



Contributions of agricultural cooperatives to decent work in Latin America

4 cooperative success stories

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1

Introduction

The Declaration on Cooperative Identity (1995), promoted by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA)¹ and by recommendation n.193 of the International Labor Organization (ILO, hereinafter), states that a cooperative is “an autonomous association of persons who have voluntarily come together to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned enterprise and democratically controlled.”² The values that inspire the action of cooperatives are based on self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, and cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, responsive attitude, social responsibility and respect for others. Based on these values, cooperatives act according to seven cooperative principles:

1. Voluntary and open membership
2. Democratic management of members
3. Economic participation of the members
4. Autonomy and independence
5. Education, training and information
6. Cooperation between cooperatives
7. Interest in the community.

Cooperatives are therefore people-centred enterprises, where ownership resides with the members, who manage it democratically according to the principle of “one member, one vote”, regardless of the type of membership and the capital they contribute to the company. Since the ownership is not owned by the shareholders, both the economic and social benefits of cooperatives remain in the communities where they operate and the profits generated are reinvested in the activities of the company or returned to the members. According to ICA data, 12% of the world’s population is a cooperative member of one of the 3 million cooperative enterprises on the planet.

The values that inspire the action of cooperatives are based on self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity

The ICA, founded in 1895, represents one billion cooperative members worldwide, providing them with coordinated action and a knowledge forum. Its members are international and national cooperative organizations from all sectors of the economy: agriculture, banking, consumption, fisheries, health, housing, insurance, and industry and services. ICA has an International Bureau based in Brussels, four regional offices (Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe), eight international sectoral organizations (agriculture, banking, consumption, fisheries, health, housing, insurance, and industry and services), and five committees and networks (gender equity, research, law, youth and development). The ICA encourages cooperation between cooperatives, thus applying principle n. 6, allowing:

- i) Develop business relationships and partnerships among its members
- ii) Organize regional and international events where organizations meet regularly to share ideas
- iii) Provide support tools and disseminate knowledge
- iv) Facilitate training programs, events and publications developed in collaboration with cooperative development agencies

The Americas Regional Office was founded in 1990 in San José, Costa Rica, with the objective of “promoting the repositioning of the cooperative model in the new economic, political, social and commercial environment by supporting CI member organizations

¹ “The International Co-operative Alliance is an independent, non-governmental organization established in 1895 to unite, represent and work in the service of co-operatives around the world. ICA provides a global voice and forum for knowledge, expertise and coordinated action for cooperatives” (<https://www.ica.coop/es/cooperativas/identidad-alianza-cooperativa-internacional>)

² Ibid.

in the Americas in the dissemination and defense of cooperative identity, business promotion and human resource development.”³ The Regional Office ensures the connection between American cooperatives and the global network, facilitating relationships and participation in specialized and sectoral networks. It is also responsible for implementing the decisions made by the regional political bodies of Cooperatives of the Americas and managing development projects.

Cooperatives and decent work

Cooperatives are considered the best organizational form to ensure workers' rights, due to their participatory governance and their dual role, which is both economic and social. However, there is little empirical evidence on the contribution of cooperatives to the generation of decent work (Moller et al., 2019).

2022 is the year in which the first broad debate on the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE, hereinafter) is held in the ILO, and the importance of this socio-economic sector has been growing since the beginning of the century, in terms of visibility and influence on policies. Cooperatives are considered part of the SSE sector, along with associations, mutuals, associations, foundations, social enterprises and other formal and informal organizations that prioritize social objectives over profit. SSE is then defined as “a concept that refers to enterprises and organizations, in particular cooperatives, social mutuals, associations, foundations and social enterprises, which specifically produce goods, services and knowledge while pursuing social and economic objectives and promoting solidarity” (OIT, 2011).

The concept of decent work refers to the possibility of accessing dignified employment, which corresponds to the aspirations of the people, which generates a fair in-

come, which has safe workplace conditions and social security for those who work and for their families. It also provides the guarantee of freedom of expression of opinions, the right to organize and gather and equal treatment and opportunities for women and men.

The concept of decent work, originally promoted by the ILO, has been integrated into the most important human rights declarations, resolutions and final documents of major UN conferences. The four pillars of the Decent Work Agenda – job creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue – have become central elements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda calls for the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, productive employment and decent work, and will be a key area of action for the ILO and its constituents. In addition, other key aspects of decent work are widely present in the objectives of many of the other 16 goals of the New Development Vision of the United Nations. It should therefore be noted how SSE organizations and especially cooperatives have a remarkable potential relative to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). More specifically, according to Report VI of the 110th Session of the ILO: “In relation to rights at work, SSE units can contribute significantly to the attainment of Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth) and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) of the 2030 Agenda, especially through advocacy, the promotion

³ <https://www.aciamericas.coop/Quienes-somos-2092>

and implementation of international labor standards” (ILO, 2022). Looking at the specific targets of the SDGs, we see how the contribution of SSE can be valuable, particularly in the case of goal 8:

- 8.5** By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including youth and persons with disabilities, as well as equal pay for work of equal value.
- 8.7** Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end contemporary forms of slavery and trafficking in persons and ensure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms.
- 8.8** Protect labor rights and promote a safe and secure working environment for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular migrant women and persons in precarious employment.

In the case of goal 16, the most significant potential contribution of cooperatives can be evidenced in pursuing the following goals:

- 16.7** Ensure inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels as needed.
- 16.a** Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, to build capacities at all levels, particularly in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime.
- 16.b** Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development.

The ILO has also been developing several standard-setting instruments related to the promotion of cooperatives, such as Recommendation 193 on the promotion of cooperatives (2002) and Recommendation 189 on job creation in small and medium-sized enterprises (1998).

