooperatives as the third pillar in their national development policies along with the public and the private sector; and some have even enshrined their importance in the national constitution, such as in Nepal and Iran.

The idea of promoting collective economic activities rooted in the spirit of cooperation and good for all has been around for long in India's development efforts as well. The path to cooperatives was laid out in the Constitution of India, which through the Directive Principles for State Policy, placed upon the state the responsibility to advance cottage industries on a cooperative basis, particularly in rural areas. While all state governments have their own laws and policies on cooperative societies, in 2002 the Government of India passed the Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act and adopted the National Policy on Cooperatives.

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2. ICA Asia-Pacific Country Snapshot: New Zealand (2020) retrieved from <http://icaap.coop/sites/ica-ap.coop/files/2020%20New%20Zealand%20Country%20Snapshot.pdf>
  3. ICA Asia-Pacific Country Snapshot: Thailand (2019) retrieved from <http://icaap.coop/sites/ica-ap.coop/files/2019%20Thailand%20country%20snapshot.pdf>

## International Cooperative Alliance and the Cooperative Identity

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) was founded in London, England on 19 August 1895 during the 1st Cooperative Congress. In attendance were delegates of cooperatives from Argentina, Australia, Belgium, England, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, India, Italy, Switzerland, Serbia, and the USA. Representatives established the International Cooperative Alliance's aims: to provide information, define and defend the cooperative principles, and develop international trade. ICA as the apex body for cooperatives represents 3 million cooperatives worldwide. It provides a global voice and forum for knowledge, expertise, and coordinates action for and about cooperatives.

The International Cooperative Alliance is the global steward of the Statement on the Cooperative Identity as well as the Values and Principles of the cooperative movement. In 1995, the ICA adopted the revised Statement on the Cooperative Identity<sup>4</sup>, which contains the definition of a cooperative, the values of cooperatives, and the seven cooperative principles. Given below is the statement on the cooperative identity.

"A cooperative is 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."

### Values of Cooperatives

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. These values are detailed below:

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4. <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>



- » Self-help: It means one should try to solve his problems with his own efforts, means, and resources available. But self-help succeeds only up to a point. Therefore, it needs joint-efforts with those who have the same problem. They can pool small resources and means, so that they become more effective. In-group individual becomes more powerful, he learns, with experience of other fellow men, and this becomes mutual self-help. Self-help and mutual-help promote cooperative spirit and are vital to the success of cooperatives.
- » Self-responsibility: Every member must take responsibility for their personal actions, for the cooperative activities as a whole, and for their impact on society. Workers should be aware of their accountability and discharge their responsibility with commitment, dedication, and sincerity of purpose.
- » Democracy: In the context of cooperatives, the essence of democracy lies in conscious decision based on free will. Members must understand the possible consequences of their decisions and their impact on individuals and institutions without any external influence. Participation is also an integral aspect of democracy, which includes not only performing individual tasks but playing an active role in the functioning of the cooperative.
- » Equality: Equality means equal right and opportunities, right of participation, right to be informed, right to be heard, right to be involved in the decision making. Members are to be associated as equally as possible, without any kind of discrimination of gender, religion, caste, creed, race, amount of share capital contribution, deposits, political affiliation, etc. The 'one member one vote' is fundamental to the principle of equality. This ensures social justice.
- » Equity: While equality ensures that everyone has equal rights in the decision-making process, the principle of equity ensures that everyone is rewarded as per the efforts they have put in. In multiple forms like patronage dividends, allocations of capital reserves in members'

name or reductions in certain charges, economic justice is ensured for all members.

- » Solidarity: Solidarity means that cooperatives and the cooperators stand together. A cooperative has a responsibility for the collective interest of its members. It indicates that society's financial and social assets belong to the group, being the result of joint efforts and participation.
- » Honesty: One of the most fundamental ideals that cooperatives need to imbibe is that of honest dealing with both members and non-members. Therefore, cooperatives have a bias towards openness. Scope of honesty is much wider in cooperatives than what is generally understood. At an individual level, it refers to honesty of thoughts, commitments, behaviour, and conduct. At the cooperative level, honesty also encompasses correct maintenance of accounts and balance sheet, correct information to members, objectivity and fairness in personnel matters, and free and fair elections. It prohibits undue favours of any kind to anyone, member or not.
- » Openness: It means that cooperatives are open to members of the community they serve. They have a commitment to serve without any kind of discrimination of gender, religion, caste, creed, race, amount of share capital contribution, deposits, political affiliation, etc.
- » Social Responsibility: Unlike other enterprises, cooperatives have a responsibility towards the society at large and not just their members. As the ILO has put, cooperative enterprises have the specific feature of producing goods, services, and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity.
- » Caring for Others: It means to take interest in and care about other people. This concept stems from humanism. Cooperatives are humane by nature though their main concern is to achieve economic objects.

## Cooperative Principles

The following cooperative principles, also referred to as the 'Rochdale Principles', are the guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice.

- » **Voluntary and Open Membership:** Cooperatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities related to membership, without gender, social, political, or religious discrimination.
- » **Democratic Member Control:** Cooperatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. People serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. All members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote), irrespective of the share capital they have contributed.
- » **Member Economic Participation:** Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least some parts of the assets are usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the purposes like developing the cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves part of which would necessarily be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.
- » **Autonomy and Independence:** Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy.
- » **Education, Training, and Information:** Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers,

and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public, particularly young people and opinion leaders, about the nature and benefits of cooperation.

- » Cooperation among Cooperatives: Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional, and international structures.
- » Concern for Community: Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.



# COOPERATIVES AS A RESPONSE TO AGRARIAN CRISIS<sup>1</sup>

## Understanding India's Agrarian Crisis

The Indian economy, for the recent past has been witnessing a prolonged agrarian crisis. With the implementation of neo-liberal policies, there has been a systemic withdrawal of the state from investing or spending in agriculture. There has been a weakening of different safeguards that have been there for the agricultural sector with regard to price policy (MSP not being guaranteed), subsidy policy, availability of credit in rural areas, marketing of agricultural goods, or even investment in agricultural research. In all these areas, the policy has been to withdraw the government presence and promote corporate engagement.

The manifestation of these aspects on the ground is the sharp decline of profitability in agriculture. Costs of cultivation are rising but output prices are not rising proportionately. This decline in profitability is not being faced by everyone in rural areas. Landlords and rich capitalist farmers, who have modern machinery, advanced technology, and produce in large quantities to enjoy the benefits of economies of scale, do not face this challenge of profitability. It is the small, marginal and landless farmers who have to deal with the pressures of profitability.

Moreover, in India the level of productivity in agriculture is very low. The quantity of production per acre of land is one of the lowest in the world. While government policy needs to address the profitability issue and regulate the market, the productivity of the agricultural sector also needs to rise. In this particular context, cooperatives can play a major role in addressing the agrarian crisis.

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1. Based on lecture by Prof R Ramakumar as part of UAS'21

## Corporatisation vs Cooperation

There are many ways in which collective actions like cooperatives are better for the agricultural sector, even when there is no ongoing agrarian crisis. The first and one of the most fundamental aspects is that of economies of scale. With the emergence of new technology like tractors, harvesters, weeding machines and other modern farm equipment, agricultural production can be made profitable. But it makes no economic sense to a farmer with one acre of land to invest in these technologies. In such a case, many farmers can pool in their land, while maintaining ownership and together invest in such technology that can increase their productivity. Cooperatives and collective actions like this will help in achieving economies of scale for marginal farmers.

Secondly, corporates investing in the agricultural sector are not obligated to invest the profits back to the agricultural sector or for the well-being of the producers. A cooperative of farmers has the duty to look after the interests of its members and hence any profits that emerge out of these cooperative enterprises get re-invested back into the agricultural sector or for the betterment of the rural community in general. The third way in which collective actions like cooperatives help farmers is the autonomy that they provide in decision making process like what crops to grow, from where to buy seeds, which fertilisers to use, etc.

Finally, most cooperatives have been seen to provide better wages and welfare policies for their workers. While workers in a corporate setup might not enjoy minimum wages, cooperatives have been known for often paying workers well above the minimum wages as well as pay dividends as a share of profits earned. Moreover, cooperatives also often provide social assistance policies in the form of pension, health assistance, scholarships for children, etc. The community rooted nature of cooperatives is what makes them better suited for the growth of the rural economy.

## Collective Actions in Agriculture

In the agricultural sector, different types of cooperatives can be formed for different stages of production and marketing processes. From input supply to retail marketing, there have been success stories of cooperatives performing these tasks and giving far better outputs to the producers and consumers than corporate entities. For example, Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS) can be formed to supply inputs for the agricultural season like quality seeds, fertilisers, pesticides, and so on. Currently farmers have to rely on local village level seed distributors for the supply of good quality seeds. Apart from selling seeds, these private dealers often engage in supply of other farm inputs as well like fertilisers and pesticides. In order to drive up more sales for themselves, these private players would give unscientific advice to the farmers to get them to buy more fertilisers or other inputs than required. This can even reduce the productivity of the farms. It is here that PACS can come in and act as dealers or distributors of farm inputs. Since these PACS are run by the farmers themselves, they will have no vested interests in overcharging or misguiding their own members for higher revenue.

Apart from seeds and fertilisers, another major input for the agricultural process is the farmland. As stated above, marginal farmers can pool in their land and achieve economies of scale for their production process. Since they can buy inputs in bulk for their large piece of pooled land, they can bargain for better prices. They can also use modern machinery to increase productivity, which is economically unviable in marginal farmlands.

While marginal land owners can pool in their land, landless labourers can form a labour cooperative to offer their services. Landowning farmers rely on local contractors for the supply of labour in their farms during the agricultural season. A labour cooperative can take the place of these contractors and ensure better wages for their members as well. Such types of labour cooperatives or labour collectives have been very popular in different parts of Kerala.



Cooperative credit societies are also another important frontier for collective action in the agricultural sector. These societies and cooperative banks are very popular in states like Kerala and Maharashtra where majority of agricultural credit is generated through such entities. With the credit market receiving little support from the public sector, cooperative banks can play an important role in giving short term credit to farmers for their agricultural needs at low interest rates. Most farmers are currently at the mercy of traditional money lenders and large landlords for their short-term credit needs for which they pay exorbitant interest rates.

Similar to the collectivisation of cultivation processes through land pooling or labour cooperative formation, during the time of harvesting and selling of the produce, cooperative societies can help in achieving economies of scale. Due to low production levels of marginal farmers, there is fragmentation of agricultural produce at the village level. Since cost of transporting this low quantity to the local '*mandis*' can be high, farmers sell their crops at lower prices to the village trader who aggregates these produces, transport them to markets and sell at better rates there. Cooperatives can act as such aggregators by formation of rural collection centres. This will not only fetch the marginal farmers a better price, but also provide a stable market for the producers.

