

# **STRENGTHENING MANAGEMENT CAPACITIES OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES**

**Findings and recommendations of My.Coop  
implementation (2012-2017)**



## About this briefing note

The objective of this briefing note is to provide highlights on the use of My.Coop - Managing your agricultural cooperative training package during its first five years, 2012-2017. The note is based on a stocktaking exercise, which aimed to understand where, how and by whom My.Coop has been used, and provides a set of recommendations for the future use of the materials and approaches of delivery. The data analysed for the stocktaking exercise derives from a variety of sources, collected through inventory activities, desk research, mailings, surveys, interviews and personal experiences of the My.Coop developers and users. The stocktaking exercise was carried out on the second half of 2017 for the ILO by Agriterra.

**Disclaimer:** My.Coop is based on a partnership between different organizations involved in its development and/or implementation; it is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License; and it is freely accessible through <http://moodle.itcilo.org/mycoop/>. Nevertheless, this brief has been jointly developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and Agriterra only and is intended to improve future delivery of My.Coop by all partners.

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# 1. Background

## 1.1. Introduction to My.Coop – Managing your agricultural cooperative

Agricultural cooperatives exist in countries around the world, and they often face similar challenges: ineffective management, lack of market access, inadequate member commitment, and insufficient services including financial services, among others. My.Coop – Managing your agricultural cooperative is a training package and programme on the management of agricultural cooperatives. It aims to respond to management challenges faced by agricultural cooperatives, and is based on the idea that better management enables cooperatives to offer high quality, efficient and effective services to their members.

Launched in 2012, My.Coop was developed through a broad partnership initiated by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Cooperative Facility for Africa (CoopAfrica) and the ILO's Cooperatives Unit. My.Coop builds on the contents of the ILO's MAT-COM training for cooperatives management manuals, which were launched between 1978 and 1989 and have since then been widely used to promote the development of various types of cooperatives.

### Rationale for My.Coop

The My.Coop training package and programme is motivated by the conviction that: *“Strong and representative agricultural organizations are indispensable for the promotion of democracy, for a better distribution of income and for the economic development of a country.”*

My.Coop training package is the result of a collaborative effort involving a wide range of partners including cooperative development agencies, cooperative colleges, cooperative organizations, organizations of agricultural producers, universities and agencies of the United Nations. During the last stage of the process, the ILO, the International Training Centre of the ILO (ITC-ILO), Agriterro, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Wageningen University (WUR) and the Royal Tropical Institute of the Netherlands (KIT) collaborated to ensure the quality of the final product. The My.Coop modules were reviewed by international peer-reviewers who are experts on agricultural cooperatives and the training package was launched in January 2012 in Turin in the presence of My.Coop partners.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In addition to partners already mentioned, Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen (CIDIN), Cooperative College of Kenya, Empowering Smallholder Farmers in Markets (ESFIM), Kenya National Federation of Agricultural Producers (KENFAP), Moshi University College of Cooperative and Business Studies (MUCCoBS), and the Nigerian Cooperative Development Centre (NCDC) contributed to the development of My.Coop. The full list of authors and contributors can be found in the acknowledgement pages of the My.Coop manuals.



While being used by various organizations across the globe My.Coop has never been formally evaluated. As a partial response to this need, in 2017 the ILO commissioned Agriterro to undertake a stocktaking exercise on My.Coop, to understand where, how and by whom My.Coop has been used, and to provide a set of recommendations for the future use of the materials. The research for the stocktaking exercise included both quantitative and qualitative data collected through inventory activities, desk research, mailings, surveys and interviews. This brief is a summary based on the report of that exercise.

## My.Coop ownership

MY.Coop, is licensed under a **Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License**. The material is freely accessible on the <http://moodle.itcilo.org/mycoop/>. Registration is required.

### 1.2. My.Coop partnership

My.Coop is based on a partnership between those organizations that have been involved in its development or implementation. The objective of the partnership is to ensure high quality delivery of My.Coop package for training, and to further develop the training package itself.

My.Coop partners are organizations and institutions that actively contribute to the roll-out and further development of the My.Coop package and training programmes at global, regional, national and local levels. They contribute through their expertise and knowledge (developers), by institutionalizing the use of the My.Coop package and programmes (users / field partners), by providing financial support (donors), or, a combination of these.

This partnership is guided by a set of jointly agreed partnership principles (see Annex 1), outlining the main rights and responsibilities of those organizations using My.Coop materials. Reciprocity among partners is a key My.Coop partnership principle, with the expectation that all partners contribute to content development, financing, human resources, publications, knowledge, etc. For instance, once a country adaptation is made, this should be publicly available for other partners to use.

### 1.3. My.Coop Training Package

My.Coop aims to strengthen the management of agricultural cooperatives to enable them to offer high quality, efficient and effective services to their members. My.Coop training package consists of four Handbooks (modules), a Trainer's manual, the materials for a Marketing Mix Board Game, and a Mobile learning toolkit. In addition, My.Coop has an online platform, hosted by ITC-ILO.

My.Coop is copyrighted under Creative Commons, which allows access and right to adapt as long as the adapted work is made publicly available and not commercially sold.<sup>2</sup> Initially the My.Coop training package was designed and published in English, French and Spanish. These generic language versions have been designed to allow for translation and adaptation to different country contexts and local experiences.

<sup>2</sup> My.Coop is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported Licence. For more information, see <https://creativecommons.org/>.





## Modules

The four My.Coop modules cover the following themes: **1. Basics of an Agricultural Cooperative** **2. Cooperative Service Provision** **3. Supply of Farm Inputs** **4. Cooperative Marketing**

Each Module consists of several learning topics. A learning topic consists of a brief content description that is complemented with real life cases that present problem solving approaches to common challenges in the management of agricultural cooperatives. Besides, each topic offers explanatory boxes on definitions and concepts as well as self-assignments that help the learner to apply the contents to the participants' own cooperative or situation. Modules and topics can be used independently from each other, in any given order in line with the training needs.

