

# SYNDICOOP

The SYNDICOOP approach tackles the challenge of organizing workers in order to contribute to the goal of formalizing their employment and ensuring their rights. This unique ILO programme is a joint initiative designed and implemented in partnership with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). Within the ILO, the Programme is led by the Cooperative Branch of the Employment Sector and the Bureau for Workers' activities.

The Programme aims to strengthen the capacity of national trade unions and cooperatives to work together to organize workers out of the informal economy and improve their working conditions: freedom of association and collective bargaining are founding pillars of this shared approach. The programme was launched with funding from the ILO/Netherlands Partnership Programme in 2002 in three East African countries: Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda and expanded to cover a fourth country, Kenya, in 2004. It was replicated in South Africa with Flemish Regional Government funding in 2005.

The SYNDICOOP approach emerged as a response to the conclusions of the International Symposium on Trade Unions and the Informal Sector organized by the ILO in 1999, which called on trade unions to establish or expand links with cooperative economic activities. It also responds to the outcome of the International Labour Conference discussion on the informal economy in 2002.

The experience in East Africa is proving that trade unions and cooperatives have much to offer each other and are natural partners to provide the services and support needed by workers in informal and unprotected situations. It has shown the tremendous potential for informal economy workers to organize and advance their interests.

Participating trade union and cooperative organizations are also benefiting from this strategic alliance as reflected in strengthened structures and enhanced services for existing members. Their collaboration is also laying the foundation for joint contributions to important national social dialogue processes.

It is this common philosophy, that is more important than the label 'cooperative' or 'trade union'. It is the basis of the SYNDICOOP programme.

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