Value addition and marketing is the final way in which cooperatives and other collective actions can improve the producers' outcome in the agricultural processes. If farmers aggregate their harvest and have a large quantity after aggregation, they can process their raw produce in order to add value to their product. They can form a cooperative among themselves, buy some required machinery and do the processing and branding, which is often done by the corporate sector. One of the biggest examples of such value addition through cooperatives is that of Amul, which basically acts as a processing and marketing cooperative for dairy farmers. Finally, cooperatives can also be present in the retail marketing sector, which is highly popular even in advanced capitalist economies of

Europe. Agricultural cooperative retail brands such as *Coop* and *Migrows* of Switzerland are examples in this regard. Such retail cooperatives are operational in countries such as Germany and France also. Retail cooperatives not only provide better price for producers but sell at an affordable rate for the consumers as well. Irrespective of the task, modernisation of processes and professionalism is required for sustaining cooperatives against competition from larger corporate players.



# THE GROWTH OF COOPERATIVES IN KERALA<sup>1</sup>

## Historical Context

In the second half of the 19th century, Kerala's agricultural economy went through a transformative commercialisation process. Unlike other parts of the country, since the 1850s, more land and more people in Kerala were engaged in cultivation of crops for the market and not for self-consumption. The colonial rulers were interested in plantation crops like tea, coffee, rubber, etc. and they set up plantations all over India only in directly British ruled regions. But only in the two princely states of Cochin and Travancore of Kerala region, the British also started plantations in the regions ruled by Indian princes. Apart from plantation crops, there were also cash crops like pepper and cinnamon – which were grown for both personal consumption and selling in the market. Kerala also had a unique advantage at that time as it was also the only region in the world where pepper was grown for commercial purposes.

Kerala's geographic location was also advantageous for the growth of markets. Traders from the middle-east and far-east would converge in Kerala or Sri Lanka and Kerala became a marketplace for the maritime traders. So, the residents of Kerala would buy from the western traders and sell them to the eastern traders and vice-versa while earning a profit for themselves. Moreover, the Malabar Coast of Kerala was also the only coastal region in the country that did not have a significant industrial base. All other coastal regions of Gujarat, Konkan, Coromandel and Bengal had some industrial capabilities – mainly textile, which were vital in their trade relations. So, the Kerala region had to rely on indigenously grown agricultural products such as spices and other commercial crops for their trade.

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1. Based on lectures by Shri V N Vasavan, Minister for Cooperation, Government of Kerala; Shri M K Kannan, Vice Chairperson, Kerala Bank; Prof. P K Michael Tharakan, Chairperson, Kerala Council of Historical Research; and Dr Joy Elamon, Director, KILA and discussions at the workshop between 1st and 7th December 2021.

Commercial crops in Kerala have been grown in both extensive farming patterns or in plantations and in intensive patterns or small landholdings. One such crop that has been grown in plantations and marginal farmlands is rubber. Rubber was brought to Kerala by the British in the form of plantations. But soon, the locals found out that extensive cultivation techniques are not required for cultivation of rubber and it can be grown in plots much less than ten acres. Similar trends have been seen in the production of coconut as well. But crops like rubber and coconut needed 10 to 12 years for harvesting at that time. Farmers who were growing these crops needed to sustain themselves for this period of gestation time. The British had introduced tapioca to Kerala from South America, which the people of Kerala have started using as a cheaper alternative to rice in order to sustain themselves during the long gestation periods of commercial crops.

Like the rest of India, Kerala also has a history of caste hierarchy. Most of the land for cultivation was owned by the higher castes and the ruling elite. Only some land was owned by the middle caste-class groups of Muslims, Syrian Christians and people from the *Ezhava* caste. After colonisation by the British, the Maharajas of Kerala had to pay a tribute to their colonial masters and for that, extra income was required by the ruling elite. In order to fetch that extra income, the then government of the maharajas persuaded the aforementioned middle caste-class groups to cultivate in marshy lands around the backwaters and in forested areas, which the higher castes had refused to do. By this process, a large number of the Muslims, Syrian Christians and Ezhavas started to accumulate wealth; sometimes enough to even give credit facilities to the ruling elite. This started changing the social ordering and the change was aided by the socio religious reform movements spearheaded by reformers like Sree Narayana Guru.

## The Growth of Left Movement

Eventually, the socio religious reform movements turned into a political movement like the independence movement or the socialist movement.

This was somewhat influenced by the economic depression that the world saw during the 1930s. At that time, the prices of agricultural products dropped, which had a devastating impact on the traders from Kerala. During this time, the poorer sections of the communities engaged in the socio religious reform movements understood that the interests of the rich and the poor, even within their own community, were not aligned. This economic cleavage in the society was used by the left movement of the day for coming up with three major demands. The first demand was that of a united Kerala, not divided into the directly British ruled Malabar and the Cochin and Travancore principalities ruled by kings under British suzerainty. The second demand was that of land reforms because the proponents of the left movement understood that whatever wealth the middle class had acquired in the recent past was through land. The third demand was that of democratisation of education.

The first demand of a united Kerala was met when the united Kerala state comprising Malabar, Travancore and Cochin were formed as per the State's Reorganisation Act of 1956<sup>2</sup>. In the first state elections that followed in 1957, the Left parties came into power in Kerala. But the dissolution of the Kerala government by the then Congress government at the centre hindered the swift fulfilment of the further two demands. The first leftist government that lasted only till 1959, focussed on land reforms, which was the second demand of the left movement, though major reforms in Kerala's land ownership and distribution could be effected only a decade later. In 1967, the Left parties came to power again as part of a wider coalition and ruled for a short duration of two years. The Kerala Land Reforms (Amendment) Act 1969 was passed during the brief tenure of that government<sup>3</sup>. The law came into effect from 1 January 1970. The same government also introduced another law to promote cooperatives in the

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2. States Reorganisation Act, 1956 retrieved from <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A1956-37.pdf>
  3. Radhakrishnan P, "Land Reforms in Theory and Practice: The Kerala Experience", Economic and Political Weekly, Review of Agriculture, 1981, December

state. It came into effect in 1969, with the passage of Kerala Cooperative Societies Act 1969<sup>4</sup>. Though there were laws on cooperatives existing in the Travancore and Cochin principalities and in the Malabar region, which constituted Kerala, the new Act was meant to give a further fillip to cooperatives in the combined state of Kerala. This also coincided with the then central government's decision to nationalise 14 private commercial banks, which helped the expansion of credit to rural areas, into agricultural sector and to sections of the poor.

The left movement was already associated with the cooperative movement, having been instrumental in the formation of two major cooperative societies – the Indian Coffee House Society and the Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers Cooperative Society. With land reforms being achieved, Kerala's agricultural cooperative sector saw massive growth. One of the early instances of this was seen in coconut production in Kerala. Cooperatives were formed or existing ones were strengthened by coconut farmers in Kerala in order to gain from the value addition process. Paddy and rubber producers also had their own cooperatives.

## **Kerala's Development Pattern**

Kerala's particular development pattern has been brought to the larger public attention by two great economists. One was Prof K N Raj who originally conducted the study of Kerala's development process although he himself never used the term 'Kerala Model of Development'. Another economist who popularised this particular development process of Kerala for the international audience was Prof Raj's colleague from the Delhi School of Economics, Dr Amartya Sen. Their studies showed that internationally two models of development were popular. The first model was that of development through foreign aid and investment. Developing countries, especially former colonies had surplus labour but lacked capital for

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4. <https://cooperation.kerala.gov.in/2019/04/22/kerala-co-operative-societies-act-1969/>

investment. The capital flowing in from outside was to be used to generate wealth and then the wealth could be distributed among the citizens of the country. Another model, mostly followed by the socialist countries argued that this process of generation of wealth first and distribution later is unjust. They argued for social and political uprising or revolution that would make the economy conducive to distribution, which can then grow equitably.

When Professor K N Raj and Dr Amartya Sen were studying the development of Kerala in the early 1970s, they found that Kerala did not follow any of the two aforementioned models. The state never received robust foreign aid to begin with and neither was there any political uprising or revolution. Yet the development trajectory of Kerala was better than that of other Indian states. Although having one of the lowest per capita income among Indian states, Kerala had the highest literacy rate and better availability of healthcare, even for the poorest. Studies showed that unlike the rest of India, rural areas of the state also had high per capita availability of schools, hospital beds, and dispensaries. Even the margin of difference in development indicators between the SC-ST population and the forward caste population was lower than that of other states. Though the magnitude of impact of cooperatives in this regard has not been computed, cooperatives in Kerala have played a huge role in reducing inequality in the state.

Currently there are cooperatives engaged in a wide range of activities like paddy processing, food processing, coir, fisheries, dairy, hospitals, restaurants, colleges, banking, retail marketing and transportation among others. The Department of Cooperation, Government of Kerala, states that there are 23,080 cooperatives spread across the state, touching all arenas of life<sup>5</sup>.

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5. <https://cooperation.kerala.gov.in/2019/04/06/introduction/>



The cooperative sector in Kerala, particularly the cooperative banks, has grown over the period of time and the banks have deposits amounting to ₹2.25 lakh crores<sup>6</sup>. At times when the state government found it difficult to finance the loss-making Kerala State Road Transport Corporation to pay salaries to its staff, the cooperative sector has extended loans to the state government. Cooperatives in Kerala are running nine engineering colleges also.

Cooperatives in Kerala offer ample scope for ideas of cooperative enterprise, democratic management, and extension of benefits to workers, farmers, fisher folk, milk producers, weavers, restaurant workers, and other similar segments of society who have organised themselves as cooperatives. They also serve consumers by offering products at reasonable prices.

The cooperatives have become integral to the life of residents of Kerala. During times of crises, like the 2018 Kerala flood and the pandemic, the cooperatives have stepped up in providing aid to all those affected. Post the 2018 Kerala floods, the cooperative sector in Kerala built and provided housing to people who had lost their houses during the floods. The role of cooperatives in Kerala in strengthening rural health infrastructure that proved to be effective in managing low mortality rate during the COVID-19 pandemic has been recognised the world over<sup>7</sup>.

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6. As stated in the inaugural speech of the workshop by Sri VN Vasavan, Minister for cooperation, Government of Kerala on 1st December 2021.