The following table shows the learning topics and some of the key contents of each My.Coop module.

<b>My.Coop</b>	
<b>Module 1: Basics of agricultural cooperatives</b>	<b>Key content</b>
<b>1. BASICS OF AN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE</b>	Collective action Coops principles Coops diverse functions
<b>2. CHALLENGES FOR COOPERATIVES</b>	Cooperatives face internal and external challenges
<b>3. COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE</b>	Dual character of cooperatives 'Agency' Members commitment
<b>4. MANAGEMENT, CAPITAL FORMATION &amp; FINANCE</b>	Roles and skills Capital formation Audits
<b>Module 2: Cooperative service provision</b>	<b>Key content</b>
<b>1. WHAT ARE THE NEEDS OF MEMBERS?</b>	The assessment of members needs can be systematic There are different methods applicable for different situations
<b>2. WHAT SERVICES TO PROVIDE?</b>	A cooperative cannot cater to all needs: prioritization
<b>3. WHO WILL PROVIDE THE SERVICE?</b>	<b>The four A's:</b> Appropriateness, Accessibility, Affordability and Availability. Evaluation – member satisfaction
<b>Module 3: Supply of farm inputs</b>	<b>Key content</b>
<b>1. PROCUREMENT OF INPUTS</b>	What to procure? How much to procure? Selection of a supplier
<b>2. STORAGE AND STOCK MANAGEMENT</b>	Stocking or not? How to manage stocks
<b>3. SELLING THE SERVICE</b>	Selling procedures Pricing policy Income statement
<b>Module 4: Cooperative marketing</b>	<b>Key content</b>
<b>1. MARKETING SERVICES</b>	Collective marketing and/or Market information (Research & dissemination)
<b>2. STRATEGIC MARKETING</b>	Targeting markets through upgrading Marketing mix (the 5 P's) Strategic marketing
<b>3. CERTIFICATION</b>	Specialized markets Certification schemes

## ***The Trainer's Manual***

The delivery of a training session in My.Coop workshops is designed in a modular way, implying that the trainers can choose the topics to be delivered according to the learning needs of the participants. Following this design logic, the Trainer's Manual includes one specific training session for each topic under each My.Coop module. For each of the sessions, the manual explains a specific participatory method to be used, the instructions to give to participants and tips for facilitation. All the methodologies used are designed for participatory learner-centred training suitable for adult education.

The Trainer's Manual includes a model schedule to deliver the complete set of topics of all the four modules. Together with the manual, trainers receive a booklet for printing out the 'Marketing Mix Board Game', which is one of the proposed methodologies for Module 4.

## ***Mobile Learning Toolkit***

The mobile learning toolkit assists in delivering a range of training activities both inside and outside of the classroom. Initially, it was designed to be as inclusive as possible, with most of the methods requiring only low end devices (basic mobile phones with voice calling and SMS capability). It was piloted in Nigeria in 2012, but has not been used ever since.

## ***The My.Coop platform***

The My.Coop platform is a web-based learning environment hosted by the ITC-ILO at <http://www.agriculture-my.coop>. End-users, trainers and My.Coop partner organizations can use the platform as a forum for joint improvement of the package and networking; it also includes distance learning trajectories for trainers. Registration to the platform is free of charge, after which one has access to training materials in various languages. The platform has been used principally during the delivery of the online Training of Trainers (ToT) courses by the ITC-ILO.