Cooperatives, throughout their history, have emerged in times of economic hardship as one of the most effective ways to ensure employment and income (Birchall and Ketilson, 2009) and SSE organizations have shown significant growth even in the stages of economic recession. This is due to their roots in local communities and the fact that their activities pursue the interest of their members (mutualist character, present above all in cooperatives and mutuals) and, in many cases, of the communities in which they operate (Borzaga et al., 2018).

Cooperatives, throughout their history, have emerged in times of economic hardship as one of the most effective ways to ensure employment and income

Because of their community roots, cooperatives have no interest in relocating their activities, as is the case with traditional enterprises. In addition, cooperatives have a potential to develop new forms of work organization, where there can be greater worker participation in decision-making.

This is functional to the characteristics of decent work developed by the ILO, where it is stated, as anticipated, that work has to correspond to people’s aspirations. Since workers are more involved, they can participate in defining management policies, schedules, wages, etc. At the same time, it is possible for people involved in cooperatives and other SSE organizations to fulfil their social aspirations and values, taking greater account

of non-monetary incentives, such as better working relationships and greater autonomy in decision-making (Defourny et al., 1985; Mirvis, 1992; Depedri et al., 2012, cited by Borzaga et al., 2018).

These organizations also have an important role in fostering rural development, promoting entrepreneurship, job creation and the provision of social care, as well as in the representation and voice of rural producers and workers (ILO, 2019). Cooperatives also encourage the creation of production and consumption circuits at a local level, creating virtuous circles that not only provide for the satisfaction of basic needs, but also generate socioeconomic development in a broader way.

This happens through the ability of cooperatives to foster demand for locally produced goods and services (Jayasooria and Yi, 2022). These processes also contribute to retaining a greater amount of wealth for local communities and to increasing solidarity, social cohesion and collective action that can generate dynamics of cooperation between local actors for the improvement of social services and infrastructure, promoting the social, economic and political empowerment of vulnerable or excluded social groups.

In addition, cooperatives have a fundamental role in creating and preserving employment, even when workers are self-employed, adding independent workers to increase their market power, as is the case with agricultural cooperatives. The generation of jobs becomes viable, not through the hiring of employees, but through the cooperative that makes self-employment viable, especially in cases of small agricultural properties and even in areas with high production costs, such as mountain regions. In addition, agricultural cooperatives allow access to better quality material at lower prices, as well as technical assistance, education and training, and credit possibilities, achieving higher prices for production and lowering production risks.

Another positive impact of cooperatives is seen in overcoming the gender gap, not only because they hire

women, but also because they facilitate the reconciliation of work life with personal and family life, this being one of the pillars of decent work. This happens through the provision of care and financial services that enable women to enjoy greater economic, social and political independence (Yiet al. 2018).

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Measuring decent work

The ILO has developed a set of statistical indicators for measuring decent work in various countries. It seems somewhat useful to mention the main dimensions of decent work as detailed by the ILO in order to get a more detailed idea of what the main pillars of decent work are. The first dimension has to do with employment opportunities, which include the employment-to-population ratio, the unemployment rate, the percentage of young people who are not studying or working, and the size of informal employment.

The second dimension is on adequate income and productive work, where the percentage of poor workers, the low payment rate (less than 2/3 of median hourly earnings), “decent working time”, i.e. excessive working hours (more than 48 hours per week) are measured. The third dimension is the reconciliation of work, family and personal life, including maternity protection. The fourth dimension concerns work that should be abolished: child labor, forced labor. The fifth dimension

has to do with job stability and security, and also measures the rate of precarious employment.

The sixth dimension is on equality of opportunity and treatment during employment, having to do with occupational segregation by gender, wage disparity between men and women, and the measure of discrimination based on race/ethnicity/discrimination against indigenous people/migrant workers/rural workers, and the employment of persons with disabilities. The seventh dimension concerns the safe working environment, where the rate of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries is measured. The eighth dimension is on social security, to measure the proportion of the population aged 65 and over receiving a pension, public expenditure on social security (percentage of GDP), and expenses on health care not covered by private households.

The ninth dimension has to do with social dialogue and representation, measuring the rate of unionization. The last dimension analyses the economic and social context of decent work, focusing on the rate of children who are not schooled, the estimate of the percentage of the working-age population infected with HIV, labour productivity (GDP per person employed, level and growth rate), income inequality, the inflation rate, the adult literacy rate and the share of GDP rate that corresponds to work.

We will see how several of these dimensions are precisely the ones that are addressed by the cooperatives covered in this study, with specific focuses on work conciliation, attention to the eradication of child labor, labor inclusion of people with disabilities, migrants and indigenous people, and a general attention that addresses several of the dimensions of decent work considered by the ILO.

Methodology

The work was carried out in 5 phases, between March and November 2022: a) pre-selection of 16 cases in the Latin American region; (b) presentation of a methodological proposal and a script of interviews; (c) conducting interviews remotely (one to three for each case, with a minimum of two interviewees); (d) transcription of interviews and content analysis; (e) drafting of the final report.

For the selection of case studies, the following criteria were considered: (a) representativeness in the region (Mesoamerica, Andean Area, Southern Cone with the inclusion of Brazil); (b) that the majority of its members are small rural producers and/or family farmers; (c) at least five years working with significant economic and social results; (d) a stable economic activity; (e) specific social programs related to decent work.

The four cooperatives selected were:

- a) Coopetarrazú in Costa Rica
- b) Villa Rica Golden Coffee in Peru
- c) Cocamar Cooperative in Brazil
- d) Cooperativa La Terre in Argentina.

