

Recommendations for National Database of Cooperatives

To the Ministry of Cooperation, India

Introduction and objectives

While the contribution of cooperatives to the local and national economy is large, there is no consolidated database of these cooperatives, particularly those owned by women in the informal economy. Therefore, this move by the new Ministry of Cooperation to organise and maintain a national database of all cooperative societies is welcome. It will provide insights into the nature and size of the cooperative sector, as well as enable effective policy and programme development.

In order to ensure that the database creation and maintenance is a streamlined effort, and to ensure that women's cooperatives are well represented, we at Gujarat State Women's SEWA Cooperative Federation Limited would like to make some recommendations.

1. Selection of Indicators:

The identification and selection of parameters of the database must be a joint effort between the Ministry and Cooperative Federations. Considering the diversity of the cooperative movement, the sectoral and geographical expertise of Cooperative Federations will enable specific indicators to be included, leading to a richer database. Moving forward, this will also allow for nuanced and inclusive policies.

2. Designing and Review of Database:

- a. The database must be easily accessible in vernacular languages, using user-friendly technologies and an inclusive interface.
- b. Cooperative Federations like the SEWA Cooperative Federation and apex organizations like the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) and the National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC) can *play a key role in the design and implementation of the database and should be incentivised to collect accurate data and in a timely manner.*

3. Data Collection:

- a. The cooperative's data should be collected through the national and regional level Federations, cooperative societies, local government institutions such as KVK centres and also through registration platforms such as NGO Darpan.
- b. SEWA Cooperative Federation and other women's federations can play a significant role in collecting, maintaining and updating data for women collectives/cooperatives on a regular basis.

4. Data Validity and Reliability:

Cooperative Federations can ensure the validity and reliability of the data, with the support of their affiliated cooperatives, unions, civil society organisations, cooperative departments and civil society organisations. Random checks for verification may be undertaken, similar to the processes undertaken by the labour department for union membership data. Audit reports by state cooperative departments can also provide data.

5. Capacity building:

Capacity-building of cooperatives and their Federations should be undertaken so that the importance of data collection, data management and the use of data for cooperatives' growth is both well understood and then enabled.

6. Digital Inclusion and Infrastructure:

- a. Investments in digital infrastructure and human resources are essential to create and maintain databases and enhance data collection efforts.
- b. There should be open access to the database so that cooperatives and Federations can use the data as required. A unique ID could be provided to each cooperative and Federation.

About the organisation

SEWA Cooperative Federation's history can be traced back to the struggle for workers' rights led by the **Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA)**. Since its inception in the 1970s, the SEWA trade union has worked actively to promote the rights of women working in the informal sector. Today, SEWA is one of India's largest and oldest national trade unions of informal workers with over 1.8 million active members across 18 states.

Alongside workers' rights, SEWA identified the need for sustainable livelihood for women informal workers. The **Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Cooperative Federation** has been working with and for women workers of the informal economy since 1992. The Federation is committed to women's economic empowerment and self-reliance through collective enterprises that are owned, managed and run by women. Our role is to provide a stable support system to women's enterprises, nationally and internationally, enabling sustainability both financially and in terms of decision making. The Federation supports over 100 women-owned and women-led cooperatives, across 6 sectors - Agriculture, Dairy, Artisans, Services, Savings & Credit, Labour-based, with the view of achieving full employment and self-reliance for informal women workers. The Federation provides support services that enable these cooperatives, and other collective businesses of informal women workers, to become viable, to innovate and to scale.