

The Dunsany Declaration

For Rural Co-operative Development

1. The Dunsany Group believe there are important choices facing rural communities:
 - Do they rely to an increasing extent on a dominant and powerful global economic model to improve their livelihoods;
Or
 - Do they take further and deeper control themselves of many of the issues they face through well-established and successful co-operative options.
2. In this year, the [United Nations International Year of Co-operatives](#), the Dunsany Group, that is meeting to consider the current role and future aspirations of rural co-operatives in a time of global economic crisis, recognise that the world will face unprecedented and urgent challenges over the next 50 years that require immediate action. An age of increasing global resource scarcity and unequal distribution is leading to major concerns over the deeply connected issues of feeding a growing population, food security, energy and water availability and decent work opportunities while at the same time ensuring there is peace in the world. Together the world is facing increasingly volatile economies, markets and climatic conditions all this at a time of rapid change.
3. In an increasingly urbanised world, over 3 billion people will continue to live and work in rural areas, while the whole of the global population will be reliant on the rural landscape for resources including food and energy and water. For the first time in centuries serious political and economic power is shifting from west to east and north to south. At the same time the global information revolution is providing ordinary people with new ways of taking action, organising and mobilising together to take matters into their own hands. These changes together may represent both huge opportunities alongside significant challenges for global stability in an age when critical aspects of the dominant economic model are failing. Together we urge ordinary people living and working in rural communities to realise that they can take action over issues of concern to them.
4. Around the world co-operatives as principled and value-driven organisations have a huge impact on rural life. They achieve this through a diverse range of large and small co-operatives ranging from agriculture and horticulture to energy; forestry to finance; social services and community development to transport, tourism and many more. The strengths and benefits of co-operatives for rural communities are recognised. In the United Nations International Year of Co-operatives 2012 we collectively have developed the momentum for a decade of co-operative growth in rural communities.
5. Significant and compelling evidence exists demonstrating that co-operation leads to a more democratised economy and society at a local, national and transnational level alongside a wide range of other benefits. The Dunsany Group seek to secure the long term social, economic and environmental sustainability and resilience of rural communities, family farmers and the global population which heavily relies on rural areas. We see that the better way forward is for rural communities to mobilise and take responsibility to pursue a better way of living through co-operative approaches. The strengths and benefits of the co-operative model need to be demonstrated and explained to rural people who could benefit from co-operative action.
6. Co-operative approaches enable rural people and rural communities to meet the increasingly urgent challenges facing the world while meeting their own everyday needs and improving their own lives. Through practical co-operative action rural people can create for themselves the opportunity to benefit from their work, innovation and entrepreneurship. They can achieve this while retaining and reinvesting wealth locally. Comprehensive co-

operative rural and agricultural sectors must be advanced in the developing world that allow wealth created to be retained and reinvested for the benefit of the rural communities who were responsible for its creation. Co-operatives in their various forms promote the fullest participation in the economic and social development of all people. Co-operatives also have an important role in transforming marginal survival activities, sometimes referred to as the “informal economy”, into legally protected work that is fully integrated into mainstream economic life.

7. We, the Dunsany Group, know the importance and effectiveness of co-operative action to develop confident cultures in rural communities of individuals empowered to explore what they can achieve together. It is a powerful instrument all too often overlooked. The following actions are urgently needed to take forward the rural co-operative agenda over the next decade:

- a. **Supportive policies and legislation** – Formal global bodies, such as the United Nations and its agencies, informal global bodies for example the G20 together with national and regional governments need to promote and create a supportive political and legislative environment for successful, independent rural co-operatives to develop and grow. Global, regional and national donors should be sought to support coherent policies as a key part of their international development strategies and to reach the Millennium Development Goals and the post 2015 Development Agenda established by the UN. To do this the Dunsany Group call for the following:
 - i. Endorsement of the Recommendation of the International Labour Organization on the [Promotion of Co-operatives 2002 \(No. 193\)](#).
 - ii. Support for the United Nations General Assembly [Resolution A/RES/64/136](#) on Co-operatives in Social Development calling for standalone co-operative legislation that is empowering and not prescriptive where it doesn't exist, to be developed.
 - iii. A level political and legislative playing field ensuring that co-operatives are treated in terms no less favourable than other businesses.
 - iv. Recognition of the unique nature of co-operatives as membership based democratically run organisations and their role in rural development.
 - v. Acknowledgement that co-operatives are a vital part of any balanced global economy and healthy society.
 - vi. Recognition that co-operatives have a proven track record of creating employment and delivering long standing benefits for rural communities globally.
 - vii. Assurance that national policies combat pseudo co-operatives violating workers' rights by ensuring that labour legislation is applied in all enterprises.
- b. **Educate and advocate** - Rural co-operatives need be at the heart of a major programme of education and advocacy led by co-operative sectors and national and international agencies. This programme, focused on sharing good practice and lessons learned, needs to reach rural communities; regional, national and international politicians; policy makers; international agencies and key opinion formers with the aim of building widespread active support for the development of rural co-operatives as an alternative to the status quo. Specific educational programmes need to be developed for the banking, accountancy and legal sectors to build much-needed understanding with sector professionals.
- c. **Inspire the next generation** – The international co-operative movement needs to take action to inspire, motivate and educate the next generation of young women and men co-operators and co-operative leaders. Engagement is required with business centres and institutes focusing on entrepreneurship to ensure that the co-operative option is known and understood. Educational establishments with deep and long standing roots in rural communities such as rural community colleges and agricultural colleges also need to be targeted to ensure full awareness and to build mutually