Por cada una de las cooperativas hay un proyecto de generación de trabajo decente en ámbitos específicos:

- a) *Proyecto Casas de la Alegría* (Houses of Joy Project), which provides childcare to improve conditions for workers, and indigenous and migrant workers
- b) *Sello Libre de Trabajo Infantil* (SELTi, for its acronym in Spanish) (Free of Child Labor Seal), which aims to eradicate child labor

- c) *Proyecto Cultivar* (Cultivation Project), the objective of which is labor integration of people with intellectual and multiple disabilities
- e) the creation of self-managed employment without employers through the recovery of the company.

Table of interviews

CoopeTarrazú	Villa Rica Golden Coffee	Cocamar Cooperative	La Terre Cooperative
María Naranjo, Field Department Assistant (TA1)	Paskal Vandebusche (ILO Consultant) (VI1)	Sabrina Ambrosio, Communication Coordinator (CO1)	Nélida Mamani (Cooperative Accountant, worker in the previous company that was recov- ered, participated in the whole process of recovery and formation of the cooperative) (TE1)
Grettel Rojas, coordinator of Casas de la Alegría (TA2)	Aníbal Borda, Coordinator of Production Chains, Development and Self-Management (VI2)		Nicolás Sabina (TE2)
	Paul Quezada, General Manager Villa Rica Golden Coffee (VI3)		
	Daniel Ortiz, President Villa Rica Golden Coffee (VI4)		

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The Cooperatives Analyzed

Coopetarrazú

Costa Rica

The Coopetarrazú cooperative is mainly dedicated to the cultivation, processing and marketing of coffee and coffee by-products. It is a cooperative with a long history, founded in 1960 by 228 small producers. At that time, it had the capacity to benefit 4000 quintals with an initial capital of 5 thousand dollars.

Today the cooperative brings together more than 5000 members and has a processing capacity of 300 thousand quintals. In addition to coffee production, the cooperative produces and markets coffee derivatives (bioinputs, coffee husk, delipulp, coffee pulp flour, green coffee capsules). The main activities are divided between the coffee area, which includes sixty coffee receivers, 2 processing establishment (*beneficios*) with a capacity to process 325 thousand quintals, and the commercial area, which includes four supermarkets, a wholesale warehouse, four warehouses of agricultural supplies, a hardware store and construction materials, a fuel station and an automotive spare part shoppe and lubrication center. The cooperative exports 78% of the production directly, 14% through local exporters and 8% is marketed nationally, with several brands. Exports mainly take place to markets such as the United States, Europe, Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

With regard to the generation of employment, in addition to the associates, Coopetarrazú ensures 250 temporary positions at harvest time and 320 permanent ones. Coopetarrazú coffee is 100% certified with the Fairtrade seal, other certifications are C.A.F.E. Practices of Starbucks⁴ and Esencial Costa Rica, which is a country brand that guarantees quality standards. There is also an agreement with ICAFÉ (*Instituto del Café de Costa Rica*) (Costa Rica Coffee Institute) to insure harvesters during the harvest season so they have social security and can opt for health services when required.

The cooperative has specialized technicians who train producers directly in the coffee plantations on issues of safety, occupational health, protective equipment and agrochemical handling.

The cooperative has several social programs, such as a community cleaning program, insuring collectors, preventive health campaigns, women's promotion, environmental education, and *Casas de la Alegría*.

Today the cooperative brings together more than 5000 members and has a processing capacity of 300 thousand quintals.

Casas de la Alegría is a Social Responsibility project that provides support to the community and the people who work and get involved in the coffee production activity. It is an entirely free service for children between 0 and 12 years old, who arrive with their parents to the coffee harvest. Some of these families are migrants from Nicaragua and Panama, and some of them belong to the Ngäbe and Buglé indigenous people (Panama). The remaining workers are Costa Rican. The services provided are comprehensive care with trained personnel, based on dignified care. The children are offered a balanced diet, recreational and didactic activities, education on hygiene and health habits.

The first *Casa de la Alegría* was inaugurated in 2018, located on the CoopeTarrazú farm, receiving 69 children. These numbers have increased in recent years, as seen in Table 1, with 19 houses in 2022, serving 600 children and 51 people employed in care, education, cleaning, and meal preparation jobs. Due to the pandemic, in the years 2020 and 2021, although there were between 9 and 14 authorized houses, not all were open, because

⁴ "C.A.F.E. Practices Ensures that the entire coffee supply chain (Producers, stockpilers and processors) provide STARBUCKS with sustainable coffee in economic, social and environmental aspects. C.A.F.E. Practices includes the criteria for social responsibility, economic responsibility, and responsible ecological practices for the cultivation and processing of coffee". (<https://biolatina.com/certificacion/cafe>)

2018–2022

Year	Houses	Children	Personnel
2018	1	69	4
2019	4	450	19
2020	9 enabled 5 operating	114	14
2021	14 enabled 12 operating	423	31
2022*	19	600	51

Table 1. Data of enabled houses, children attending and personnel working

the borders with Panama and Nicaragua remained closed for a long time.

The interest of CoopeTarrazú in building Casas de la Alegría dates back to 2013, when contacts with Unicef began, following the experience of Coopesabalito, another coffee cooperative pioneer in this type of project. These beginnings of Coopesabalito derived from several actions, promoted among others, by the Joint United Nations program to improve the human security of temporary migrants in Costa Rica and Panama.

The first five *Casas de la Alegría* developed by Coopesabalito were financed by UNICEF between 2014 and 2015. Interest in *Casas de la Alegría* began with CoopeTarrazú in 2015. In 2018, the first *Casa de la Alegría* was built on the cooperative's farm with its own resources, complying with all the regulations requested by the Ministry of Health. Since 2020, Coopetarrazú participates together with Cooperatives of the Americas in a project co-financed by the Delegation of the European Union in Costa Rica, which provides important resources for the operation of this initiative. Some of the funds come

from donations from coffee buyers who want to support the project, both from abroad and within the country.