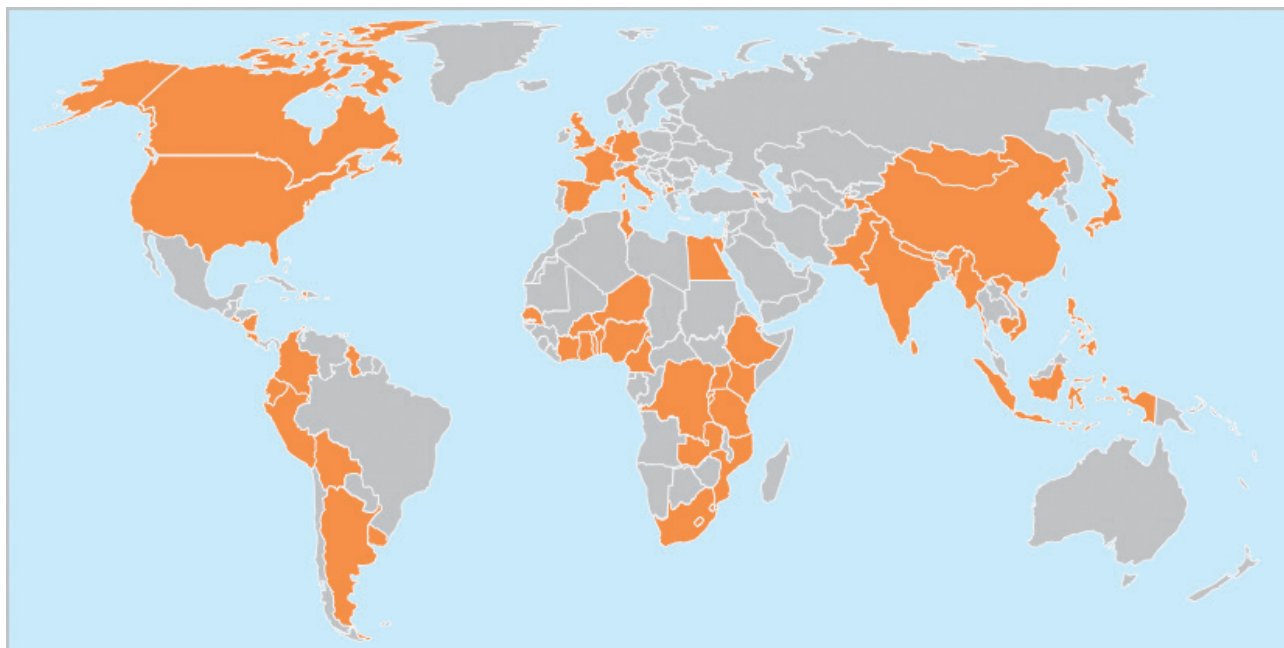


## 2. MY.COOP 2012-2017 – Main findings and recommendations

### 2.1. Outreach

Based on the available data, participants from at least 59 countries and 148 organizations from around the world have participated in a My.Coop ToT course or made use of the materials; and at least 479 training sessions have been conducted with more than 11,000 participating members of cooperatives or other farmer organizations as end users.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1:** Geographical spread of the countries where My.Coop has been used.



According to the records of the ITC-ILO between 2012 and 2017, 212 persons have successfully completed the online My.Coop ToT. In addition to these trainers, at least 1,221 individuals have either completed a My.Coop (face-to-face) ToT or are actively promoting My.Coop after having completed a non-ToT training. Data on the numbers of training sessions carried out by the participants after completing the online ToT has not been comprehensively monitored. Based on the available information, only a few participants of the online ToT course have actually carried out training sessions. The countries where most training sessions have been done correspond with the countries where face-to-face ToTs were carried out.

<sup>3</sup> This figure is an estimate based on triangulation of data from different sources. It excludes those that were not confirmed by the research team.



The first face-to-face pilot ToT took place in Turin in an academy of the ITC-ILO in 2011; and in Nigeria. After these, ToTs have been conducted in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Lebanon, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Peru, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Viet Nam, and Zambia among others. In most of the countries the training sessions were preceded or accompanied by a translation and an adaptation process.

***Recommendation 1: Monitor the number of participants who provide training after completing the online ToT.***

## **2.2. My.Coop modules' concept and design**

My.Coop is perceived as a useful tool for cooperative development applicable to different country contexts. Its modules are introductory yet comprehensive, providing a strong basis for improving cooperative management.

My.Coop offers a good overview of the topics it deals with, and it is a good tool for raising awareness on the issues that cooperatives need to consider in improving their management. However, it does not go in-depth on how to deal with the issues identified. As such, it is most useful for cooperatives in understanding what the issues are that they need to focus on in order to improve their management practices. For example, Module 1 indicates the need for sound financial management, internal capitalization, good governance and the issue of agency. In order for a cooperative to actually start addressing these issues there is a need to access specific training on these in a complementary manner outside My.Coop. The partners involved in My.Coop have such complementary tools available to them.

***Recommendation 2: Facilitate access to external resources for more in depth dealing with management issues.***

My.Coop increases understanding on the potential pitfalls and challenges in the management of a cooperative. This can change attitudes of managers and leaders to better deal with key management issues, including those they have not considered before. My.Coop enables cooperative leaders to have a fuller picture and understanding about how to manage their cooperative.

These findings have a particular positive meaning, in terms of broadening the participants' horizon of the issues related to cooperative management and stimulating a positive attitude change. My.Coop provides an opportunity for defining further needs of capacity building in the different topics included in the modules, so that training participants can better define next steps for addressing any knowledge gaps.



The conceptual content supported by real-life case studies and examples, practical exercises, self-assignments, and storytelling, is conducive for a user-friendly and motivating learning. For adapted versions the case studies are best replaced by local examples, making it easier for the participants to relate to them.

***Recommendation 3: Provide examples of local context, products and issues in the case studies in the adapted versions.***

Beyond content, My.Coop modules are appreciated as well-conceived and elaborated materials, with professional and accessible graphic design and layout, with structure, colours, drawings and pictures that effectively draw in the users. In some adaptations, such as in Indonesia or Mongolia, an additional effort was made to ensure local specificities were taken into account in the use of images and drawings.

In order to continue to respond to the needs and requirements of cooperatives, it is important to both update the existing My.Coop contents to ensure they are easily adaptable to different country contexts; and to add new topics as modules for My.Coop.

***Recommendation 4: Adapt existing contents to local contexts for example by adding an introductory module clarifying the national and local context and situation.***

With the development of new content it is also suggested to continue with a modular approach to My.Coop delivery, where the training for each cooperative would be tailored based on their specific needs. Some topics for new modules could include:

- Cooperative governance (including women and youth participation and greening of the cooperative as a cross cutting issue).
- Cooperatives' financial sustainability (business planning, financial management in general and internal capitalization).
- Marketing strategy and marketing plans for cooperatives.
- Production-related service delivery to members at the farm level (machinery, extension & specialized technical advice, credit, business planning, project formulation for members, etc.).
- Value creation: market research, technological need at farm level and business planning
- Value chain integration and strategy
- Input supply market analysis and strategies
- Roles and potential of cooperatives to address decent work issues, such as use of child labour, forced labour or discriminatory practices in the value chains cooperatives participate in.



Consequently, and based on the training needs assessment, a training could be designed for a cooperative, together with the current modules, an introductory module, and other relevant tools from My.Coop partners. The comprehensive list and understanding on the potential plug-in modules will need to be developed in order to ensure synergies with already existing tools.

***Recommendation 5: Add new topics as plug in modules to address specific training needs.***

### **2.3. Adaptations and translations**

A key feature of My.Coop is that the materials are adapted to different contexts to make it appropriate for the local or national contexts, sometimes including particular types of cooperatives or cooperative legislation.