7. ICA World Cooperative Monitor 2021, retrieved from [https://monitor.coop/sites/default/files/2022-01/WCM\\_2021\\_0.pdf](https://monitor.coop/sites/default/files/2022-01/WCM_2021_0.pdf)

# COOPERATIVE SUCCESS STORIES FROM KERALA

## Indian Coffee House Cooperative Society, Thrissur<sup>1</sup>

Across many cities and towns throughout the nation, the Indian Coffee House (ICH) is something of an omnipresent eatery. Started in 1942 during the British rule and managed by the Indian Coffee Board to propagate the consumption of coffee in the country, the story of coffee houses being managed by their workers clad in the famous white uniforms with colourful turbans, began in 1958<sup>2</sup>. This was in response to a government decision to close down the coffee houses, dismiss the workers, and hand them over to the private sector. The decision was based on the recommendation by the auditor of the India Coffee House in 1951 as according to him, the coffee houses had already fulfilled the role of propagating coffee consumption in India, for which they were set up by the government. An in-principle approval by the Coffee House Board followed and a further recommendation on the same lines came from the Plantation Industries Corporation in 1956, which was accepted by the Government of India in 1957.

In order to avoid the dismissal of workers, on 25 June 1957, the India Coffee House labour union under the leadership of AK Gopalan, then a member of the Parliament decided to approach the government to hand over the coffee houses to be run as worker run cooperatives. Following it on 27 June 1957, the workers organised a black day and a one-day hunger

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1. The note on ICH Society, Thrissur is based on lectures by Sri Linu Damodaran and CN Rajesh, Assistant Secretary and Accountant of the society as part of the UAS'21.
  2. The following section on history of India Coffee House is based on Pillai Parameswaran Nadakkal, *Coffee Housinte Katha*, (The story of Coffee House), 2017, Chinta Publishers, Thiruvananthapuram, pp.105-107, pp.83-84, pp.87-88 and Sajan Evujin, "Thiyil Kuruthathu" (That which Sprouted in Fire), *Indian Coffee House Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, 2008, pp.90-94.

strike in support of their demands. The same day a notification dismissing 152 workers was issued by the board's chairman. On 11 August 1957, AKG declared fast unto death by the workers and leaders of India Coffee House. On 30 August 1957, the Union and the Indian Coffee Board signed a contract to hand over the coffee houses to be run by the workers.

The first worker-run India Coffee House was started in Delhi on 27 October 1957, which was followed by Bangalore on 17 January 1958, Pondicherry 20 February 1958, Thrissur on 8 March 1958, Thalassery on 7 August 1958 and later in various other parts of India. The central federation of coffee house worker cooperatives was set up on 17 December 1960. From 1964 onwards, the coffee board worker cooperatives network started running on profit. Various regional federations of India coffee houses functioning in different parts of the country operate independently, though they are connected to the central federation.

In 1958 when the Thrissur India Coffee House was set up, an 11-member governing board was elected from among the workers. TK Krishnan, then an MLA, was the first President of the society and Mr N Parameswaran Pillai was the first secretary. The Thrissur Coffee House started functioning from a building that was rented out to them on a substantially reduced rate by AKTKM Namboothirippad, the owner of Mangalodayam Publishers, then a leading publishing house in Malayalam. It was obtained on the intervention of the then education minister who was also holding additional charge of cooperatives and a famous critic of Malayalam literature Prof. Joseph Mundassery, who hailed from Thrissur. In order to support the Thrissur India Coffee House Cooperative Society, the then Government of Kerala waived its sales tax for a period of two years, under the initiative of the then Chief Minister EMS Namboothirippad<sup>3</sup>. India Coffee House, Thrissur was also supported by other worker friendly businessmen in Thrissur such as KJ Francis, the owner of Fashion Fabrics, KP Paul and KP Chakkunni, the owners of Popular Automobiles among others.

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3. Pillai Parameswaran Nadakkal, 2017, op. cit. pp. 84-85, p.106

Today the Indian Coffee House Cooperative Society, Thrissur has 53 branches running across the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin region of Kerala with around 2,200 workers, all of whom are members of the society. The coffee houses in the Malabar part of Kerala were federated with their headquarters in Palakkad in 1958, which was later moved to Thalasserry and is currently functioning from Kannur.

For anyone to become a member of the Thrissur India Coffee House society, they have to buy at least 500 shares of the society with each of the share costing ₹100, after which they are assigned their respective work. The salary of each member is dependent on their years of service and profits are distributed as bonuses during the festival season based on the amount of share capital owned by each member. Irrespective of ownership of share capital, each member is entitled to a single vote as per the principle of any cooperative society. Workers also enjoy benefits like gratuity, provident fund, ESI, and insurance cover. Workers with the required qualifications are preferred for appointment to non-manual jobs like counter clerks and managers. The accountant of Thrissur ICH Society who was one of the presenters on the ICH success story at the workshop, mentioned that he himself had begun his career as a cleaner and educated himself while working, to grow within the organisation to his present position. In this connection the culture of egalitarian relations among ICH workers at all levels, which AKG nurtured is worth mentioning. Once when AKG visited a branch of the coffee house he heard a worker calling his supervisor 'Sir'. He responded: "this is a workers' organisation where all are equal. Is it not good to call comrade instead of Sir?"<sup>4</sup>

From 1997-98 for a decade the Thrissur ICH Society was suffering losses due to competition from other more attractive restaurants in the industry<sup>5</sup>.

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4. Pillai Vijayan R Velavoor, "Randayirathiladhikam makkale Pottunna Ammakku Pranamam" (Bowling to the mother who feeds more than two thousand children), *Indian Coffee House Golden Jubilee Souvenir 2008*, p.56
  5. Pillai Parameswaran NS, "Sakhakkale Munnottu" (March ahead Comrades), *ICH Golden Jubilee Souvenir 2008*, pp. 64-65

During the financial year 2016-17, the total turnover of the society was around ₹126 crores. Both the presenters from ICH Thrissur mentioned that they strictly avoid use of chemicals in their food. In health-conscious Kerala this seems to have helped them in winning over the customers. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has further affected the ICH Thrissur federation financially, which they hope to overcome as the pandemic recedes. The Indian Coffee House has become a meeting place for people of various walks of life among whom a loyal customer base has been generated.

The location of the coffee houses has also played an important role in its growth, serving not only in major towns and cities but also within the campuses of medical colleges, government offices, and even high court compounds. The low cost of meals available at the coffee house at Thrissur medical college, has become popular with those going to the medical college from the rural areas of nearby districts. At the medical college branch, they are giving tea for ₹8 and meals at ₹35. Both are priced at ₹10 and ₹65 respectively otherwise. The Thrissur society has also been the first of its kind in India to employ women by appointing 70 women workers in October 2019.

With the pandemic induced lockdowns affecting restaurants heavily, the Thrissur coffee house society has managed to pay only 80 per cent salary to the workers currently. Despite these challenges, the society has started diversifying their work and moved into other areas like the sale of coffee powder and marketing mineral water with its own branding. They also plan to open a supermarket as part of diversification. The society provides its member-workers with benefits like provident fund, gratuity, medical insurance, life insurance, as well as support for educating their children.

## Kochi Auto Rickshaw Cooperative Society<sup>6</sup>

On 17 February, 2019, the honourable Chief Minister of Kerala inaugurated the Kochi Auto Rickshaw Cooperative Society. The society currently has 5,000 members, all auto rickshaw drivers from the Ernakulam district. A one-time membership fee of ₹25 and purchase of shares of the society for ₹100 per share is all that is required for an auto rickshaw driver to be a member of the society. One can purchase any number of shares one wants to. While the society provides higher income to the auto-drivers along with benefits including health coverage and children's education, a major success of the society has been bringing together workers registered under six different trade unions operating in Kochi.

The motive of formation of the society has been drawn from its aim to empower public transport facilities. The society believes that there should be a drastic change in the public transport system of India when compared to other developing countries. As improving public transport and ensuring lower greenhouse gas emissions were two of the main objectives of the society, they began as a feeder service connecting to the Kochi Metro. Moreover, the affordability of the auto rickshaw services also makes it the trusted public transport option for the common people of Kochi.

With electric mobility being the future of transportation, the cooperative society has also started the service of electronic auto rickshaws. With support from the Kochi Metro Rail Limited and the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), a total of 16 e-auto rickshaws were launched in early 2021 with around 80 more being added during the first phase of the launch. By end of 2022, the society plans to build a network of more than 2,000 e-autos across Kochi. Not only e-autos, the society has also developed a mobile application called 'AuSa' for hailing the auto

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6. The note on Kochi Auto Society is based on the lectures by Sri. Syamantha Bhadran, President and Sri Binu Varghese, Secretary of the Society on 1st December 2021 and discussions.

7. Portmanteau of "Auto Savari" (Auto ride)

rickshaws through mobile phones. The society has also planned to set up day care centres, stitching units, and catering units for improving the income of family members of auto drivers. Food prepared by the family members would also be available for delivery through the AuSa app in the near future.

In May 2021, when the cases of COVID-19 were surging, to overcome the shortage of ambulance, the society stepped in to fill the gap<sup>8</sup>. Many auto rickshaws were fitted with portable oxygen cylinders, pulse oximeters, infrared thermometers, and other medical equipment. The drivers had their smartphones connected with the district control room and transported patients to hospitals and delivered medicines and food to infected people under home quarantine.

In the short span of time for which it has existed, the cooperative society has gained popularity and won several accolades. It won the award for 'Innovation in urban transport during Covid-19' under the public transport segment of the Urban Mobility India (UMI) conference 2020<sup>9</sup>. The model has been so effective and innovative, that similar projects are being thought of in Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode districts as well.

## Kudumbashree<sup>10</sup>

Kudumbashree is the poverty eradication and women empowerment programme implemented by the State Poverty Eradication Mission of the Government of Kerala. It was set up in 1997 following the recommendations of a three-member task force appointed by the Government of Kerala. Its

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8. <https://www.indiatoday.in/cities/kochi/story/kerala-autorickshaw-ambulance-services-begins-in-kochi-1807401-2021-05-27>

9. <https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/kochi/2020/nov/08/kochis-auto-drivers-body-wins-national-award-for-innovation-in-urban-transport-during-covid-19-2221140.html>

10. The note on Kudumbashree is based on the lecture and notes by Prof. Mini Sukumar as part of UAS'21

formation was in the context of the devolution of powers to the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Kerala, and the Peoples' Plan Campaign, which attempted to draw up the Ninth Plan of the local governments from below through the PRIs. Kudumbashree has a three-tier structure for its women community network, with Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) at the lowest level, Area Development Societies (ADS) at the intermediate (ward) level, and Community Development Societies (CDS) at the local government level. The program currently has more than 45 lakh members covering over 50 per cent of Kerala's households<sup>11</sup>.