The operations logic of the houses is based on comprehensive care with trained personnel, where at least one person for each house must have specific capacity in the educational field (teachers, students who are pursuing education studies, etc.). The rest of the team is made up of women from the community, offering them employment opportunity, and the trained person organizes the management of the activities and trains the team.

The idea of dignified care comes from the working conditions of mothers in the fields, who are surely the ones who take best care of their children, but who do not have the conditions to do so during the various phases of coffee harvesting, being that the children would be in the coffee plantation together with them or alone in the camps. Another important point is the provision of a balanced diet, with the involvement of a nutritionist. The Houses, which operate from 6am to 6pm, offer 4 meals, including breakfast, lunch and two snacks, which in some cases are the only ones that children have available due to a lack of resources of the families.

There are also basic educational activities because many of the children, even the older ones, are not literate.

The operations logic of the houses is based on comprehensive care with trained personnel, where at least one person for each house must have specific capacity in the educational field (teachers, students who are pursuing education studies, etc.).

In the case of indigenous children, language may sometimes be an obstacle to communication, therefore, parents are asked to let an older boy or girl who speaks Spanish and whom can act as a facilitator to be in the house.

The main changes, or positive impacts, according to the person interviewed, since the Casas de la Alegría project began, were:



Source: Coopetarrazú Facebook Page

- The interest and commitment from the producers, who understand the objective of the Casas de la Alegría and therefore ask for a House in their area, or ask for longer hours at some times when the harvest requires it. The Houses seek flexibility and try to adapt to the demands of producers in order to mitigate the risk for minors.
- Changes in the attitudes of children, who learn to have a more organized and structured day-to-day, have the opportunity to care and be cared for in terms of their hygiene, being that in the shelters of the collectors there are hardly any health conditions in this regard (for example, showers with hot water). The nourishment conditions, as already highlighted, and they also improve a lot thanks to the food and meals that the Houses offer.



Source: Coopetarrazú Facebook Page



Source: Coopetarrazú Facebook Page

- The Houses also have an impact at the community level, because the service is also offered to the sons and daughters of those who work for producers who are not members of the cooperative. In addition, work is generated for the women of the community who are being employed in the Houses as caregivers and cooks.

On the other hand, one of the greatest difficulties is the planning of openings and management, due to the temporary nature of the work and the uncertainty regarding the number of people who come to the coffee plantations to work. However, the people in charge do

everything they can to adapt to the needs of producers, collectors, and above all children who can improve their living conditions. As the interviewee highlights:

“This cannot stop because it is one of the biggest projects we can have and we know that it really is for people who need it and that in the end, if the children are well, the parents are well. If the parents are well, they come to collect coffee and always seek the producer, because they know that near that farm there is a Casa de la Alegría. So, we know the coffee is going to reach the cooperative.” *María Naranjo*

Cooperativa Agroindustrial Villa Rica Golden Coffee Ltda.

(Villa Rica, Oxapampa - Pasco, Perú)

The Villa Rica Golden Coffee LTDA Agroindustrial Cooperative was established in 2012 on the initiative of 22 small coffee producers in order to improve the socioeconomic conditions of its associated producers. It brings together Yaneshas coffee families (indigenous people of the Peruvian Amazon rainforest), Andean and Austro-German migrants belonging to the Entaz, Eneñas, Paucartambo, Cacazu and Bocaz basins.

At present, the social basis has 264 small producers. It has organic coffee certifications, as well as the solidarity Fair Trade seal, and the NOP USDA and EU seals. The cooperative highlights in its strategic guidelines its social and environmental commitment and the promotion of community development. It functions in a region, the Oxapampa-Asháninka-Yaneshas reserve, which is part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves of Unesco. began coffee exports to Europe and the United States in 2015. Participation in several national and international fairs seeks to expand the exportation of the cooperative's coffee to other markets, such as Asia, Africa, Australia.

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Business management is based on the methodology of creating networks, where a network is a group of coffee producers under the name of Civil Association or com-

mittee, whose members participate directly with the cooperative enterprise. The role of networks consists of:

1. Monitoring and controlling the correct execution of associativity policies; Services within their association.
2. Articulating the management of projects within its scope, with an impact on associativity and productive infrastructure.
3. Coordinating and supporting the execution or implementation of administrative actions and services established by the cooperative.
4. Strengthening its foundational associativity, also promote and facilitate the inclusion of new partners.
5. Keeping the validity of their legal representatives up to date, as well as associate registry, cash registry book and minute books.
6. Preparing and presenting its operational plans and Annual Report in a timely manner.

The cooperative also stands out for its environmental commitment, based on agroecology and with much of the coffee produced maintaining an organic certification. In addition, it has established an agreement with Ecotierra, which is a developer of sustainable agroforestry projects generating positive environmental, economic and social impacts. Within this framework, a pilot project is being carried out with 25 members of the Cooperative that has the objectives of mitigating climate change, through the reduction of CO2 emissions and the conservation of forests, and the improvement of the living conditions of families, increasing and diversifying income, favoring female participation, reinvesting the benefits linked to fair trade in social objectives.

In the social programs there is also the development of family bio-gardens for their own consumption, which

represents an aid in terms of saving money, given the increase in food prices, and raising small animals (guinea pigs) for reproduction and sale in the local market.

Within the social objectives of the cooperative, a specific project for the eradication of dangerous forms of child labor in rural areas of Peru, called the *Semilla* (Seed) Project, is also inserted. This is a pilot project that emerged within the National Strategy for the Prevention and Eradication of Child Labor (ENPETI, for its acronym in Spanish) 2012-2021, whose objective is to merge the efforts of the state and civil society in an intersectoral and interdisciplinary manner. The challenge of ENPETI is to eliminate hazardous child labor and minimize work in children under 14 years of age, through the implementation of national plans and

projects, the proposal of clear goals and the evaluation of results.