As the programme has been rolled out globally, more organizations from across the globe have become involved in adaptations and translations of My.Coop. The French and Spanish generic translations were developed as part of the initial My.Coop package. Adaptations to local contexts have been completed and used at least in Peru (see Box 1), Colombia, Bolivia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mongolia, Viet Nam, Myanmar and Egypt, while, some translations and adaptations, like Swahili and KiSwahili remain untested. A guide for potential users has been developed by the ILO to help partner organisations with the translation and adaptation process, but in the absence of a common approach and progress indicators there have been monitoring challenges in seeing through some of these processes.

***Recommendation 6: Develop a common approach for monitoring and improving the efficiency of translation and adaption processes.***

#### **BOX 1**

In the San Martin Region in Peru, collaboration between Asociación Verde Amazónico, CUSO International and Agritererra led to the adaptation of My.Coop materials to a regional context with a specific focus on the coffee and cocoa value chains. In addition to the novel form of adaptation (i.e. regional adaptation instead of national one), the delivery method was also adapted to suit the schedule of the producers, breaking it down to weekly training sessions of three hours each, held over several months on Saturday mornings. This both facilitated participation and helped the participants to better visualize the concepts received in the training in their day to day work in the cooperative: fewer messages received in each training session allowed for time to observe the topics in practice. The adaptation is part of a capacity building programme aiming to create a network of trainers and facilitators in the region through a pilot cooperative school. My.Coop is being rolled out in the region to reach out to a larger number of coffee and cacao cooperatives in order to support them toward better management practices.



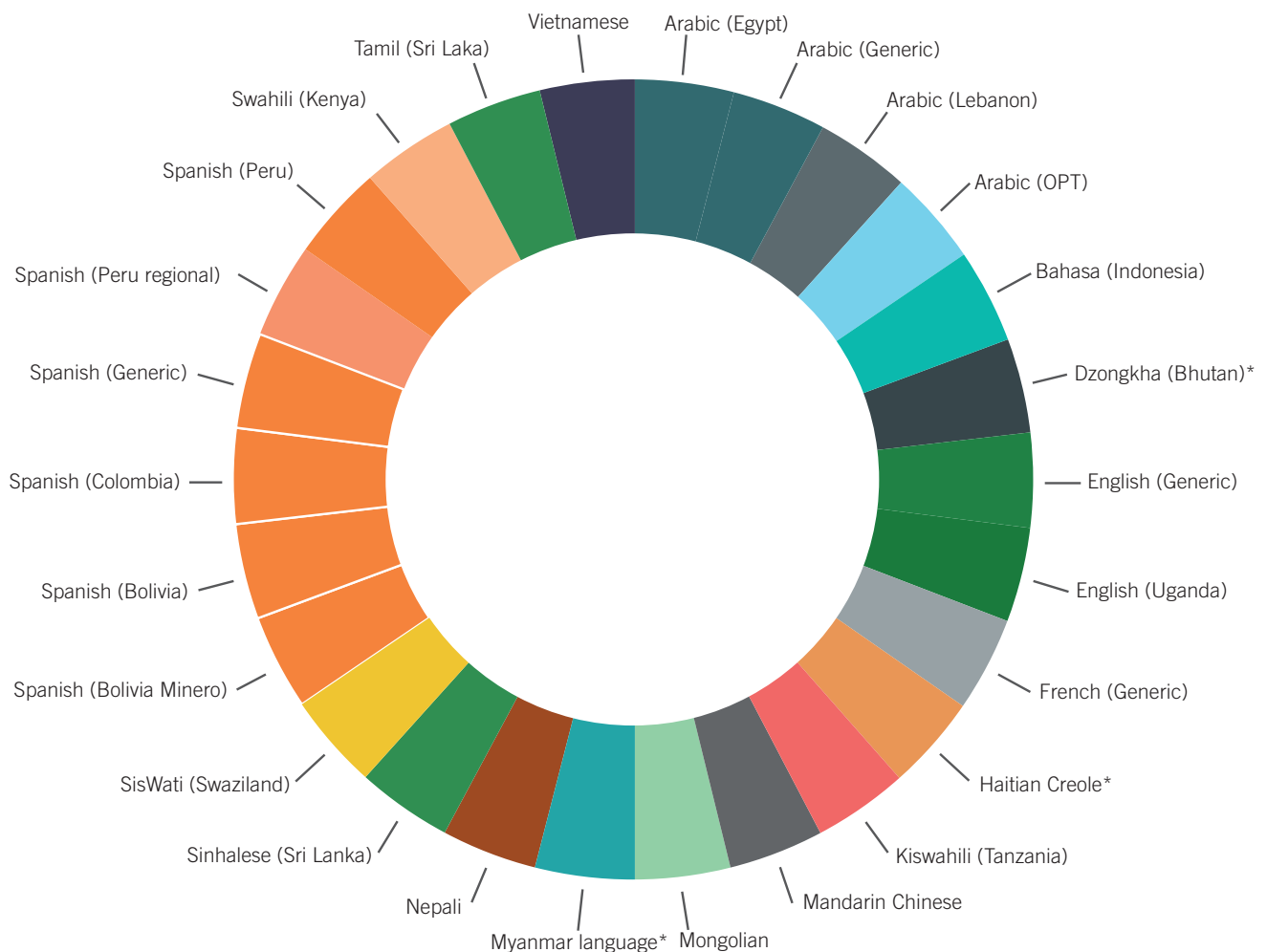


Adaptation of the My.Coop materials to the local context, reflecting the history of cooperatives, the legislative and regulatory frameworks, and types of cooperatives, is an important step in ensuring the contents are fully aligned with realities in the countries. For some countries an introductory module, “Module Zero” has been developed to provide more in-depth understanding on the country’s situation.

My.Coop materials have been translated and/or adapted in at least 23 countries. The figure below gives a brief overview of the translations and adaptations.