The concept of Kudumbashree is built around the three critical components of microcredit, entrepreneurship, and empowerment. Its major activities include credit supply, promotion of microenterprises, creating joint liability groups in agriculture, management of MGNREGS, facilitating the destitute support programme of 'Ashraya', and supporting palliative care programs among many others. In the gender and empowerment activities under the policy, there are activities for self-learning within the NHGs including preparation of reading material, cultural programmes, etc. Joining Kudumbashree means that women go for weekly meetings where they meet other women and socialise. This makes them self-aware and the collective economic activities of the programme ensure a steady monthly income. More than anything, it has liberated women to get out of the house and go to work. In a traditionally male-dominated society, women participating in the polity, going to vocational training programmes, and starting small businesses were not the norm. Kudumbashree helped to change this.

Kudumbashree groups have also focused on vulnerable communities through activities like special care for the elderly, children, and the differently abled. The local self-government institutions of Kerala, under the guidance of Kudumbashree, operate 293 BUDS institutions in the state,

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11. <https://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/171>



which include schools for differently abled children and rehabilitation centres for intellectually disabled adults<sup>12</sup>. Kudumbashree has also formed collectives of children, called 'Balasabhas' in all districts of the state that undertake various activities for their wholesome growth<sup>13</sup>. Each collective consists of 15 to 30 children in the age group of 5 to 18 years. The prime objective of constituting 'Balasabhas' is to prevent inter-generational transmission of poverty through capability enhancement of children. Small learning groups for experimental and systematic learning, opportunities for understanding democratic processes, participation in conserving the environment, enabling children to unfold the intricacies of collectivisation are the basic focal points of these collectives.

Kudumbashree has also made a significant contribution to fight against the pandemic in the state of Kerala. The Government of Kerala together with Kudumbashree Mission has undertaken different activities to face the Covid-19 pandemic. A major activity undertaken during this pandemic was to break the chain campaign through social media communications. 3 lakh WhatsApp groups with 22 lakh NHG members were formed to educate them about government instructions regarding Covid-19 during the lockdown<sup>14</sup>. The Kudumbashree groups have also been involved in the process of mask making and sanitizer production. By the end of September 2020, Kudumbashree groups had prepared and sold more than 71.55 lakh cotton masks through around 306 tailoring units and 9,322 litres of sanitizers were prepared by 21 micro enterprise units<sup>15</sup>.

The Kerala State Financial Enterprises (KSFE) had developed a scheme where it collaborated with Kudumbashree to implement a microcredit scheme called the KSFE 'Vidyashree' Scheme. It supported member

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12. <https://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/85>

13. <https://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/708>

14. <https://kudumbashree.org/pages/828>

15. <https://www.kudumbashree.org/pages/830>

families to avail laptops to ensure online education to their children. Around 400 community kitchens were started in panchayats and municipalities as budget hotels in the name of 'Janakeeya Hotels' (People's Hotels) by Kudumbashree workers<sup>16</sup>. The Joint liability groups across the state have voluntarily stood together for community kitchens and donated their products generously for the social cause, handing over tonnes of agricultural commodities to community kitchens across the state.

While Kudumbashree cannot be strictly called a cooperative society, it has been able to nurture and promote collective economic activities of women through its NHGs. These groups follow the essential cooperative values and principles of democratic governance, equality, equity, and responsibility towards the community. The NHGs also essentially work as cooperative societies offering micro-credit to its members for consumption needs, contingency needs, festival needs, and needs for income generation. The Kudumbashree mission has been a turning point in women's socioeconomic development in the state, achieved through community participation and collectivisation.

## Kerala Bank<sup>17</sup>

As part of a bold and radical policy decision of restructuring the state's existing cooperative credit structure, the Government of Kerala brought about the amalgamation of 13 District Cooperative Banks (DCB) with the Kerala State Cooperative Bank (KSCB) with the approval of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). On the midnight of 29 November 2019, all DCBs except the Malappuram DCB, which decided against the merger, were merged and a single entity under the brand name 'Kerala Bank' began functioning in the state.

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16. <https://kudumbashree.org/pages/826>

17. The note on Kerala Bank is based on the lecture and notes provided by Mr. Reveendran Vedavathy, Chairman, Board of Management, Kerala Bank as part of UAS'21

The short-term cooperative credit structure in the state was, traditionally a three-tiered system consisting of Primary Agricultural Cooperative Societies (PACS), District Cooperative Banks (DCBs), and the Kerala State Cooperative Bank. The Left Democratic Front (LDF) in their election manifesto for the 2016 legislative assembly elections, had declared that once elected to power, they would propose to form an apex bank in the cooperative sector and in the process restructure the then existing three-tier to a two-tier structure. The idea was to consolidate the cooperative credit institutions to form a model Scheduled Commercial Bank in the cooperative sector, in which, the government of Kerala will have a major stake and which will be well-equipped to compete with any other commercial or new generation bank operating in the state. It was conceived to be one of the largest and strongest banks in Kerala with the capability to ensure hassle-free, tech-based banking products and services to the common man at affordable costs by leveraging the best in modern banking technology.

Once voted to power, the government appointed an expert committee under the chairmanship of Prof M S Sriram of IIM Bangalore to analyse in detail the proposed structural changes for setting up the new bank. After an in-depth study, the Sriram Committee submitted its report to the state government and soon after, the Cabinet approved the recommendations in principle. The state government then constituted a special task force headed by Shri. V.R. Raveendranath, the former Chief General Manager, NABARD and experts from the domain of banking, cooperation and information technology to examine the recommendations made by the expert committee and to prepare a road map for the formation of the new bank.

After the merger, the 1650 PACS and 60 Urban Commercial Banks (UCB) in Kerala, are the primary members of the Kerala State Cooperative Bank (branded as Kerala Bank). The bank, as approved by the RBI, has an elected Board of Directors consisting of 21 members. Out of these, 13 members are elected from member PACS of each of the 13 district cooperative

banks that joined: one member representing each district. In addition, there is one member to represent the UCBs that joined. Other members are nominated professional directors and ex-officio members representing NABARD, the state government, Registrar of Cooperative Societies, etc. Apart from the board of directors, there is also a board of management constituted as per RBI guidelines.

The bank has seven regional offices in commercially important locations and 13 credit processing centres, one each in every district excluding Malappuram. Put together, they have a network of more than 4,625 touch points and as of March 2021, Kerala Bank's total business was ₹1,06,396.54 crore comprising ₹6731.61 crore in deposits and ₹39664.93 crore in advances<sup>18</sup>. Kerala Bank has the second largest number of branches in the state.

The story of the formation of Kerala Bank can be summed up with the phrase "small is beautiful but big is dependable". The merger of the DCBs into a single entity has led them to achieve economies of scale. The consolidation process has considerably cut down costs of technology, administrative costs, and financial costs. On account of delayering, there are significant gains in terms of efficiency of managing a single large balance sheet and all these gains in the costs could eventually be passed on to the primaries, so that they will be better placed to serve their customers more effectively. It will also help the bank to effectively compete with the other lending institutions; mainly the commercial banks, and provide more ethical and friendly banking products at non-exploitative rates. The new bank can now access transactions in forex too, which opens a new avenue of banking for them. The re-branded entity with emphasis on technology has the potential to attract the younger generation as a targeted customer base.

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18. Kerala Bank Budget 2022-23, provided by Mr Raveendran Vedavathy

## Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society<sup>19</sup>

Around the year 1917, a group of lower caste workers who were denied the opportunity to work by the upper castes met Sree Vagbhatananda Swamy who advised them to take up work as a collective. Sree Vagbhatananda was influenced by Sree Narayana Guru, who played a central role in what is referred to as Kerala renaissance dated to the second half of the 19th century to the end of first half of the 20th century.

In early February 1925, a group of 14 workers of Uralunkal near Vadakara, collectively contributed 37 paise and formed a society of coolie workers called 'Uralunkal Kooli Velakarude Parspara Sahaya Sangham' (Uralunkal Wageworkers Mutual Help Society). Over a period of 97 years, the society has grown to have projects valued at ₹6,800 crores and employing around 12,000 workers. The society is now known as the Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society. Headquartered at Vadakara in Kozhikode district of northern Kerala, it takes up infrastructure development projects all across Kerala from roads and bridges to highways, flyovers, and housing projects. Over the years, the ULCCS has built up a reputation for completing projects under budget and before the allotted time, and also returning any unused funds to the concerned government departments.

One of the major constructions ULCCS has undertaken include the 28.5 km long Ramanattukara flyover in Kozhikode district which has five bridges on it. It has successfully completed several other major projects including the Kozhikode city improvement project consisting of six roads, the Valiyazheekkal bridge in Kollam that has a span of 108 metres, and iconic

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19. The following note on ULCCS is based on the presentation made by Mr. T Kishore, Project Coordinator, ULCCS at UL Cyber Park on 4th December 2021, observations during a study visit to ULCCS as part of UAS'21, subsequent telephonic conversation with Mr. Kishore on 18th Feb 2022; Sharma, S. K. (2018), *ULCCS The Saga Continues*, ICA Domus Trust, New Delhi and other references cited.

state of the art buildings such as their own huge UL cyberpark building in Kozhikode with an area of 482,000 square feet, which can accommodate 3000 IT professionals, the IISF building at Kollam, and many more. UL cyber park building is one of the first Green Energy buildings in India with gold certification by Leaders in Energy Efficient Design (LEAD). Recently, leading a consortium of 31 primary cooperatives, ULCCS won a major contract of ₹693 crores for building a 39 km six lane road on National Highway 66 that passes through Kasaragod district<sup>20</sup>.

But this journey of almost a century has not been easy. The society had to wait for almost a year before it could secure its first contract. The job was road maintenance and the contract was valued at just ₹925. The work was completed on time to the satisfaction of the authorities. However, this did not help the society in securing another contract. There was complete lull for some time. After waiting patiently, the society got another job in 1928-29 valued at ₹350, which was again completed successfully. Another period of no work lasted for the next two-three years till a small job valued at ₹167 came as some relief in 1931-32.

ULCCS's membership was increasing steadily every year but this did not result in sufficiently augmenting its share capital. By the end of 1931-32, though the membership had increased to 102, the paid-up share capital of the society was just ₹77. It decided that the practice of collecting 4 anna per week as share capital contribution by members during the time of their employment would be strictly enforced. They also removed the restriction on the number of shares that each member could hold. These resolutions had a positive effect on the finances and by 1949-50, ULCCS's paid-up share capital had increased to ₹2,965.