*Within the social objectives of the cooperative, a specific project for the eradication of dangerous forms of child labor in rural areas of Peru, called the **Semilla (Seed) Project**, is also inserted.*

The *Semilla* project is executed by three NGOs: *Fundación Desarrollo y Autogestión* (Self-management and Development Foundation) (active in Ecuador, Peru, Argentina and Bolivia), *Desco* (*Centro de Estudios y*



Promoción del Desarrollo) (Center for education, and development promotion, Peru) and World Learning (United States). *Semilla* also has impact objectives in the formulation of public policies for the reduction and eradication of child labor. The work team of the *Semilla* project, together with the technicians of the cooperative, work in a coordinated manner for assistance in the orientation and supervision of the member families of the Cooperative in activities that represent risks to the health of children and that affect the hours that should be allocated to learning in school and play, as well as the use of chemical, toxic or polluting substances.

Work with families has been a process of guidance, education and discussion, which has been producing radical changes within the cooperative, being that in rural work the contribution that children under 14 years of age can offer is fundamental for families, as detailed by the interviewees:

- *Child and adolescent exploitation, like slavery, human trafficking, service due to debt and other forms of forced labor, forced child and adolescent recruitment for armed conflict, sexual exploitation and illicit activities.*

“Well, yes I was one of the participants, I also worked with the Development and Self-Management program. Well, first it has been a little shocking for families to tell them that children will not work, but from there, seeing the reality, they have been trained ... looking at the best ways for a child to work. (...) it has been very hard work and we have participated with the cooperative and the Free of Child Labor Seal has been implemented.” *Daniel Santos Ortiz*

- *Work in children under 14 because it can affect school enrollment, play time, and time for rest.*
- *Work in 14 year old adolescents, even more so being dangerous in nature or due to the conditions under which they are performed, putting their health, safety and moral development at risk*
- *Work until 17, which is dangerous in nature or because of the conditions under which they are performed, that puts their health, safety and moral development in danger. Also that which has excessive work loads due to the physical conditions of the job, and/or the duration (number of working hours), even when the activity or occupation in and of itself, is not dangerous.*



“With all those trainings which also came through Development and Self-Management, bringing their professionals from other countries. I don’t know if it’s made it a little easier for us to reach out to families so they can understand. We were already going with a more family-focused format. This can be done, this cannot be done, but from there they have been understanding and now I think the issue has been improved. In the native communities where child labor was first seen, now it is not, there is not much anymore because their children are focused on going to school, so they are not as before. So a good job has been done in the first communities and now you can see our achievements”
Daniel Santos Ortiz

It is interesting to note how the danger of some tools can be relative and has to be discussed with producers who know their environment and working conditions perfectly, as is the case of the machete that was cited by an interviewee:

“We worked on a matrix of equipment and tools: which tools they can use, which tools they cannot use, for example. There, all the tools were established, and an important case was the one of the machete. (...) Then when the producers started to make this identification of dangers, people said, but if my child goes to the field without a machete, it is more dangerous than carrying a machete because if they encounter a snake, they have to kill it, otherwise the snake will kill my child.”
Aníbal Borda

The Semilla project gave rise in 2019 to the certification called SELTI—Free of Child Labor Seal, granted by an international certifier that has a renewable duration of two years and implies having social responsibility within organizations, not only cooperatives, being that the seal can also be granted to traditional companies. Regarding cooperatives, one interviewee adds:

“It was the first time social responsibility had been addressed in a cooperative and that was very interesting, because the cooperative began to think about social responsibility actions aimed at preventing and eradicating child labor, which was to work with schools, training adolescents and signaling this type of issues with the children. So it was extremely interesting.” *Aníbal Borda*

The Semilla project gave rise in 2019 to the certification called SELTI—Free of Child Labor Seal, granted by an international certifier that has a renewable duration of two years.

Cooperativa Cocamar

Brasil

Cocamar Cooperativa Agroindustrial (Agro-industrial Cooperative) was founded in 1963, in Maringá (State of Paraná). At first, it brought together 46 coffee producers, with the aim of organizing production at the regional level, receiving and obtaining better prices for the product. The cooperative grew and diversified production over the years, up until today where it has almost 100 operating units with around 3,000 employees in three Brazilian states (Paraná, São Paulo and Mato Grosso do Sul) and 16 thousand associates, 75% of them being small producers, who are dedicated to the cultivation of soybeans, corn, wheat, coffee and oranges.

The cooperative has different industries for the production of products, such as beverages (fruit nectars) and

sauses (mayonnaise, ketchup, etc.), alcohol bottling, yarn industry (cotton, polyester and mixed), treated wood (eucalyptus), mineral supplement (for livestock), bran and vegetable oils, roasting and grinding of coffee. The cooperative has its own brand for the retail sale of coffee, beverages, oils, sauses, etc. In addition, Cocamar's Seed Processing Unit has a production capacity of 200,000 bags of soybeans and 70,000 bags of wheat seeds.

Cocamar develops a social responsibility project, fully financed by cooperative associates, called "Proyecto Cultivar – Produciendo florestas con manos especiales", (Cultivation Project - Producing forests with special hands) which has social ("to be socially just"), economic ("to be economically viable") and environmental ("to be ecologically correct") objectives.

The project arose to solve an environmental problem, that of the reforestation of degraded areas of the At-



Source: <https://cocamar.com.br/pagina/projeto-cultivar>

Atlantic Forest, one of the most devastated biomes in the country, soon becoming a social project for labor insertion of people with intellectual and mixed disabilities. It is not a project of a welfare nature, but a program of labor insertion and generation of decent employment opportunities. The project was conceived in 2005 thanks to the interactions between Cocamar, the Ministry of Labor and APAE (Associação de Pais e Amigos dos Excepcionais - Association of Parents and Friends of the Exceptional). APAE is a pioneer entity in Brazil, dating back to its foundation in the 50s, dedicated to the assistance and special education of people with disabilities.