**Figure 2: Adaptations and translations of My.Coop.**

*Languages marked with an (\*) are currently in progress but not completed yet.*



## 2.4. My.Coop training methods

My.Coop uses a number of participatory training methods, designed specifically for adult learning. These methods were designed simultaneously with the technical contents, under the leadership of the ILO and the ITC-ILO. In the Trainer's Manual, each learning activity is complemented with an example of a possible participatory training method, such as storytelling, world café, mind-mapping, or case study, among others. The methodology used in My.Coop is one of its key advantages. On the other hand, following the suggested methodology strictly takes time, and sometimes there might not be sufficient time for discussions on technical contents. This could be improved ensuring sufficient preparatory activities for the training, for example a detailed learning needs assessment.

***Recommendation 7: Conduct a detailed learning needs assessment to select the appropriate training methods and estimate the time needed to complete them.***

The trainer's manual is valuable for conducting the training sessions with clear instructions and appealing participatory methodologies. A suggestion would be to expand on the possible training methods for each activity, to give the trainer more options to choose the method best suited for their style and preference. Additionally, technology could be better incorporated as part of the training methodologies, such as mobile applications in which participants can go through the contents, answer tests, educational games, provide feedback, etc., or brief videos showing examples of methodologies (in practice) could be used in both the ToTs and the content training sessions.

***Recommendation 8: Expand the innovative training methods by incorporating available and accessible technologies.***

## 2.5. Delivery modalities and national ownership

My.Coop partners have delivered the programme using different modalities across countries. There are examples of it being incorporated as part of larger development cooperation programmes; as part of a broader capacity building efforts for cooperatives; or as a one-off training event.

In some countries, such as Peru, Colombia, Viet Nam and Nepal, there are clear signs of strong national ownership of My.Coop, where partner organizations structurally promote the programme and use it beyond the initial training for cooperative development countrywide. In Peru, the National Agrarian University La Molina offers My.Coop as part of its curricula of cooperative training (see Box 2). In Colombia, there has been a strong ownership and leadership by a local organization, SENA (see Box 3), while in Nepal a My.Coop partner organization, Agriterro, has led the process in close collaboration with their local partner organization and support from the ILO (see Box 4). The Lebanese case is similar, with the ILO and FAO collaboration.





## BOX 2

In **Peru**, three major capacity building programmes have used My.Coop since the adapted version to Peruvian context was completed with support from the ILO and USAID. A network of My.Coop trainers was built as part of the Cooperative Strategy of the Ministry of Production.

In 2015 alone, over 300 professionals related to cooperative development were trained. In parallel, the Agrarian University of La Molina in Lima included My.Coop as part of their curricula on cooperative training. Both Agriterra and the ILO have also incorporated My.Coop in their cooperative support activities in the country.

## BOX 3

In **Colombia**, My.Coop was adapted to the local context and included in the Young Entrepreneurship Programme of the National Service of Learning (SENA), a public institution responsible for vocational training. In collaboration with the National Cooperative University and the Confederation of Cooperatives (CONFECOOP), at least 350 people have been trained on My.Coop, including over 200 coffee-producing peasant women in the Huila Department.

## BOX 4

In **Nepal**, My.Coop was included as part of the capacity building efforts for cooperatives initially as part of the Accelerated Capacity-Development Plans (ACDP) for strengthening farmers' cooperatives, a joint initiative by the Nepalese government, FAO and IFAD. The programme was implemented through the Nepal Agriculture Co-operative Central Federation Ltd (NACCFL), an umbrella organization representing over 750 agricultural co-operatives. As part of the capacity building component of the programme, ILO and Agriterra collaborated in the translation and adaptation of My.Coop, followed by the piloting of the package and roll-out in Nepal. This was followed by a face-to-face ToT, after which NACCFL and other farmer organizations received further advice and support from the Agriterra-funded programme, with the objective of ensuring My.coop roll-out at the primary cooperative level.

Through this programme, Agriterra and its local cooperative clients have organized 62 My.Coop training sessions, benefitting approximately 1,300 cooperative leaders and managers. The participating cooperatives use My.Coop tools and methodologies to improve their members' awareness on cooperative management, needs assessment and the importance of defining priorities for service provision and marketing. My.Coop approach is embedded in a larger strategy of capacity building and advice to cooperatives, which continues with deepening on key topics of cooperative management like governance and financial management and accounting.

In countries like Sri Lanka and Egypt My.Coop has been built as part of a wider development cooperation programme of the ILO (see Boxes 5 & 6). In contrast with these relatively successful cases of national ownership, strong institutional ownership of My.Coop has not been forthcoming in some other countries where the tool has been implemented.





## BOX 5

In **Sri Lanka** My.Coop was integrated as part of the two phases of the ILO's Local Empowerment through Economic Development (LEED) project in the conflict stricken Northern region. In collaboration with a number of national partners, including the Northern Provincial Department of Cooperative Development, National Institute of Cooperative Development, and National Cooperative Council, My.Coop was translated into Sinhalese and Tamil and adapted to the local context. Both primary cooperatives as well as a number of government officials working on cooperative development were trained using My.Coop, leading to an increased understanding on the cooperative model and needs in the country.

## BOX 6

In **Upper Egypt**, generic Arabic version of My.Coop was adapted to the national context led by the ILO, for use in a joint UN project promoting pro-poor horticulture value chains. With the participation of a number of government institutions and cooperative organizations, the tool was used in supporting cooperative management.

As part of a wider cooperative support programme by FAO a study was done on the legal framework including regulations around agricultural cooperatives, followed by performance assessment of cooperatives to develop capacity building approaches. Based on the studies, workshops and the needs assessment's outcomes, FAO suggested to use My.Coop as a basic needed tool for the follow-up capacity building programme.