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20. <https://ulccsltd.com/aboutus>

21. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/how-this-kerala-cooperative-in-the-infrastructure-sector-has-become-a-role-model/articleshow/72615180.cms>

The governing framework of ULCCS is also a fascinating example. The membership of the cooperative is divided into different classes<sup>21</sup>. 'A class' members are full members with voting rights and share capital. 'C class' members are those with share capital but not voting rights. There are around 600 'A class' members and around 2,400 'C Class' members. Then there are around 9,000 non-member workers of the society. Progress from non-member to 'C Class' and ultimately 'A class' is dependent on the amount of time the individual has spent working with the cooperative. This classification has been made to ensure that only those who work long enough with the organisation and imbibe the values of the organisation can have influence in the organisation's long-term policies.

As the construction sector is heavily dependent on inter-state migrant workers, almost half of the non-member workers are migrants from other parts of the country. However, a process of enrolling migrant workers who have served long periods and share the organisation's values into 'C class' members has started. As 'C Class' members they will be entitled to all benefits that other members get, but will not have voting rights, which takes more years of service. It was also mentioned in this connection that recently a migrant worker who lost his life was paid a contribution of ₹35 lakhs.

Management and leadership at the society is also democratically controlled. All voting members attend the general body meeting and from the general body, the board of directors is elected. At present there are 13 directors on the board comprising construction workers and professionals among whom two are women. The board then elects a chairperson from among themselves. These elections take place every five years. While every director has been assigned responsibility of certain worksites, the operational leadership at each worksite is democratically managed. On every worksite, all workers elect from among themselves a worksite leader,

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21. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/infrastructure/how-this-kerala-cooperative-in-the-infrastructure-sector-has-become-a-role-model/articleshow/72615180.cms>

irrespective of the technical or managerial superiority. For example, in the ULCCS worksite at Ponnani, where they are building a bridge and a housing project for displaced fisher folk community, the worksite was headed by a mason and not an engineer<sup>22</sup>.

All workers are entitled to several perks and benefits over and above their wages. Every worker gets bonus twice a year, and is entitled to medical insurance and accident insurance. Apart from these, members are also entitled to provident fund, gratuity, pension, family insurance cover, and interest-free loans. As a matter of principle, meals are also provided to workers for free during their working hours. This assurance of decent wages and working conditions has ensured that ULCCS has never lost a single person day of work due to strike or labour unrest.

The ULCCS prides itself at having achieved 13 out of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Achievement of the goal of decent work and economic growth is fundamental to their existence, but efforts have been made to tackle inequality and ensure gender balance. 45 per cent of the workers of ULCCS are women, and they claim to have no gender pay gap. They have also made comprehensive efforts to mitigate climate change and reduce excessive dependence on power supply with investment in solar energy. They have also adopted rain water harvesting, recycling of waste water, and construction of low power and water consuming buildings.

The society has also modernised their workflow by using state of the art construction technologies and importing modern survey instruments from Europe, first of its kind in Kerala. It has also invested heavily in enhancing workers' capacities so that they can make better use of the modern machinery. But modernisation of workflow and technology is not the only way in which ULCCS has made advancement to keep up with the changing

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22. The participants and organising team of UAS'21 visited the worksite on 4th December 2021, as part of the workshop.



world. Since the turn of the century, the demand for blue collar jobs has decreased in Kerala and the youth has started seeking white collar jobs in the IT and ITES sector. Understanding the demand of the day, ULCCS started diversifying into newer ventures.

While construction continues to be the main source of revenue, it entered the technology sector in 2011, with the setting up of UL Technology Solutions (ULTS), a tech services company. The office of ULTS, which looks like that of any tech major is located within the UL cyber park campus in Kozhikode. The campus has also been built by ULCCS and hosts other technology and services-based companies. Apart from the cyber park and IT company, ULCCS has also built an educational institute called Indian Institute of Infrastructure and Construction near Kollam, which provides technical, supervisory, and management courses related to infrastructure development. Along with the Tourism Department of Government of Kerala, ULCCS has converted an old quarry site to a modern crafts village called 'Sargalaya' at Vadakara. This crafts village is not only a tourist attraction by itself, but also provides sustainable livelihood opportunities to many traditional artisans including many from other states of India.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on the entire economy with the construction sector and construction workers facing aggravated consequences. But workers of ULCCS faced comparatively less challenges. The Uralungal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS) had chartered private buses to take migrant workers back home in the event of the pandemic. Workers who stayed back in Kerala had food and accommodation provided by ULCCS, even though work remained suspended.

During the Covid-19 period, not only did ULCCS render services for its own workers, but it worked for the society at large as well. It established oxygen support systems, provided cryogenic tanks to medical colleges, and set up new oxygen plants. The World Cooperative Monitor 2021 lauded the

services of ULCCS during the pandemic<sup>23</sup>. The report mentioned ULCCS as one of the large Indian cooperatives that made generous contributions to pandemic relief work including through employee contributions from salary. The other Indian entities who were mentioned in this regard are NCUI, IFFCO, KRIBHCO, AMUL, and SEWA.

The WCM 2021 rates ULCCS as the second highest in the ratio of turn over by GDP per capita 2019 at USD 85366 in the category on industries and utilities; the first being Corpracion Mondragon, Spain<sup>24</sup>. The rise of ULCCS in economic terms is more than evident from its growth to internationally comparable levels. However, according to ULCCS's own statement, in the past 97 years ULCCS has worked to reduce poverty and for the next 100 years, it aims to create a liveable environment for all.

## **Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers' Central Cooperative Society<sup>25</sup>**

The tale of Dinesh Beedi is that of grit and gumption of workers rendered jobless for reasons beyond their control to find a livelihood and ensure themselves a decent life. In 1966, as a response to the struggles by beedi and cigar workers, communist leader AK Gopalan, then a Member of Parliament, moved a private-members bill in the parliament to protect their rights. The then Union Labour Minister Gulzarilal Nanda had requested AKG to withdraw his bill as the Government of India was moving a bill

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23. ICA World Cooperative Monitor 2021, p.23 retrieved from [https://monitor.coop/sites/default/files/2022-01/WCM\\_2021\\_0.pdf](https://monitor.coop/sites/default/files/2022-01/WCM_2021_0.pdf)

24. Ibid p.61

25. The note on Kerala Dinesh Beedi is based on presentations by MK Dineshbabu and K Prabhakaran, Chairman and Secretary of Dinesh Beedi Cooperative Society on 4th December 2021 at Kannur, observations on a study visit to Kerala Dinesh as part of UAS'21 and references cited.

under the title 'Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act'<sup>26</sup>. The law provided for decent wages and certain benefits for the workers in the tobacco industry. The implementation of the law was however left at the discretion of the states and the then Left Government of Kerala implemented it in the state. As a result of this, all beedi manufacturers, mostly from Karnataka, who were operating in northern Kerala mainly Kannur and Kasaragod districts, like Ganesh Beedi, Bharat Beedi, etc. abruptly shut down their operations in the state and rendered thousands of workers jobless.

Even after the efforts of the government and trade unions, the companies did not resume their operations in Kerala. The beedi workers' unions had waged struggles to get the factories opened and also to implement the new Act in all states so that factory owners did not desert any state that implemented the Act. These were not heeded by the factory owners or other state governments. Later, workers demanded rehabilitation of the workers who were thrown out due to sudden closure of the beedi factories<sup>27</sup>. In response the then Government of Kerala decided to create a cooperative of the beedi workers. Under the chairmanship of the then Regional Joint Director in Department of Industries and Commerce, Mr G K Panicker, the Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers' Central Cooperative Society was registered on 15 February 1969, based out of Kannur. Initially, around 3,000 workers were brought under the cooperative, which increased to 42,000 by 1980<sup>28</sup>.

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26. Chandran Pookkudan, "Kannuril Beedithozhilali Prasthanavum Dineshinte Thudakkavum" (Beedi Workers' Movement of Kannur and the Beginning of Dinesh", *Kerala Dinesh Beedi Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, Kerala Dinesh Beedi, Kannur, 2019, p.57

27. Sahadevan KP "Dinesh Beedi Utbhavavum Athodanubandhicha Prashnangalum" (Birth of Dinesh Beedi and the Difficulties Associated with it", *Kerala Dinesh Beedi Golden Jubilee Souvenir 2019* op. cit. pp.35-37.

28. Pookkudan Chandran, 2019 op.cit, p.61.

The central society was the apex society formed as a cooperative of 20 primary societies from different regions of Northern Kerala. A worker is a member of any of the primary societies and each primary society is a member of the central society. When operations began, each worker had to buy share capital of ₹20. Workers who were finding it difficult to meet both ends out of the daily wage of ₹3 after a prolonged lock out and the struggle that had impoverished them, could not afford to buy the shares out of their own money. The Government of Kerala therefore, extended ₹19 to each worker as finance capital loan.

The central cooperative society of Dinesh Beedi acts as the apex body of member societies. A nine-member board of directors has been formed with seven elected directors from the primary societies and two nominated by the government – the chairperson and general manager. The procurement, refining, and distribution of tobacco and tendu leaves are done by the central society. The workers in the primary societies are responsible for the beedi rolling processes and the rolled beedis are again sent to the central society. The central society then takes up the task of labelling and marketing the beedis under the common brand, 'Dinesh Beedi'.

The welfare of beedi workers and their dependents is the primary goal of the Dinesh Beedi cooperative society. This includes a salary of ₹530 for every 1,000 beedis rolled. In comparison, beedi workers in other states make less than ₹200 for the same amount of work. A beedi worker would generally roll more than 1,000 beedis per day and therefore can have an effective daily wage of up to ₹800. The Dinesh Beedi workers also enjoy benefits like provident fund, pension, medical insurance, annual leave, and Sunday wages.

The empowerment of the beedi workers is also an important objective of the cooperative. In order to do so by making them aware of the current affairs, in each beedi rolling unit, a person is hired to read the newspaper for the day. In units with larger number of workers, the help of a

microphone and speakers is also taken. Each worker provides around 5 to 10 beedis per day from their own pool to support the compensation of the newspaper reader. Exposure to current affairs has helped in many beedi workers becoming politically active by becoming panchayat presidents and even members of the legislative assembly.

During the initial years, Dinesh Beedi faced a barrier to enter the beedi market. This was due to the fact that tobacco consumers are brand loyalists. Most of them do not want to easily change the brand of tobacco product they use. With the cooperative producing 30 lakh beedis per day, the number of unsold beedis were piling up. Then concerted efforts by the workers themselves and the trade unions to make the beedi more popular among the consumers changed the fate of the cooperative. The number of workers grew from 3,000 in early 1970s to 42,000 in the 1980s. Dinesh Beedi had become the most sought after beedi brand in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka.

Since the 1990s, the story has changed. The income of the average consumers started to increase and with this, many shifted from beedis to cigarettes. Moreover, increase in awareness regarding health outcomes and governments' anti-tobacco policies on account of health concerns started to hurt the sales and revenue stream of Dinesh Beedi. A series of management decisions taken and implemented with the support of the trade union and the financial support from the state government has helped in making Dinesh Beedi economically stable<sup>29</sup>.

