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Celebrating Communities of Cooperative Building

By [Tom Carter](#) on November 1st 2012 in [USAID Blog](#)

As we come to the end of the **Year of the Cooperatives**, we celebrate our very own [USAID Cooperative Development Program](#) (CDP). By helping to solve governance, management and technical challenges, USAID and our partners aid cooperatives in their efforts to create lasting impacts for their members, their communities and their nation.



So what exactly is a cooperative? Believe it or not, you may know about more cooperatives than you think. Cooperatives are businesses with a difference: they are user-owned businesses that aim to satisfy members' needs, generate profit and increase development within communities. They are a part of everyday life in the U.S. and abroad. We save at credit unions, buy hardware at Ace and True Value, purchase our camping gear from REI, spread Land O'Lakes butter on our potatoes from Maine Potato Growers, drink Welch's or Ocean Spray juice, enjoy a Sunkist orange while we snack on Blue Diamond almonds or Sun Maid raisins while reading an Associated Press article.

But more importantly, **Cooperatives directly benefit the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people** around the world with millions of jobs, 20 percent of them being international businesses. To support enduring cooperatives, USAID, between 1998 and 2010, funded 184 agricultural projects to strengthen agricultural value networks that included cooperatives, associations, groups and collective action organizations.

Cooperatives impact and improve lives at every socio-economic level, and promote gender equality. In Paraguay, where it is common for women to be economically exploited and not receive pay for their labor and where male family members routinely are credited with the actual labor a woman expends, ultimately marginalizing the impact of support for their families.

Claudina Portillo rose above these challenges and initiated her own woman-owned cooperative. The Guaaibi Poty Cooperative exports bananas and pineapple to Argentina. To assist Claudina and the women in the cooperative, USAID's Cooperative Development Program (CDP) partnered with [ACDI/VOCA](#) and trained members of 15 cooperatives, including Portillo's, on how to overcome gender issues and fight poverty.

Session after session, with interest in her cooperative membership growing, Portillo established a youth subcommittee cooperative addressing the need for future farmers. With USAID's CDP

program, gender barriers were eroded; the cooperatives' membership increased and Portillo's dream of establishing a family-oriented cooperative to support the community became a reality.

However, cooperative development doesn't end here. As we come to an end to the Year of Cooperatives, we will continue to increase awareness about the various cooperative development projects being implemented nationwide . We look forward to having many more years of developing and implementing [sustainable cooperative programs](#) across the world. View more [stories about cooperatives](#) or watch the [video](#).