Although the training package is freely available, the costs of delivery of My.Coop training sessions can be difficult for the local partners like cooperative organizations to cover. These costs include adaptation, translation and printing of the materials, in addition to administrative costs such as accommodation, food, and others that the end users may not be able to afford. Consequently, financial and technical assistance from a My.Coop partner organization is often a necessary pre-requirement for effective implementation of My.Coop.

***Recommendation 9: Provide financial and technical assistance to reduce the cost burden of implementation for local partners.***

One opportunity to respond to this challenge would be to divide the training sessions into shorter and simplified sessions over a longer period of time, instead of having one full week of training. The modular nature of My.Coop allows for spreading training over time, for instance instead of having five consecutive days of training with all four modules, sessions would focus on one module for the duration of one or two days, and these sessions could take place once a week over the period of one month. The advantages are that participants who might not be able to spare several consecutive days for training activity can still benefit from the training, and focus more on a specific topic.



***Recommendation 10: Use the modular structure of the training package to spread the activities over time to increase participation and foster a more focussed, in depth learning process.***

The potential impact increases when a comprehensive approach is taken: selecting, training, certifying and accompanying facilitators and promoters of the cooperatives, in a close collaboration with the national cooperative movement. The participation of the cooperative movement from the beginning increases the level of national ownership, and improves the potential for more sustainable results. When this is built as part of a wider programme, there are opportunities for even broader impact. This could be combined with continuous and well-planned mentoring for increased sustainability of cooperatives' management capacity. More comprehensive follow up for cooperatives, however, comes with the need for additional resources as well.

***Recommendation 11: Take a more comprehensive approach to ensuring the participation and ownership of stakeholders from the local cooperative movement for increased sustainability and impact, including having My.Coop built in as part of wider programmes.***

## **2.6. Partnership**

Apart from two My.Coop partner organizations collaborating in specific country settings (such as in Myanmar and Viet Nam, see Box 7), the practical application of My.Coop partnership has been limited both in terms of collaborative activities and coordination. Most of the partners involved in its development have either continued using My.Coop within their own organizations, or have not actively used it. Coordinated efforts are lacking to enhance and maintain strong commitment around the partnership. To improve the delivery of My.Coop, the future of the partnership may need to be revisited, including updating the partnership principles to reflect the evolving realities of the programme. One option to revitalize the partnership would be to include it as part of resource mobilization strategies within larger development cooperation projects, using the comparative advantage of the different partner organizations.

At the national level, My.Coop partners need to further engage the relevant cooperate apex bodies to adopt the tool as a part of the resources available to them. At the global level, the ILO has initiated conversations with the ICA leadership in the context of the cooperatives in development initiative to see how My.Coop could become better integrated into the larger body of tools available to the cooperative movement for more systematic use.

***Recommendation 12: Strengthen My.Coop partnership through coordinated efforts for improving the contents and mobilizing resources for new development cooperation projects. The partners could also join forces to improve the existing modules and create new content, as requested by cooperatives and their movements.***



## BOX 7

Since 2017 both the ILO and FAO have worked in the promotion of cooperatives in **Lebanon**. The work includes research, support for legislative reform, and capacity building for cooperatives. The ILO supported the adaptation of the Arabic version of My.Coop into the local context, followed by a pilot testing workshop of the adapted My.Coop package with cooperative stakeholders in October 2017. In addition to training cooperatives, My.Coop is being linked to the curricula of Technical Vocational Training Institutions with a view to reach wider audience interested in improving cooperative management.

### 2.7. Platform

The original objective of the My.Coop online platform was to provide access to the materials and facilitate interaction between My.Coop users, particularly during the online ToT. Despite the relatively active discussion in the early years, the platform has almost exclusively been used during the online ToT, with very little activity outside the course. Furthermore, not all the language versions and country adaptations are available for download through the platform.

There is need for an improved online database of reference materials (modules, manuals, bibliography, articles, case studies, reports etc.), information on training sessions and trainers, and adapted case studies through the online platform. These would help trainers to better prepare themselves to deliver good quality training sessions. Cooperative leaders, trainers and members would have access to an extensive knowledge base on cooperative management. My.Coop partner organizations can also monitor the progress of the programme. Such an online platform would increase the visibility of My.Coop and build a more active community around the programme.

In summary, transforming the current online platform into a more interactive and accessible platform for exchange, and for access to training materials and information on cooperatives management has the potential to revitalize its use.

***Recommendation 13: Update the platform with an improved database of useful resources for cooperative management, adapted case studies for trainers and a monitoring system to follow up on the impact.***

An updated platform, together with apps and other IT solutions, could offer a range of interconnected services including, for example:

- A Cooperative Library, with a data base hosted in the platform and also with automatic links to existing data bases from My.Coop partners and other institutions and organizations, links to databases on projects supporting cooperatives, universities and research centres, international journals, etc.; and
- My.Coop content courses, in a modular approach, allowing participants to build knowledge and skills by following different (modular) courses on time.





## 2.8. Face-to-Face Training of Trainers course

Face-to-face ToTs are crucial for My.Coop rollout, and have the greatest potential to achieve desired results when conducted at the national or local level. National or local ToTs have actually been embedded as part of a bigger cooperative capacity building strategy and/or programme, complementing other components and thus increasing their effectiveness and contribution towards sustainability. An example of such an approach was the collaboration between the ILO, VECO and Agritererra in Indonesia, where the face-to-face ToT was co-financed by each of the three organizations. In this joint initiative, in addition to My.Coop, other training tools, advice and coaching were a part of a more comprehensive cooperative development strategy. Another similar example was implemented in Viet Nam (see Box 8).