In 2007-08, the central society decided to reduce over-production of beedi beyond the available demand by reducing its work force. This was done in discussion and cooperation with the workers' union of Dinesh beedi.

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29. This note on post 2007 economic revival of Kerala Dinesh Beedi Cooperative Society is based on Rajan C "Kerala Dinesh Uyirthezhunnelpinte Katha" (Kerala Dinesh: The Story of its Resurrection), in *Kerala Dinesh Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 2019* op.cit, pp.23-28.

The then LDF Government had allotted ₹6 crores to Dinesh Beedi to support its VRS. Around 3,000 workers opted for the VRS, which in turn helped in bringing down production beyond demand and piling up of unsold stock.

In addition, the price of beedis was also revised periodically according to the costs involved and strengthened the agents' network by weeding out non performing agents and appointing new agents. Steps were also taken to collect the amounts due on account of credit sales. As a result of all these measures, the proceeds from beedi sales which is the core business of the Dinesh Cooperative increased from ₹38 crores in 2007-08 to ₹53 crores in 2015-16, though it dipped again slightly to ₹50 crores in 2018-19. During this period the number of workers in the cooperative dependent on beedi making also reduced from 10,000 to 4,500. Currently, with 4,000 workers in 18 active primary cooperative societies, Dinesh Beedi makes 64 crore beedis per year with an annual turnover of ₹63 crores.

These developments brought benefits for the worker-members of the cooperative and also strengthened it economically. While in 2007 they were doing work for 5 days and receiving the wages only for 4 days, by 2009 they could work for 6 days and receive wages for the seventh non-working day as well. With the increase in proceeds and support from the government, the society could pay the gratuity arrears of ₹25 crores. From 2015-16 it could bring all the 4,500 workers under a group gratuity scheme of LIC.

In 2016-17, all worker-members were given shares of the cooperative worth ₹2,000. Till 2017-18, they were also given a bonus above the minimum rate. The cooperative could also clear the ₹7 crore dues to be paid to the Odisha Forest Development Corporation on account of supply of tobacco leaves and another ₹4 crores due to the Kannur District Cooperative Bank for a loan taken to build the Dinesh auditorium.

The decline in sales and a shift in the generation of workers paved the way for diversification into newer avenues. Dinesh Foods was opened in 1998 and it currently employs around 100 people; among them 80 erstwhile women beedi workers are rehabilitated. The brand produces spices, curry powder, coconut-based products like coconut milk, virgin coconut oil, desiccated coconut powder, pickles, jams, sweets, squashes, and many more food products. They also have a tea packing unit. Food products of Dinesh Foods are certified by HACCP, AGMARK since 2007-08. After that, new products were introduced and packaging was made more attractive. New distributors and sales executives were also appointed. As a result, proceeds rose from ₹2.5 crore in 2007-08 to ₹6 crores in 2018-19. The state government's Consumer Fed, Civil Supplies Corporation and other government agencies started procuring various products from Dinesh Foods. They have exported their products to regions in the West Asia, Europe, and Australia.

The success of diversification into food products paved the way for diversification into other ventures as well. They set up umbrella manufacturing units, which also employ erstwhile beedi makers. Through production innovation, quality upgradation, and improving sales the umbrella making unit could raise its sales from around ₹0.5 crore in 2007-08 to ₹3 crores in 2018-19. By that time the number of workers in the unit also increased from 30 to 60.

In 2007, the society started Dinesh Apparels. It provides employment to 400 people, mostly women and dependents of beedi workers. The apparel unit is export oriented with its finished products like uniforms for hospital staff going to countries in West Asia and Latin America. The apparels unit earns around ₹5 crores of foreign exchange annually. During the 10 years prior to 2018-19, Dinesh Apparels earned foreign exchange to the tune of ₹50 crores.

There has been diversification at the primary society level as well. This is due to two compounded factors. First, new recruitment into beedi making

has completely stopped and most beedi makers have started to retire. This could lead to the liquidation of the society if there were no members. In order to prevent such consequences, and to provide employment to workers, diversification was started in the primary societies in the form of restaurants under a common brand name and retail shops selling Dinesh branded products, etc.

But one of the most interesting diversifications is that of Dinesh IT System. With an employee strength of around 50, comprising mostly children of beedi workers, Dinesh IT System is the product of an organisation, that till 25 years ago was only selling beedi and is still largely run by the beedi rolling workers. Dinesh IT System provides core banking software to primary cooperative banks, sets up mobile banking and ATM services to cooperative banks, and provides merchandising software to other cooperative societies and private businesses. They have also built a data centre for the cooperative banks and are in the process of building two more. In 2018-19, the revenue generated by the IT division was to the tune of Rs 2.3 crores.

In addition to HACCP and AGMARK, Dinesh has also secured ISO 9000 and is one of the few cooperatives in India that achieved SA8000 social compliance standards. Dinesh was also awarded the all-India winner in the category of Fair and Ethical Business in the SME sector by ASSOCHAM consecutively for six years from 2014 to 2019<sup>30</sup>.

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30. Kerala Dinesh Beedi – Existence in the Cooperative Way, (Backgrounder on Kerala Dinesh Beedi) Dinesh Beedi, Kannur, 2019





# COOPERATIVES AND DECENT WORK: THE WAY FORWARD<sup>1</sup>

## Growth of the Social and Solidarity Economy

At an ILO Conference in 2009, the social and solidarity economy was defined as a “concept designating enterprises and organisations, in particular cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations, and social enterprises, which have the specific feature of producing goods, services, and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity”<sup>2</sup>.

While there is no one definition of social and solidarity economy, and the term is relatively new, with all the changes that the world of work is going through, new-age enterprises based on the principles of cooperation and solidarity are coming up these days. Inspired by Fair Trade, Circular Economy, and Sustainable Development Goals, there is a cooperative called FairBnB in Europe<sup>3</sup>. FairBnB.coop started its journey in 2016 as a movement seeking to create a just alternative to existing home-sharing platforms. FairBnB is a workers’ cooperative in the tourism sector. Like all the other platforms, they ask for a fee for bookings but unlike other platforms, they transfer 50 per cent of the fees to community projects in the host area with the goal to redistribute wealth and create jobs.

In Japan, there’s Agurilin, which is a biodiesel fuel plant managed as a cooperative and employs young people with special needs or having

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1. Based on the lecture and notes by Dr TM Thomas Isaac and Ms Simren Singh as part of UAS’21
  2. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-abidjan/documents/publication/wcms\\_166727.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---africa/---ro-abidjan/documents/publication/wcms_166727.pdf)
  3. <https://fairbnb.coop/about-us-3/>

difficulties to be socially involved. Japan Workers' Cooperative Union runs four such plants throughout the country that are managed as workers' cooperatives<sup>4</sup>.

In Indonesia, InnoCircle Initiative is an incubator for cooperative start-ups that encourages youth to hone their innovative business ideas and collaborate with each other<sup>5</sup>. Indonesia is an emerging centre for entrepreneurial growth and has the 5th highest number of start-ups in the world<sup>6</sup>. InnoCircle offers co-working space to young cooperative entrepreneurs, mentors and connects them with investors, founders, academicians, and government to create products and services that have economic and social impact. InnoCircle focuses on promoting worker-owned cooperatives among the youth in the country. Established in 2018, InnoCircle has incubated 20 cooperative start-ups that are engaged in home delivery of goods (Dommu); home delivery of vegetables (Beceer); book rentals and mobile library (BookCircle).

In South Korea, freelance cooperatives are another type of cooperatives that have seen an upsurge lately<sup>7</sup>. They are being established by lecturers, coaches, consultants, IT developers, scientists, researchers, civic landscapers, artists, craftsmen, freelance theatre artists, reporters, storytellers, photo journalists, movie staff, and writers.

In Singapore, there is Runninghour Cooperative, which is an inclusive running club that promotes and provides support to persons with special needs through physical recreation, mainly running<sup>8</sup>. It also provides them

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4. <http://icaap.coop/sites/ica-ap.coop/files/2019%20Japan%20country%20snapshot.pdf>

5. <https://innocircle.id/>

6. <https://www.startupranking.com/countries>

7. Jang, J. (2016). The Emergence of Freelancer Cooperatives in South Korea. *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, Vol. 88, No. 1

8. <https://www.runninghour.com/about>

opportunities to interact with their peers, ordinary youth, and adults to build bonds and enlarge their social networks. The cooperative's business activities include events management, conducting integration workshops for corporations, organising national races, and providing fitness instructors for visually challenged students in schools.

## **Towards an Environment that Supports Cooperation**

Social enterprises like cooperatives have the potential to become key components of the future. This is based on three very important reasons. First and foremost, the present system fails to provide decent work and ensure sustainable living conditions. Labour is a fundamental essence of a human being. The present system alienates labourers from controlling the labour processes, which is an undesirable situation. Second reason is the widespread inequality, which is seeing unprecedented heights in the history of human civilisation. The third reason is the rift that is being created between nature and the human world due to over exploitation of resources. An alternative form of socio-economic growth is needed that is sustainable and equitable, and cooperatives can play a very important role in such alternative processes.

The current pool of cooperatives is much constrained by certain impediments, with the result that mainstream economists always argue that cooperatives cannot be sustainable or successful at large. The biggest impediment, is the barrier to entry that a small cooperative faces when trying to promote a mode of production, trade, or credit supply. The simplest reason for that is the lack of adequate capital. Contemporary economic systems have made it necessary for new entrants to mobilise huge capital. For example, when ULCCS started, it was difficult for them to mobilise enough capital to take up large infrastructure projects. Gradually with support from the government and having created a name for itself, it overcame this barrier but it took them near about four decades to do so. In order to ensure that cooperatives can have better access to

finance, there need to be efforts in the policy ecosystem to create strong cooperative banks, which can act as financiers for emerging cooperatives. Cooperation among cooperatives is also very important in sustaining a solidarity economy.

In a capitalist economy, the sole objective is to maximise financial profits and all other objectives are subjected to it. But a cooperative has other objectives as well, including but not limited to social justice, workers' welfare, and ensuring control over the labour process by the labourers themselves. Moreover, in traditional firms, the management is hired by the owners of capital while in cooperatives, it is the workers or producers who hire the management. Traditional economic theories would suggest that such diverse objectives and management style can create hindrances in the effective operations of a firm. In order to sustain for long, cooperatives have to ensure that such operational challenges are attended to. Successful cooperatives have to imbibe the democratic values from below and cannot expect it to be a top-down model. The structure of the cooperative should be such that it ensures participation and transparency.

