

Women Cooperatives: Building a Resilient and Equitable Future

Dates: June 9-10, 2025

Venue: VAMNICOM, Pune

Duration: Two-Day Event | **Time:** 10 AM – 7 PM

01. Background & Rationale

The **International Year of Cooperatives (2025)** provides a timely opportunity to recognize and amplify the contributions of women-led cooperatives in fostering economic resilience, social security, and community-driven enterprise development. Women's cooperatives have consistently demonstrated their capacity to generate sustainable livelihoods, facilitate formalization for informal workers, and establish cooperative entrepreneurial ventures. However, systemic challenges—such as restricted access to financial resources, regulatory barriers, and limited market linkages—continue to impede their full potential.

In 2019, the National Women's Cooperative Workshop was organised by the SEWA Cooperative Federation, the International Cooperative Alliance, the International Labor Organization and SEWA Bharat in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. 42 grassroots women cooperative leaders from 21 cooperatives across 12 Indian states, along with two representatives from Iran's Rah-e-Rashd education cooperative, met experts in marketing, finance, IT, and policy-making. **This workshop was the first of its kind where grassroot-level cooperators and**



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sector specialists met and exchanged ideas and experiences. This groundbreaking workshop facilitated the exchange of ideas and experiences while addressing key themes for cooperative growth: finance and funding insights from public and private sectors and the NCDC, digitalisation with sector-specific solutions for agriculture, artisans, and services, enhanced market linkages through innovative strategies, and governance challenges, focusing on policy barriers and proposing reforms to empower women-led cooperatives.

Following the National Women's Cooperative Workshop, a significant milestone in strengthening women's cooperatives in India was the **Delhi Declaration for Women Cooperators (2022)**, a landmark policy document adopted by 100 women cooperators from 18 states. The Declaration outlined a comprehensive roadmap to promote women's leadership and economic empowerment through cooperative enterprises. It emphasized the need for **financial inclusion, policy support, legal reforms, market access, and leadership capacity-building** to ensure the sustainability and growth of women's cooperatives. Key recommendations from the Delhi Declaration included establishing dedicated cooperative financing mechanisms, simplifying registration and compliance processes, enhancing women's representation in decision-making bodies, and linking cooperatives with social security and welfare programs. The Declaration also called for greater recognition of women's cooperatives at national and global forums, urging integration into G-20 processes and other international trade and policy discussions.

Since then several policy developments have focused on women's cooperatives. For example, the **Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act (2023)** now mandates **two reserved seats for women** in cooperative boards, and **Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS) model bye-laws** have been made to



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ensure women's representation in over 1 lakh PACS. **National institutions such as VAMNICOM** have also carried out training and capacity building programmes for women cooperators. Recently steps have also been taken to streamline cooperatives as a component of national education to further promote them as businesses, produce skilled professionals in the sector and encourage youth involvement, with **IRMA to become India's first national co-op university**.

Despite these steps, persistent structural challenges remain for women's cooperatives. Studies conducted by the SEWA Cooperative Federation in 2024 with international and national partners such as the International Labor Organization¹ and Microsave Consulting², highlight certain key issues such as access to suitable financial instruments, markets and procurement platforms, digital barriers, lack of gender disaggregated data and specific incentives for formation of women's cooperatives, managerial and professionalization challenges and unpaid care work burdens.

While women's cooperatives are often viewed as poverty alleviation measures, they should be seen as alternative business models that are scalable, democratic, inclusive and profitable. Women's cooperatives contribute significantly to economic development, digital and financial inclusion, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of food security, gender equality, decent work and economic growth.

¹ SEWA Cooperative Federation. (2024). Strengthening women's cooperatives: The experience of SEWA Cooperative Federation. In the International Labour Organization. International Labour Organization. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/strengthening-womens-cooperatives-experience-sewa-cooperative-federation>

²SEWA Cooperative Federation & MicroSave Consulting. (2024). Study to assess the working capital needs of women's collective enterprises. <https://www.microsave.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Study-to-assess-the-working-capital-needs-of-womens-collective-enterprises.pdf>



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Additionally, at the **ICA Global Conference (2024)**, it became evident that **grassroots women's cooperatives lack representation at national and international levels**, further exacerbating challenges of **access and visibility**.