### BOX 8

In **Viet Nam**, Agritererra and the ILO collaborated with the Vietnamese Cooperative Alliance (VCA), the Viet Nam National Farmers Union (VNFU) and the Ministry of Agriculture in adapting, translating and piloting the My.Coop package. In addition, My.Coop is incorporated as part of the Viet Nam Cooperative Master (VCM) programme where it is being used as a basic part of the VCM strategic view on cooperatives development for Viet Nam.

After piloting, adapting and conducting a national level ToT along with the VCA and the ILO, Agritererra incorporated a session at the end of the My.Coop training for a follow-up plan for the participating cooperatives. These follow up plans are tailor-made roadmaps of a capacity building trajectory for each cooperative working with Agritererra. The idea is twofold: awareness raising of the complexity of cooperative management, and priority setting for a longer-term capacity building programme including further and deeper training as well as coaching, advice and exchange among peer cooperatives at national and international level.

After the implementation of My.COOP both VCA and VNFU have seen improved understanding of their staff on cooperative principles and basics of cooperatives needed in providing advice for establishing cooperatives. The follow-up action plans made by participants, provide the VCA and VNFU in further insights in designing and delivering future training sessions.

Enhancing the face-to-face ToT modality implies the need for investing in a pool of qualified master trainers. Clear criteria for master trainers need to be developed and defined by My.Coop partners. Such criteria could include previous knowledge on cooperatives and contents of My.Coop, and training experience. Having a roster of qualified My.Coop trainers at country, regional and international levels with knowledge of different languages could be a useful feature for ensuring a consistent delivery of quality training sessions, when and where needed. A clear and jointly agreed strategy for developing the roster of qualified trainers is required. The suggested update of My.Coop platform could also be linked to this issue.

***Recommendation 14: Develop a pool of qualified master trainers to ensure consistent delivery of good quality training sessions***



## 2.9. Online Training of Trainers course

Since 2012, the ITC-ILO has organized an online ToT course on My.Coop. The main objective of this course has been to provide opportunities for trainers in different parts of the world to learn about the methods and contents of My.Coop in order to enable them to conduct face-to-face training sessions at the country level. The participants are often funded by different My.Coop partner organizations, and there is a tutor responsible for managing the course. Over the years, the online ToT has been offered in English, French and Spanish, though not all these languages are available each year as there is a minimum number of participants required to organize a course in a specific language.

While the online ToT courses are a useful addition to My.Coop training offer, in particular in terms of learning on cooperatives and the methods of training, there are indications that many participants join the training without fully understanding that the main focus of the training is on methods, and not on the content of the modules. This leads to a number of participants not completing the online ToT. This might be a result of the fact that the online training does not have an accountability mechanism built in regarding the course obligations and schedule. Also, in many cases those who dropped out were participants sponsored by a third party organization.

With respect to content and learning gained on the participatory methodologies, it was recognized that participants have gained knowledge on the training methodologies that are useful in general, beyond the My.Coop training itself. However, it was also pointed out that following an online course might not be the best way to become a qualified trainer, as the online course and work in the assignments was considered “dry swimming”, without actual exposure to the “how to” of the training methods. Among the participants some concerns were voiced about having sufficient skills to conduct a face-to-face training in practice. One option to overcome these challenges would be to add a more practical session to the online training, in which the participants would practice and test the methodologies and content learnt; or to require practical exposure to face-to-face training during the course.

***Recommendation 15: Add a practical session to the online training to test the methodologies in practice to increase student commitment and teaching skills.***

During the online ToT, interaction with other participants was seen as a good way to learn, as it motivates the trainees to share their local experiences while learning from others. Levels of commitment and participation vary among participants, which is unsurprising considering the different backgrounds, motivations for participation, and expectations from the online training.

One option for improving the online training modality would be to introduce a My.Coop online training course where the focus is on technical content of the materials instead of or in addition to the methodologies. These courses could be modular, including not only the current modules but other plug-ins modules deepening certain key topics.

***Recommendation 16: Make complementary modules available on the technical content of the topic instead of the exclusive focus on the training methodologies.***





## 2.10. Impact

As there is not a unified monitoring system for My.Coop partners it is challenging to measure impact of My.Coop for individual cooperatives or farmers. This is particularly the case when a ToT is conducted – it does not demonstrate outreach at the final beneficiary level. Also, the fact that the ToT's are often conducted as standalone training sessions and not as part of a larger project creates additional challenges to measuring impact. The evaluation of My.Coop trainers currently used evaluates the training event itself and not its follow-up.

***Recommendation 17: Develop a monitoring mechanism to measure the impact of the training in terms of number of training sessions given by the participants, changed management practices, action plans developed and follow up on the action plans.***

Some My.Coop partner organizations have tools for impact evaluation of the work they do in supporting cooperatives. However, it is not easy to identify the exact attribution of My.Coop itself. The use of other tools, approaches and advice, often provided by different actors and at different times, makes it hard to isolate the effect of My.Coop training sessions. In some cases there are reports from cooperatives on improved management practices, but there is no specific reference to My.Coop. Improved and more forward-looking approaches to assess and monitor My.Coop effectiveness should be designed and adopted by partner organizations. The focus should not only be on the learning of participants, but also on the effects of this learning on management practices following the training.

There is, however, some evidence of My.Coop having positive influence on individual agricultural cooperatives. In the majority of training reports, development of action plans by the participants for follow up is recorded. These action plans are often logical and well-developed, with signs of enthusiasm and ambition to improve the current situation of the cooperative. In many cases, however, the recommended coaching and follow up is not possible due to the nature of the one-off training.