Source: <https://cocamar.com.br/pagina/projeto-cultivar>

“Cocamar was very visionary at the time to create that solution. There were meetings with APAE and with a partner who came from public power in the first year, the project was approved by the leaders (of the cooperative) and began in 2006” *Sabrina Ambrosio*.

The conscious focus of the leaders was also driven by the inspections in the properties that had to do with the issue of reforestation and by the fact of having to meet quotas for labor insertion of people with disabilities. In

fact, in Brazil there is a quota law (“Lei de Cotas”, art. 93 of Law No. 8,213/91), which was enacted in 1991 and establishes that companies with more than one hundred employees must fill part of the positions with people with disabilities.

The project arose to solve an environmental problem, that of the reforestation of degraded areas of the Atlantic Forest, one of the most devastated biomes in the country, soon becoming a social project for labor insertion of people with intellectual and mixed disabilities.

In 2006 the first plant nursery was created in Maringá (State of Paraná), which produces 35 thousand seedlings per year, and in 2014, due to the good results of the first one, a second nursery was created in the city of Rolândia, in the same State, which produces 15 thousand seedlings. These, all belonging to native species, are then donated completely free of charge to reforest degraded forest areas and also, in some specific cases, to urban areas.

There are currently 23 people with disabilities employed in Maringá, plus two who are about to enter, and 11 in Rolândia, accompanied by an instructor for each nursery. The instructors are hired full-time, while the employees work part-time, participating the other half-day in the educational activities of the APAE.

The value of the wage is higher than the minimum wage defined by the unions, and employees enjoy health plans, food vouchers and participation in the results of the cooperative. The participating workers, according to the person interviewed, are very committed and aware of the contribution of their work to the defense of the environment.

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The selection of the workers, who are not members of the cooperative, takes place in a first stage by the APAE, in a second stage with the support of a psychologist commissioned by Cocamar. Being that it is a manual job it is not possible to hire very physically compromised people. The workers in the nurseries are largely men, and 90% of the people hired at the beginning (2006 and 2014 respectively) remain in their jobs today.

Three of them went on to work in the cooperative's industrial park, thus having another opportunity for paid employment.

The objective of the Cultivar program is part of a strategy (of an environmental and social inclusion nature through protected work) that is an integral part of the work of the cooperative, which is why there is already talk of a very well-structured program and not a project, which would imply a certain temporality of the intervention.



Source: <https://cocamar.com.br/pagina/projeto-cultivar>

Cooperativa La Terre

Mendoza, Argentina

The La Terre cooperative, unlike what happens with the other cases analyzed that consist of essentially agricultural cooperatives, is a worker cooperative that derives from the recovery of a company whose bankruptcy put the work of dozens of workers at risk.

The J. Matas Industries, which had a more than 50 years trajectory, were declared bankrupt in 2014, although since 2001 they began to have economic and financial problems, with repercussions on company workers who had to face the reduction of their salaries, the cancellation of their mandatory bonuses and the fact that they did not have their payments for social security and medical coverage.



Source: Cooperativa la Terre Facebook page

In 2011 there was a first takeover of the plant facilities, due to non-payment of wages. The conflict was

resolved in a few days, but this first event meant that since 2012 the workforce declared itself in a state of permanent alert, surveilling the establishment, which prevented the emptying of the factory. In 2014 the La Terre Work Cooperative was founded, with 14 members, a few months before the establishment was declared bankrupt.

The founding of the cooperative, protected by provincial law 8708, was declared of public utility and the cooperative was granted temporary occupation for two years. This law has been renewed and is still in force. The cooperative managed to start production with 14 worker-members in 2016. However, in 2019 the cooperative had to face an illegal auction process because Judge Gloria Cortez was unaware of the validity of framework law 8874 of temporary occupation for all cooperatives and companies recovered from Mendoza.

The cooperative has been growing in terms of production, guaranteeing 120 jobs in 2022 with 4800 tons of processed vegetables and 20 types of processed products (at the beginning, in 2015, the only product was dehydrated spinach). The cooperative now produces several dehydrated vegetables, as well as pre-prepared meals that offer advantages in terms of conservation, preparation and nutritional value, thus adapting to community cafeterias, institutions and vulnerable sectors.

An interviewee comments on the trajectory of the cooperative up until today:

“When the cooperative was born and we started working in 2016 nobody saw us as a cooperative, nobody believed in a cooperative that was just starting. It took very hard work from people who are not in the cooperative and who helped us a lot, many good people came through, they helped us bring back their customers and they believed in the cooperative. That is why today the cooperative is very well named, let’s say, and we have

excellent kids who are helping us, young people, so the factory is credible, even more so now that we started with the pre-prepared meals.” *Neli*.

The prepared food packs are also distributed through an agreement signed with the Mendoza Food Bank. In 2020, in the most critical phase of the pandemic, with 40% of the province’s inhabitants under the poverty line and 23,000 registered jobs lost, La Terre not only did not lose jobs, but also organized a campaign to produce and donate food for soup kitchens throughout the province (called “*Campaña Racioná*” (Ration Campaign)).

Several businesses of the social and popular economy operate within the property of the cooperative, constituting the so-called “Productive Pole of cooperative development”, which also offers training centers and, as typically happens in the recovered companies, the factory space becomes not only a workspace managed by its workers, but also a social, cultural and meeting space for the community (*Vieta, 2010*).

The cooperative is also in the process of creating oppor-

tunities for small vegetable producers in the province, in order to strengthen solidarity value chains that also guarantee respect for the environment.

1. OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISADVANTAGED PRODUCERS	
2. TRANSPARENCY AND RESPONSABILITY	
4. FAIR WAGES	7. GOOD WORK CONDITIONS
5. NOT TO CHILD LABOR NO TO FORCED LABOR	8. DEVELOP ABILITIES
6. NO A LA DISCRIMINACIÓN, IGUALDAD DE GÉNERO, LIBERTAD DE ASOCIACIÓN	9. PROMOTE FAIR TRADE
	10. RESPECT THE ENVIRONMENT



Cooperativa La Terre: fight against eviction (Facebook page Cooperativa La Terre)

3

Case Analysis

The analysis of the four cases presented allows us to show some trends and strategies of agricultural cooperatives in the creation of decent work, both complementary and different from each other, although it is not possible to generalize the considerations illustrated here given the small size of the sampling.

jectives in this regard, and the main actors that have been supporting the process of development and implementation of the projects themselves. Cooperatives have different strategies to promote better working conditions, focusing on different objectives and sectors, depending on the context and the main challenges they face.

Table 1 shows the specific projects of the cooperatives analyzed for the creation of decent work, their main ob-

Therefore, we see how CoopeTarrazú and Villa Rica Golden Coffee focus their action mainly on the rights

Cooperative	Products	Decent Work Project	Main objective	Actors Involved
CoopeTarrazú (Costa Rica)	Coffee (fair trade certificate) Coffee by-products	Casas de la Alegría (Houses of Joy)	Childcare to improve conditions for day workers and migrants.	Fairtrade Seal, Ministry of Health and other state institutions, UNICEF
Villa Rica Golden Coffee (Perú)	Coffee (organic and conventional, fair trade certified)	Free of Child Labor Seal	Elimination of hazardous forms of child labour	Ministry of Labor and Employment Promotion NGO Development and Self-Management
Cocamar (Brasil)	Corn, soy, other processed products (biofuels, drinks, alcohol, etc.)	Proyecto Cultivar (Cultivate Project)	Labor integration of people with disabilities	APAES (Associations of Parents and Friends of the Exceptional)
La Terre (Argentina)	Dehydrated vegetables Prepared meals	In and of itself it is a project to create decent work	Self-managed job creation	(Provincial Law 8708) Support from different civil society actors (university, other recovered companies, local community)

Table 1

of children, with childcare to improve the conditions of migrant workers and eradication of child labor primarily, and with the eradication of dangerous forms of child labor as a second objective.

Cooperatives have different strategies to promote better working conditions, focusing on different objectives and sectors, depending on the context and the main challenges they face.

Therefore, we see how CoopeTarrazú and Villa Rica Golden Coffee focus their action mainly on the rights of children, with childcare to improve the conditions of migrant workers and eradication of child labor primarily, and with the eradication of dangerous forms of child labor as a second objective.

The case of CoopeTarrazú includes equal opportunities and treatment in employment, improving the conditions of workers under conditions of disadvantage such as being migrant workers and with a significant percentage of people belonging to indigenous communities.

In addition, thanks to the intervention of *Casas de la Alegría*, there are fundamental improvements in the work and family life balance of parents, however, we are referring to workers who live in conditions of extreme poverty, especially in the case of indigenous workers who are a highly vulnerable population, who also suffers racism and abuse due to lack of knowledge of Spanish or lack of immigration documentation.

Offering children dignified care services prevents them from remaining in the so-called “potholes” (camps where migrant workers are housed during the harvest, in most cases in precarious conditions and without basic water and electricity services (*systematization of*

Casas de la Alegría, 2020), or in the coffee plantations. This protects children from the risk of being left unsupervised in the camps or exposed to extreme weather conditions and insect or snake bites in the coffee plantations. It also protects them from the risk of falling into forms of child labor, both under the care of younger relatives or in the fields.

The presence of the *Casas de la Alegría* also promotes greater protection of children’s rights, safeguarding their right to health, education, food, play, protection, and non-discrimination. It is important to highlight the fact that the idea behind the project is not to separate children from their families, since, as detailed in the UNICEF report on *Casas de la Alegría* (although it refers to the origins of the project, which was later adapted by CoopeTarrazú that, contrary to what happens with the cooperative Coopesabalito, it does not operate with a majority of Panamanian migrant indigenous population):

“[The project arises] from finding a solution that is not an emotional burden for the family (taking away their children), because they are people who come from a critical situation in Panama, when they come to Costa Rica it is a time of prosperity. The attention strategy then had to be propositional and favorable towards them (*Contreras, 2018, systematization of Casas de la Alegría, 2020*)”.

This consideration of the fact of implementing actions that are propositional and favorable for working families can be extended to the *Semilla* project and its origin in the Free of Child Labor Seal developed in Peru thanks to the NGO Development and Self-Management in conjunction with the Ministry of Labor.

According to the people interviewed from Development and Self-Management and the Villa Rica Golden Coffee Cooperative, it is evident how the idea, often assumed by the population of the upper-middle class of the global north or the global south, of viewing child labor as

a plague that has to be eradicated in its entirety, finds little confirmation in reality. In fact, the analysis shows how the main challenge has to be the eradication of hazardous forms of child labor. This is because the work of these children represents a sustenance and a fundamental contribution in certain contexts, especially rurally, and therefore it is important that this does not become the children's main occupation.

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Guaranteeing the rights of these children is essential, in this case most importantly the right to enjoy enough time for education and play, where work is an activity that can take up less time and in conditions of total safety and that do not imply physical and emotional exhaustion for the children. The interviews, as detailed above and as is representative with respect to the example of the use of the machete, highlighted the aspect of the initial difficulty of reaching families and communities in regard to the eradication of child labor, in a context where this type of work cannot be eradicated in its entirety, but rather adapted to conditions that respect children's rights, but ensure that fundamental contribution to the families of the minors.