This national-level conference jointly conducted with VAMNICOM will build upon the commitments of the Delhi Declaration and subsequent policy initiatives, **aiming to catalyze meaningful discussions and structural reforms that promote the long-term financial viability, institutional recognition, greater proliferation of women's cooperatives and their leadership in the cooperative movement in India**. By bringing together government representatives, cooperative leaders, financial institutions, and grassroots practitioners, this event will facilitate actionable strategies to recognize and advance women's economic empowerment through cooperatives.

02. Objectives

1. Primary Objective

- a. **Policy Engagement for an Enabling Environment** - Engage key policymakers to create a more inclusive and enabling regulatory environment for women led development through cooperatives, thereby enhancing women's workforce participation.

2. Secondary Objectives

- a. **Enhance Financial Inclusion & Market Access** - Explore financing models, investment mechanisms, and policy interventions to improve access to credit, capital, and markets for women-led cooperatives.
- b. **Promote Formalisation of Women's Work** - Highlight how cooperatives serve as vehicles for supporting transitions into the formal economy with access to legal protections and economic security.



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- c. **Strengthen Grassroots Leadership & Representation** - Empower women cooperative leaders to participate in decision-making and policy discussions at national and global levels.
- d. **Identify Capacity Building Needs** - To build resilience and adaptability in informal women workers' cooperative in a changing world (digital change, urban-rural transitions, climate change)
- e. **Facilitate Collaboration & Cross-Sectoral Networking** - Foster meaningful partnerships between government entities, financial institutions, international agencies, and grassroots cooperatives, especially in the South Asia region.

03. Event Structure & Flow

a. Welcome & Inaugural Session

b. Plenary Sessions

- i. **Plenary Session 1** - Women in Leadership: Strengthening Governance & Representation
- ii. **Plenary Session 2** – Bridging the Formal-Informal Divide: Enabling Women's Collectives to Thrive
- iii. **Plenary Session 3** – Supporting access to Finance for Women's Cooperatives: Unlocking Capital for Growth & Sustainability

c. Breakout Sessions

- i. **Breakout Session 1** - Strengthening Market Linkages: Expanding Access to Trade & Government Procurement
- ii. **Breakout Session 2** - Building Resilience: Climate Adaptation for Cooperatives
- iii. **Breakout Session 3** - Vision for Cooperative Education in



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Strengthening Women's Cooperatives and youth participation in cooperatives

iv. **Breakout Session 4** - Investing in Digitalisation of Cooperatives d.

Closing Session – The Future of Women's Cooperatives in India.

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Draft Programme Schedule & Attendees

Dates: June 9-10, 2025 | **Venue:** VAMNICOM, Pune

Day	Date	Plan	Duration (hrs)	Time	Participants	Session Timeline
Day 1	9th June	Inaugural & Welcome	1	10-11 AM	Suva Kanta Mohanty, Ghanshyam Amin, Asha Bharti, Mirai Chatterjee, Yasmin Sheikh	
		Plenary 1 - Bridging the Formal-Informal Divide: Enabling Women's Collectives to Thrive	1	11:15-12:30	Etwari Devi, Padma Hedao, Dr. C Shambu Prasad, Bharti Birla, Arti Ahuja (M)	
		Lunch	1.5	12:30-14:00		
		Breakout 1: Strengthening Market Linkages: Expanding Access to Trade & Government Procurement Breakout 2: Building Resilience: Climate Adaptation for Cooperatives (Parallel Sessions)	1.5	14:00-15:30	Breakout 1 - Market Linkage Ila Shah, Sreeja K, Shomya Kumari, Savitri Singh, Mohit Dave (M) Breakout 2 - Climate Resilience Shital Mistry, Benu Verma, Emlen Kandulna, Satysovan Das, Dr. Indu Murthy (M)	Round 1 - 16 mins Round 2 - 16 mins Round 3 - 16 mins Micro GDs - 25 mins Closing - 10 mins
		Tea	1	15:30-16:30		
		Plenary 2 - Women in Leadership: Strengthening Governance & Representation	1	16:30-17:30	Chokhli Gamar, Vimla Solanki, Dr. Hema Yadav, Savitri Singh, Madhu Khetan (M)	
		Cultural Event	1	19:00-20:00		
		Dinner	1.5	20:00-21:30		