***Recommendation 18: Ensure My.Coop is used as part of structured programmes with an action plan, budget allocation and a local ownership strategy. This would facilitate effective follow-up on the action plans of individual cooperatives.***

In **conclusion**, it is widely agreed that the My.Coop training package is a consistent tool for cooperative development that can be used worldwide. The comprehensiveness of its modules in terms of topics is considered as a strong basis for a sound cooperative management. The level of depth of the topics is good for 'awareness raising' on the issues that cooperative management needs to deal with. However, the tool is not sufficient for building capacities for actual improvement of management on topics like financial management, internal capitalization, good governance and member commitment. Cooperative leaders and managers get a good understanding on the complexity of cooperative management and the diversity of issues they need to tackle and overcome.



## Annex 1

### My.COOP Guiding Partnership Principles

#### 1. Ambition/Objective of the partnership:

- To ensure a high qualitative and worldwide delivery of the My.COOP package and training programmes with the aim of maximizing impact.
- To support the further development of the My.COOP package and training programmes, amongst others through self-initiated knowledge management and knowledge sharing practices

#### 2. Purpose of the guiding principles:

- To agree on ways of collaboration around My.COOP according to capacity. The agreement on collaboration amongst the global partners constitutes a moral commitment rather than a legal commitment.
- To anchor the co-ownership of the package
- To facilitate the involvement of our respective organizations/colleagues to ensure continued development and roll-out.
- To facilitate communication for mobilizing new partners and guide possible partnership agreements with field partners / users.

#### 3. Definition of My.COOP partners:

- My.COOP partners are defined as organizations and institutions that actively contribute to the roll-out and further development of the My.COOP package and training programmes at global, regional, national or local levels.
- My.COOP partners' contributions can consist of: expertise and knowledge for content development, adaption, translation purposes (developers), or, by institutionalizing the use of the My.COOP package and programmes (users / field partners), or, by financial support (donors), or, a combination of the fore-mentioned contribution types.

#### 4. Principle of reciprocity:

- All partners are expected to contribute in terms of finance, human resources, publications/ knowledge, etc. to the partnership, the development and the roll-out of the package.
- Initiatives (for training activities, adaptations, new modules, ...) can be taken by any partner (i.e. the focal points), informing and where required, involving the others.
- Sharing information on My.COOP product development is the responsibility of each partner (ref. information sharing)
- Partners appoint My.COOP focal points in their respective organization.



## 5. Ownership:

- Copyright: Creative Commons  
Managing your Agricultural Cooperative, My.COOP, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. The legal conditions of this copyright procedure are expressed here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>
- Extracts, adaptations and additions to the existing package cannot be copyrighted by one of the partners but remains Create Commons copyrighted.
- Partners commit to inform the others on such developments, including through the website [www.agriculture-my.coop](http://www.agriculture-my.coop)
- The material will be freely accessible on the [www.agriculture-my.coop](http://www.agriculture-my.coop) platform. This website is not visibly associated to one of the partners in particular. It can be co-administered by different partners. The My.COOP platform will be managed by ITC-ILO Turin until further notice.

## 6. Accessibility of material:

- The material is freely available on the agriculture-my.coop platform. A basic login form for M&E purpose will need to be filled in by users who want to access the My.COOP platform.
- The website contains the distance learning platform for training of trainers
- The site contains a section where partners and users will upload news, translations, adaptations and other training material, such as stories, pictures, background reading, etc. (ref. knowledge management and sharing)
- Websites of partners will provide the link to the agriculture-my.COOP website and will not post the PDFs on their website directly, and refrain where possible for sending the PDF files to users in order to encourage user login on the website.

## 7. Quality assurance, certification and coherence:

- Partners will work in collaborative ways when making important adaptations / developing new material.
  - Partners will ask each other to make tools/publications/material available for the development of new material to the benefit of all.
  - Partners will respect a minimum procedure to ensure quality control. This would involve a quality check by a (virtual) reading committee composed of the different partners and other experts, and a pilot activity. It may be complemented with other collaborative methods (e.g. writing workshops, ...)
  - Partners agree to use and not to modify the existing graphic design, style and logo of My.COOP
- Partners will aim at staying involved in My.COOP training activities, either through M&E or through involvement in the delivery of training (face-to-face and/or distance learning)
- Certification: ITC-ILO will certify participants in ITC-ILO managed training activities. Partners (users) can establish their own certification scheme based on My.COOP certification criteria. The access to the pool of certified trainers on My.COOP platform will be managed by the global partners. Partners (users) can establish their own certification scheme for the activities that they run in line with the My.COOP certification criteria.
- Partners will aim to make use of the pool of (certified) My.COOP trainers



## **8. Information and knowledge sharing:**

- Partners will at least inform other partners on training activities and try where appropriate and needed to actively involve other partners through for instance, consultations, joint training delivery, etc.
- Partners will discuss regularly (aiming at one meeting per year with all partners, through F2F or teleconference) the status and developments around the package, set out new strategies, new partnerships, etc. These meetings will be organized on rotating basis.

## **9. Broaden the My.COOP partnership and programme**

- The current global partnership is composed of: Agriterro, ILO (HQ, ITC/ILO in Turin, field offices, projects), KIT, WUR and FAO. WFP and IFAD have expressed interest to collaborate and possibly join the partnership.
- New user partners at national level that have shown interest include: Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina in Lima (Peru), the CRE Foundation in Santa Cruz (Bolivia) and the Moshi University College of Cooperative and Business Studies (Tanzania).
- The organizations listed in the package have substantially contributed to the development of the package in terms of human resources, expertise and knowledge and/or finance. They are recommended to become partners if they adhere to the present principles.
- New partners will be invited by one of the existing partners, possibly in response to a demand to join the partnership, and their acceptance will be explicitly agreed upon by each of the partners.
- New partners will need to adhere to the partnership principles.
- Partners contribute to rolling out and developing the package, based on, amongst others, demand and feedback from My.COOP learning events





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