In the case of the Cultivar project, the fundamental dimension connected with decent work is non-discrimination and labor insertion that goes together with the social inclusion of vulnerable people such as people

with disabilities, however the number of employees operating in the project (less than forty) still appears quite small compared to the size of the cooperative which has about 16 thousand associates.

The favorable aspects and potential of this project lie in the close connection with APAE, which guarantees the best working conditions and follow-up for the people inserted, and the fact that it is a program that has a positive environmental impact, thus having a relapse at the level of awareness of the members of the cooperative about the negative impact that certain types of intensive agriculture can have.

Seeing the main dimensions of decent work detailed above, we can also highlight the fact that having adequate income, considering the salary is above minimum wage and there are food vouchers and health insurance, will allow workers with disabilities to have their own income which at the socioeconomic level increases their capacity for emancipation and on an emotional stance increases their level of confidence and self-esteem, all aspects that can positively impact other areas of their social life.

The case of the La Terre Cooperative highlights more transversal aspects related to decent work, being that the cooperative itself, unlike what happens in other cases, does not have a specific project outside its activities, but all its action and history point in the direction of generating decent work opportunities for its members and workers

This experience then addresses the ability to generate employment opportunities in a context affected by the bankruptcy of a traditional company associated with a strong risk of unemployment and pauperization, representing a form of social inclusion through decent work that promotes equality. The collective action of the recovery of the company aims to have jobs characterized by adequate income and hours, generating decent in-

come for the people who work there and encourage the participation of associates in decision-making.

The favorable aspects and potential of this project lie in the close connection with APAE, which guarantees the best working conditions and follow-up for the people inserted.

It should be noted that in the case analyzed only a small part of the workers are associated with the cooperative, which can be explained by the constant difficulties for their survival, which La Terre has had to face. However, it is to be expected that the number of associates will increase as their economic and social achievements progress. It is also necessary to emphasize the relationship that, as usually happens in recovered companies, is established openly with the community in which the cooperative is located, incorporating various forms of non-commercial interaction with its social environment and generating opportunities for exchange that have a positive relapse both for the cooperative in terms of support, as for the community itself.

4

Conclusions

The analysis of the cases presented has made it possible to highlight how agricultural cooperatives operate different strategies to generate decent work that are represented in: i) corporate social responsibility programs, as in the case of the *Cultivar* program or the *Casas de la Alegría*; ii) in certifications, as in the case of the Free of Child Labor Seal, and to some extent the Fair Trade Seal, which guarantees in the case of CoopeTarrazú and Villa Rica Golden Coffee certain labor standards of employees; iii) or in processes of struggle and self-management to generate employment opportunities that carry in themselves characteristics of the concept of decent work, as in the case of La Terre.

It is also possible to observe how cooperatives focus on the most disadvantaged categories of workers to protect them and facilitate their socioeconomic inclusion. This is evident if we think of the eradication of child labor that goes together with the protection of children's rights, of labor insertion of workers with disabilities, of the support of migrant and indigenous working parents, of the struggles by people at high risk of unemployment and pauperization to recover a company.

Another point to highlight is the capacity of cooperatives to weave strategic alliances to implement their projects and specific actions to generate decent work opportunities. Partnerships are established both with public sector actors (Ministry of Health in the case of Costa Rica, Ministry of Labor in the case of Peru, local government institutions in the case of Argentina) and with collective actors of organized civil society (the NGO Development and Self-Management in the case of Peru, the Association of Parents and Friends of the Exceptional in the case of Brazil), with international non-governmental organizations, such as UNICEF in the case of *Casas de la Alegría*, and also with actors of non-organized civil society as in the case of the constant support received by La Terre in Argentina and its joint work with local vegetable producers who provide the raw materials for desiccation in the plant.

The cooperatives analyzed demonstrate constant attention to the communities in which they operate, respecting and giving value in this sense to the seventh cooperative principle. In general terms, they assist in care for their associated producers, with constant presence and support toward generating jobs in Casas de la Alegría for indigenous and migrant women, in constant action to develop tools along with families to eradicate dangerous forms of child labor like in the case of Peru, in helping the environment with the donation of seedlings for reforestation like in the case of Brazil, in the exchange of spaces, events and experiences like in the case of Argentina, where the community plays a fundamental role for the struggle and survival of the recovered company.

Another point to highlight is the capacity of cooperatives to weave strategic alliances to implement their projects and specific actions to generate decent work opportunities.

It can also be evidenced, as detailed in table 2, how the economic objectives and the generation of decent work are accompanied by social, environmental, community objectives, all crucial aspects for the generation of virtuous processes both within cooperatives and in the relations between cooperatives and their environments. ►

Objectives	CoopeTarrazú	Villa Rica Golden Coffee	Cocamar	La Terre
Social	Support for workers' families through Casas de la Alegría	Elimination of hazardous forms of child labor	Labor inclusion of people with disabilities	Generate employment for people at risk of unemployment
Environmental	Certified organic coffee production	Certified organic coffee production	Production and donation of seedlings for reforestation of degraded areas	Alliances are being generated with local producers of organic vegetables
Community	Generation of jobs in the Casas de la Alegría and assent of children of the communities	Work to sensitize families on the risks of child labor	Constant dialogue with communities to mitigate the negative impacts of intensive agriculture	Constant exchange with the local community (spaces, events, support in the struggle of the coop from the community)

Table 2

Finally, it is important to highlight the limitations of the study which cannot generalize the results due to the small number of cases and the fact that it has not been possible to carry out a more in-depth study of the organizations, including visits and a greater number of interviews, due to limitations of time, resources and the pandemic situation. However, the cases analyzed show

the potential of agricultural cooperatives to promote processes for improvement of working conditions and inclusion and labor insertion of people in situations of socioeconomic disadvantage. Hopefully these types of processes will be reinforced where they are still most fragile, and that they can be an example for other cooperative organizations in the sector.

5

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