Day 2	10th June	Breakfast	1	8:30-9:30		
		Recap - From Breakout 1 & 2	1	9:30-10:00	B/O 1 - 1 ben - 15 mins B/O 2 - 1 ben - 15 mins	
		Plenary 3 - Supporting access to Finance for Women's Cooperatives: Unlocking Capital for Growth & Sustainability	1	10:00-11:00	Minnie Sharma, Medha Samant, Bhavna Gondaliya, Shalini Tomar, Yamini Atmavilas (M)	
		Breakout 3: Vision for Cooperative Education in Strengthening Women's Cooperatives and youth participation in cooperatives Breakout 4: Investing in Digitalisation of Cooperatives (Parallel Sessions)	1.5	11:15-12:45	Breakout 3 - Coop Edu. & Youth in Coops Alpa Dave, Hemangini Vala Smt. R. Premeela, Dr. Preeti Priya. Dr. C Shambu Prasad (M) Breakout 4 - Digitalisation of Coops Rekha Koshti, Yasmin Sheikh, Tomnoie Sarmah, Meet Thosar, Susanben (M)	Round 1 - 16 mins Round 2 - 16 mins Round 3 - 16 mins Micro GDs - 25 mins Closing - 10 mins
		Lunch	1	13:00-14:00		
		Recap of Breakout 3&4	.5	14:00-14:30	B/O 3 - 1 ben - 15 mins B/O 4 - 1 ben - 15 mins	
		Valedictory	1	14:30-15:30	Dr. C Shambu Prasad, Mirai Chatterjee, Savitri Singh, Jigisha Maheta	
		Networking Tea	1	15:30-17:00		



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Cooperatives Build
a Better World



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National Conference on Women's Cooperatives

Building a Resilient and Equitable Future

Day 1 - Monday	What	Where	Day 2 - Tuesday	What	Where
8:30am-10am	Breakfast	Himalaya Guest House Sahyadri Dining Hall	8:30am-9:30am	Breakfast	Himalaya Guest House Sahyadri Dining Hall
10am-11am	Opening Address	Jubilee Hall	9:30am-10:00am	Recap- Breakout 1 & 2	Jubilee Hall
11:15am-12:30pm	Plenary 1	Jubilee Hall	10:00am-11pm	Plenary 3	Jubilee Hall
12:30pm-2pm	Lunch	Himalaya Guest House Sahyadri Dining Hall	11:15am-12:45pm	Breakout Session 3	Room No. 1
2pm-3:30pm	Breakout Session 1	Room No. 1		Breakout Session 4	Room No. 2
	Breakout Session 2	Room No. 2	1pm-2pm	Lunch	Himalaya Guest House Sahyadri Dining Hall
3:30pm-4:30pm	Tea		2pm-2:30pm	Recap - Breakout 3&4	Jubilee Hall
4:30pm-5:30pm	Plenary 2	Jubilee Hall	2:30pm-3:30pm	Valedictory Session	Jubilee Hall
7pm-8pm	Cultural Event	Jubilee Hall	3:30-5pm	Networking Tea	Himalaya Guest House Sahyadri Dining Hall
8pm-9:30pm	Dinner	Himalaya Guest House Sahyadri Dining Hall			

A SEWA Cooperative Federation and VAMNICOM conference
Celebrating International Year of Cooperatives 2025

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