Another problem that cooperatives face, as suggested by traditional economic theories, is the lack of long-term asset accumulation. Members of a cooperative would enjoy dividends from the cooperative as long as they are working at the cooperative. This, as well as the economic conditions of the members, makes them more prone to opt for distribution of profits rather than re-investment into the development of the cooperative enterprise. But if the successes of the aforementioned cooperatives are to be studied, then it is proven that accumulation of assets over time for cooperative enterprises is indeed possible. In order to ensure this, the real wages of the workers need to improve over time so as to reduce the requirement of large-scale profit distribution. Once the arrangement ensures desirable standards of living for the workers, the surplus can be used for investment in asset creation and new technology to make the production process efficient. An effective model for this is to take approval of investment decisions from the members and instead of waiting for capital accumulation to invest, use the services of

credit market facilities for making those investments. Subsequently, any new surplus that is generated automatically deducts the investment cost in the form of debt repayment.

It is to be noted that sustenance of cooperatives is not just based on economic successes. Cooperatives are economic enterprises for sure, but they are also social and political enterprises. The development of a cooperative is a political struggle in itself aimed at ensuring social and economic justice. Educating all stakeholders and making members aware of the possibility of degeneration of the cooperative into mere economic entities can be the first step to prevent degeneration. This is a drawback of the cooperative movement against a capitalistic firm. A capitalistic firm would be punished by the market if it does not go for fulfilling the objective of profit maximisation. But a successful cooperative which has degenerated into a purely economic entity would need a society with the political conscience to punish it for not fulfilling its objectives.

## **Another World is Possible**

In the current global economic context of shrinking employment, increasing inequality and expanding corporate control in work spaces as well as in the larger society, cooperatives offer hope that another world is possible, though in a somewhat limited way as compared to the mainstream economy. Cooperatives today exist in all fields and are not confined to traditional economy sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, dairy, forestry, housing, etc. We need to remove roadblocks, create enabling conditions, and promote cooperatives focusing on the needs of the most marginalised and disadvantaged, such that they become owners of their own and collective enterprises, and of factories, plantations, and estates whose owners have long abandoned their workers.

As the Honourable Minister for Cooperation, Kerala said, cooperatives in the state offer an alternative economic system for the people to cope up and withstand the expanding market-oriented system. The example

of Kerala shows that cooperatives present themselves as spheres of worker participation in management and in leadership and the ability to run such businesses that are economically successful. It has also shown the capacity of the cooperatives, run by various sections of the poor, to set apart profits for investment and diversification. In the process of diversification, they have also shown huge levels of innovation, receptivity to new ideas, and adaptation to the needs of ever rising technological requirements of modern capitalist economy. However, state support in initiation, guidance, and at times of distress is an important feature of the Kerala cooperative experience.

Few areas that Kerala's cooperative sector could attend to is increasing women's representation in management as well as their participation in management beyond token presence. There is large scale participation of women's labour in various segments of Kerala's cooperative economy. More efforts are also required in increasing the participation of other marginalised groups including but not limited to people from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in management and leadership of cooperatives, given that they form an important part of Kerala's shrinking local work force. Given the increasing participation of migrant workers in Kerala's labour, including the cooperative sector, the cooperatives in the state should also take measures to include migrants in the management and leadership of cooperatives to give a sense of equality for all.

The race for economic success forces cooperatives also to be influenced by the hierarchical and non-democratic culture of the dominant capitalist economy. In the process they tend to exclude the participation of workers and other primary members of cooperatives from participating in management and leadership. The bigger the cooperatives grow, bigger will be the danger of losing democracy in them if proactive measures are not taken to address it.

To those who intend to initiate cooperatives or strengthen existing smaller ones, the cooperatives of Kerala offer a wide spectrum of experience,

from ideas of cooperative enterprise to developing them as some of the largest cooperatives in India. Their development shows the initial struggles and the subsequent competition with the dominant economy. They also show the heights of innovation and growth, institutions set up by the poor can reach; though with the support of a conducive state policy, but not just on account of it. They also provide lessons on the need to withstand the tendencies of hierarchical management by deepening democracy within the cooperative organisations. This experience also shows the need to expand democracy to sections that are marginalised in the wider society in which cooperatives exist.

Cooperatives can and already have transcended manufacturing and agriculture sectors, and expanded into health care, food processing, education, banking, construction, information technology, and other emerging sectors as well. Of course, we need to guard against the tendencies of cooperatives to shrink into economism and move away from socially and ecologically sensitive development. A strong programme of education, based on the values of cooperation is needed. In this manner cooperatives and social solidarity enterprises can create the possibility of another world where everyone can live with dignity and justice.





# ANNEXURES

## Annexure 1: Urban Action School - UAS'21 Program Plan

Session Title & Time	Session Details	Course Facilitators
Day One   1st December, 2021		
10:00 am to 12:30 pm	Inaugural Session	Shri V N Vasavan Shri M K Kannan Dr Joy Elamon Vineetha M Rajiv Kumar Sandeep Chachra Prem Ranjan
12:30 pm to 1:30 pm	Session 1: Labour Situation in India	Amarjeet Kaur
1:30 pm to 2:30 pm	Lunch	
2:30 pm to 4:15 pm	Group Activity	
4:15 pm to 4:30 pm	Tea	
4:30 pm to 6:30 pm	Session 2: Cooperative Success Stories from Kerala	MB Syamanthabhadran Binu Varghese Leenu Damodaran CN Rajesh
Day Two   2nd December, 2021		
9:30 am to 11:15 am	Session 1: Exploring the Preconditions of Growth of Cooperatives: The Kerala Context	Prof PK Michael Tharakan
11:15 am to 11:30 am	Tea	

(Contd. ...)

(Contd. ...)

Session Title & Time	Session Details	Course Facilitators
11:30 am to 1:15 pm	Session 2: Building Blocks of Cooperatives	Prof G. Veerakumaran
1:15 pm – 2:15 pm	Lunch	
2:15 pm to 3:15 pm	Session 3: Registration of Cooperatives	Prof E Vinaikumar
3:15 pm to 4:15 pm	Group Activity	
4:15 pm to 4:30 pm	Tea	
4:30 pm – 6:30 pm	Session 4: Agricultural Cooperatives in Kerala Field Visit	
<b>Day Three   3rd December, 2021</b>		
9:30 am to 11:15 am	Session 1: Cooperatives and their Role in Addressing Gender and Promoting Resilience: Kudumbashree	Prof Mini Sukumar
11:15 am to 11:30 am	Tea	
11:30 am to 1:15 pm	Session 2: The Changing Legal and Entitlement Framework to Meet the Challenges of Informal Workers	Prof Praveen Jha Sandeep Chachra
1:15 pm to 2:15 pm	Lunch	
Session Title & Time	Session Details	Course Facilitators
2:15 pm to 4:15 pm	Session 3: Presentation of Field Example: Kerala Bank	Raveendran Vadavathy
4:15 pm to 4:30 pm	Tea	

(Contd. ...)

(Contd. ...)

Session Title & Time	Session Details	Course Facilitators
4:30 pm to 5:30 pm	Session 4: International Cooperative Movement	Simren Singh
5:30 pm to 6:30 pm	Planning for Field Visit	
<b>DAY Four   4th December, 2021</b>		
Field Visit to Uralunkal Labour Cooperative (ULCC), Vadakara		
<b>DAY Five   5th December, 2021</b>		
Field Visit to Dinesh Beedi Cooperative, Kannur		
<b>Day Six   6th December, 2021</b>		
9:30 am to 11:15 am	Session 1: Reflection on the Field Visit to ULCC	Mr Rajiv Kumar Dr Alex George
11:15 am 11:30 am	Tea	
11:30 am to 1:15 pm	Session 2: Reflection on the Field Visit to Kerala Dinesh Beedi	Mr Rajiv Kumar Dr Alex George
1:15 pm to 2:15 pm	Lunch	
2:15 pm to 3:15 pm	Session 3: Cooperatives as a Response to Agrarian Crisis	Prof R Ramakumar
3:15 pm to 5:15 pm	Session 4: Proposal Making	Prof Philip Sabu
<b>Day Seven   7th December, 2021</b>		
9:30 am to 11:15 am	Final Proposal Presentation	

(Contd. ...)

(Contd. ...)

Session Title & Time	Session Details	Course Facilitators
11:15 am to 11:30 am	Tea	
11:30 am to 1:15 pm	Valedictory Session	Dr Thomas Isaac Dr Joy Elamon Mr Rajiv Kumar Ms Dipali Sharma Dr Alex George

## Annexure 2: Profile of Course Facilitators

**Dr Alex George** has been working on research and advocacy on disaster risk reduction, migrant labour, and child rights. He did his PhD on the Dalit Movement of Kerala and has published in academic journals, newspapers, and magazines.

**Amarjeet Kaur** is the General Secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress and a National Secretariat Member of the Communist Party of India. Having started her political journey as a student leader, she became the first woman to head a central trade union in India.

**Binu Varghese** is the Secretary of Ernakulum Jila Autorickshaw Drivers' Cooperative Society. He also serves as the Ernakulum District Secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress.

**C N Rajesh** is an accountant with the India Coffee House Cooperative Society, Thrissur. He had begun his career as a cleaner with the ICH and educated himself while working, to grow within the organisation to his present position.

**Dipali Sharma** is a development worker with over 25 years of experience in the social sector and currently works as Director- Organisational Effectiveness in ActionAid Association India. She also leads and guides partnership processes including programme reviews, appraisals, monitoring, impact assessment and evaluations.

**Prof E Vinaikumar** is a former faculty member at the Department of Cooperative Management, College of Cooperatives, Banking and Management, Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur.

**Prof G Veerakumaran** is the Head of the Department of Cooperative Management, College of Cooperatives, Banking and Management, Kerala

Agricultural University, Thrissur. His areas of expertise include cooperative management and agribusiness management.

**Dr Joy Elamon** is the Director General of Kerala Institute of Local Administration. A medical doctor by training, his areas of interest and expertise include decentralisation and local governance, participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation, climate change, and development among others.

**Leenu Damodaran** is the Assistant Secretary of the India Coffee House Cooperative Society, Thrissur.

**Prof Mini Sukumar** is a member of the Kerala State Planning Board and a faculty member at the Department of Women's Studies at the University of Calicut, Kerala. She contributes articles, book reviews, columns and, presents television programmes and is a founder member of Women's Imprint, a feminist publishing house.

**M B Syamanthabhadran** is the President of Ernakulum Jila Autorickshaw Drivers' Cooperative Society. He also serves as the Ernakulum District Secretary of the Centre for Indian Trade Unions affiliated Autorickshaw Drivers Association.