beneficial relationships with existing co-operatives in rural areas. Rural co-operatives themselves need to see it as their duty as part of the international co-operative movement to undertake mentoring of both individuals and emerging rural co-operatives.

- d. **Demonstrate impact** – The international co-operative movement needs to find methods to collate, generate and aggregate statistics and evidence on the known impacts of rural co-operatives on individuals living and working in rural communities. The international co-operative movement must seek to work together with national and international agencies and academics and academic institutions to bring together existing knowledge into one place.
- e. **Co-operative to co-operative knowledge transfer** – The international co-operative movement needs to seek far greater levels of knowledge transfer between individual rural co-operatives and distinct sectors of the co-operative economy. Better understanding is needed of the challenges facing rural communities and how they can be confronted. The co-operative movement at all levels needs to challenge itself to share knowledge to a greater extent so that individual co-operatives and co-operative sectors can benefit from each other's knowledge. To achieve this, a website focused on knowledge sharing and interaction between individuals associated with rural co-operatives needs to be pursued. Cross sector meetings are required at regional, national and international meetings of co-operatives. Co-operatives must also seek to 'rural proof' their policies and any impacts on rural communities.
- f. **Maintain and develop community roots** – Ensuring that a co-operative is rooted with a community whether this is local, transnational or a community of interest is the most important element of the co-operative difference. Effective membership engagement through good governance is key to addressing this challenge and must be of the highest priority for rural co-operative members, leaders and supporters. Development of linkages with trade unions, rural workers' organisations, business associations, as well as mutual and other social and non-governmental enterprises and organisations is crucial to strengthen support for co-operatives.
- g. **Build understanding** – Significantly greater understanding of the diversity of co-operative approaches among rural co-operatives needs to be built. A lack of understanding means that opportunities for greater co-operation amongst rural co-operatives are being missed. Greater understanding must be forged between producer and consumer co-operatives in particular to explore opportunities for mutual benefit. Co-operative leaders need to see the importance of understanding the range of rural co-operatives as a part of their personal responsibility to the global co-operative movement. Therefore there needs to be a commitment from key people involved in rural co-operatives and national and sector co-operative representative organisations to build on this understanding by contributing to a global knowledge bank on rural co-operatives.
- h. **Finance the future** – The international co-operative movement needs to work together to disseminate knowledge and understanding of the existing range of financial instruments appropriate for supporting the development of the wide diversity of rural co-operatives, as well as developing new ones.
- i. **Access to technology** – National governments, international governmental frameworks and multinational enterprises need to ensure that rural co-operatives have access to the latest developments in the most appropriate technology and technological learning to be most able to deliver their economic, social and environmental objectives.

We, the Dunsany Group, have experienced how the co-operative option provides the better way for rural communities to take control of the issues affecting them. It achieves this through ensuring that:

- Economies and societies are empowered and democratised;
- Wealth generated by local communities is retained and reinvested;
- Skills, expertise and leadership potential of individuals and communities are built and developed;
- Enterprises are developed that ensure gender equality and are free of discrimination; and
- Communities can thrive free of corruption and exploitation.

We therefore urge key organisations to pledge their support for the Dunsany Declaration for Rural Co-operative Development and commit to work together to take forward this important agenda at this significant time to create a better future for rural communities and the whole of humanity.

We, the undersigned, agree to the best of our abilities to take forward the actions and principles of the Dunsany Declaration as it is our collective belief that rural co-operatives build a significantly better world for rural people and rural communities internationally.

Signed in their personal capacity:

Peter Couchman, Plunkett Foundation

Pauline Green, International Co-operative Alliance

David Button, Co-operatives UK

Eve Crowley,
Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations

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James Graham, Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society

Colette Lebel, La Co-op fédérée, Quebec

Martin Lowery,
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David Cameron, Community Land Scotland

Seamus O'Donohue, Irish Co-operative Organisation Society.....

Simel Esim, International Labour Office

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