**M K Kannan** is a member of the board of the Kerala State Cooperative Bank serving as its Vice President. A veteran trade unionist and member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), he was formerly elected to the Kerala Legislative Assembly representing the Thrissur constituency.

**Prof Philip Sabu** is the former Director, College of Cooperative, Banking and Management, Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur. He currently serves as a professional board member of the ESAF Multi-State Cooperative Society.

**Dr Praveen Jha** is currently a Professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, JNU and the founding Chairperson of the Centre for Informal

Sector and Labour Studies, JNU. His major areas of research include economics of education, labour economics, agricultural economics, and public finance with a special focus on developing countries.

**Prem Ranjan** is the Head of the Policy and Research Unit, ActionAid Association. He has been working for the empowerment of marginalised groups through grassroots intervention, advocacy, policy, and research for more than two decades.

**Prof P K Michael** Tharakan is the Chairperson of Kerala Council of Historical Research. He is a renowned academician with interests in social and economic history and development studies and has been formerly the Vice Chancellor of Kannur University and Director of Kerala Institute of Local Administration.

**Rajiv Kumar** is a programme manager with the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, South Asia regional office in New Delhi. He specialises in labour affairs.

**Prof R Ramakumar** is a member of the Kerala State Planning Board and a faculty member at the School of Development Studies, TISS Mumbai. His research interests include agrarian changes in rural India, agricultural economics with a focus on agricultural credit, development economics, and Indian economy.

**Sandeep Chachra** is the Executive Director of ActionAid Association and Co-Chair of the World Urban Campaign of the UN-HABITAT. A social anthropologist by training, he has been working in the arena of social development for the last three decades, in India and globally and is one of the founders of the Agrarian South Network.

**Simren Singh** is a Programme Officer at the International Cooperative Alliance, Asia Pacific overseeing the research work under the ICA-EU project 'Cooperatives in Development: People Centred Businesses in



Action'. Simren also serves as the Secretary of ICA AP Committee on Cooperatives in Education Institutions (ICEI).

**Dr T M Thomas** Isaac is the former Minister of Finance, Government of Kerala and a Central Committee Member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). During his tenure as a member of the Kerala State Planning Board, he was instrumental in the People's Planning Campaign.

**Vineetha M** is a lecturer on Women and Child Development in the Kerala Institute of Local Administration and PhD candidate at University of Hyderabad. She designs and teaches courses on gender, local governance, and development studies among others.

**V N Vasavan** is the Honourable Minister for Cooperation and Registration, Government of Kerala. Having a background in the cooperative movement of Kerala, he has served as the President of Pampady Housing Cooperative Society, President of Kottayam District Cooperative Bank, and a Director of Kerala State Cooperative Bank.

### Annexure 3: Profile of Participants

**Amarendar Reddy M** is associated with a Telangana based social service organisation, PILUPU. He works with farmers to ensure their economic sustainability through farmer producer organisations.

**Aonaro Jamir** is a social worker from Nagaland who was previously working with the NGO Sisterhood Network. She works on issues of women empowerment and community development.

**A. Limayangla** works with the Nagaland based NGO, Sisterhood Network. In her organisational capacity, she works on advocating for equal rights for women, supports women's livelihood development, and campaigns against domestic violence.

**Divya Bagwe** is a social worker from Betul, Madhya Pradesh. She has worked towards organising the women of her community into a women's collective called Mawa Shakti Sangathan, where they get together and discuss the social issues of their community.

**Donald Takhellabam** is a researcher from Manipur associated with the organisation Indigenous Perspectives. Within his organisational capacity, he has been assisting the All Loktak Lake Areas' Fishers Union in Manipur in making a fishers' cooperative body.

**Hamzah Hassan** works with the ActionAid Gujarat field office. He works with landless agricultural labourers who are in neo bondage and single women's groups supporting them create alternative economic structures.

**Hasan Deen** hails from Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, where he is associated with several social movements and organisations working for the Gujar Nomadic community. He has been working on forming a dairy cooperative with nomadic pastoralists of his community.

**Hemlata Kansotia** works with the Labour Education and Development Society in Rajasthan. She has been working for the rights and empowerment of the single women, sanitation workers, and migrant workers along with their children's education rights.

**John Oraon** is a social worker involved with tea estate workers in West Bengal. He is trying to organise youth collectives, farmers' cooperatives and workers' cooperative in the tea garden areas of Mal block in Jalpaiguri district.

**Khima Jethi** works with the Uttarakhand based NGO, ARPAN, working for the land and forest rights of Dalit and Tribal women. She has made cooperative societies with these women that she wants to develop further.

**Krishnamoorthy CCS** is a social worker and activist from Tamil Nadu. He has been working for the rights of and collectivising women fish workers and salt pan workers in the Tuticorin region.

**Krushna Chandra Mohanta** works with the Odisha based NGO, Centre for Child and Women Development. He works with unorganised workers in the urban informal sector for promoting decent work, decent wage, labour standards, and social security coverage.

**Lalitha Srinivasan** works with the ActionAid regional office in Karnataka. She has been working on livelihood programmes in urban slums by forming women's collectives with a vision to transform them to community based cooperative societies.

**Neelaiah** works with the ActionAid Association, based in Karnataka.

**Niraj Anurag** Lakra works with the Integrated Livelihood Development Centre, Jharkhand. He works on the promotion of business and entrepreneurship based livelihood options among the tribal communities for income generation.

**Ravi Krishna** is a social activist from Tamil Nadu working for the rights of Dalit and Tribal communities. He has been working with the indigenous Irula community by forming a collective of snake catchers for their economic sustainability.

**Sangram Kesri Mandal** has been working with the Odisha based NGO, Centre for Child and Women Development. Within his organisational capacity, he has been advocating for proper social security for unorganised workers in Bhubaneswar.

**Shaik Hussain Basha** works with the Andhra Pradesh based organisation Association for Rural Development. He is working to improve the financial status of the rural families by creating alternative livelihood methods.

**Shyam Kumari Dhurwey** is a social worker and activist working with the Madhya Pradesh based organisation, Paramparik Rudi Pratha Gram Sabha. She works with tribal women in Dindori district to ensure their customary rights to land, forest, and water commons.

**Subrat Talukdar** is an activist from Assam who has been associated with various peoples' movements. He works on the issues of sustainable skills and alternative ways of livelihood generation among urban and rural communities.

**Sunil G** works with the ActionAid regional office in Tamil Nadu. He conducts training with women workers' collectives and is actively involved in organising informal women workers and making them aware of social security provisions.

**Suranjoy L Singh** is a social worker and activist who works with a Manipur based organisation. He has been organising fisher folk of the Loktak lake region into a collective called Loktak Lake Areas' Fishers Union Manipur.

**Usha Kumari** is a social worker who works with the Bihar based NGO, Nav Bihar Samaj Kalyan Pratishthan Kendra. She has been working with women farmers in Nalanda by collectivising them to form an agricultural cooperative society.

**Vishwajeet Kumar** is an activist working with All India Trade Union Congress. He has been working for the rights of students, youth, and workers in ensuring common and scientific education system and decent livelihood opportunities.

**Yerragunta Goverdhan** works with a Telangana based social service organisation, PILUPU. He supports farmers directly and indirectly in creating economic stability by adopting innovative agricultural practices.

## Annexure 4: Profile of Organisations

**Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA)** is an autonomous institution functioning for the local governments in Kerala. It was registered under the Travancore-Cochin Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act 1955. The Central university of Kerala has recognised it as a research centre attached to the Department of International Relations since 14th July 2014. Since its inception in 1990, KILA has been engaged in a myriad of capacity building interventions on local governance and decentralization that include training, action-research, publications, seminars and workshops, consultancy, documentation, handholding, and information services.

**Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung (RLS)** is a German foundation that is a part of the grassroots movement of democratic socialism. Bearing the name of Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919), RLS works within the tradition of workers' and women's movements. It serves as a forum for debate and critical thinking about political alternatives, as well as a research centre for progressive social development. The RLS South Asia office, situated in New Delhi, is responsible for organising and coordinating the foundation's activities in South Asia. The main areas of their work are social transformation, gender equality, labour rights, and agriculture.

**ActionAid Association** is an organisation that works in solidarity with the most marginalised communities to achieve a greater modicum of social and ecological justice. ActionAid has been engaged with the most marginalised communities in India since 1972. In 2006, it was registered as an Indian organisation, governed by an independent General Assembly and a Governing Board. ActionAid believes in the leadership and empowerment of the marginalised and socially-excluded communities, in combating poverty and injustice, and for a life of dignity for all. ActionAid Association draws inspiration from the Constitution of India and other international covenants that envision a just and equal world.

## **Annexure 5: The Urban Action School 2021 Team**

The Urban Action School 2021(UAS'21) has been a result of the collective efforts of numerous colleagues at ActionAid Association. Multiple units and state offices were involved from the process of conceptualisation of the course to coordination, logistical support, execution and finally documentation. Sincere gratitude is due to all of them.

### **Conceptualisation and Framework**

KT Suresh, Prem Ranjan and Sandeep Chachra

### **Fieldwork Coordination**

Dipali Sharma and Avinash Sapru

### **Participant Selection and Outreach**

Ajay Singh Rana and other members of the Human Resources Unit.

Anamika Roy, Mashkoo Alam, Tanveer Kazi and other members of the North Central Cluster.

Chandra Mohan Majhi, Khalid Chaudhary, Maneesha Bhatia, Sion Kongari, Sushila Prajapati and other members of the North West Cluster.

Ananyo Mukherjee, Debabrat Patra, Saurabh Kumar, Surajit Neogi, Suvendu Kumar and other members of the East Cluster.

Jennifer Sirin, Mrinal Gohain, Rehana Rehman and other members of the North East Cluster.

Anjanaleyu Madduluri, Esther Mariaselvam, Lalitha Srinivasan, Nandini, Vara Prasad, Vijilaya A and other members of the South Cluster.

### **Finance and Accounting**

Amit Ranjan, Bijaya Goswami, Phaneendra G, Rajneesh Dass, Rajitha Sajith, Raju Chakraborty, Ruchika Sharma, Sanjeev Kumar, Shalini Garg, Shyam

Sundar Pal, Uttam Sinha, Varshlata Rohida, Vishal Kumar, Vijay Shankar Sahu and Venketeswar Nayak

**Communications and Documentation**

Joseph Mathai, Lalit Dabral, Priyanka Khullar and Rajeevan M V

**IT Support**

Rajiv Grover and Ravinder Singh

**Logistical Support**

Ajay Kumar, Mukesh Verma, Raj Kumar Singh and Ramesh Kumar

**Overall Coordination**

Koustav Majumdar




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