

Received: 04/27/2021

Accepted: 06/11/2022

## **COOPERATIVISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: AGENDA FOR RACIAL AND GENDER EQUITY**

## **COOPERATIVISMO E OBJETIVOS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL: AGENDA PARA EQUIDADE RACIAL E DE GÊNERO**

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### **Abstract**

The International Cooperative Alliance (ACI) adhered to the United Nations agenda to promote sustainable development until 2030. Among the 17 established commitments, we chose gender equality and the reduction of inequalities to reflect on the promotion of equity in Brazilian cooperativism. Documentary research is used as a methodology, having as main source the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives' (OCB) yearbooks and content analysis of the news published about the subject by the OCB. The research reveals the absence of data on racial belonging and the information inconsistency on gender in the yearbooks. However, it is clear that women are in an adverse position in the activity and occupy less managerial positions, as well as the reproduction of the sexual division of labor. Women have a greater presence in branches related to care, but they are few in agriculture and infrastructure. Based on these results, we propose a work agenda that includes the production of statistics disaggregated by gender and racial belonging; encourages the production of academic-scientific knowledge about gender and race in cooperativism, and creates working groups to think about policies to combat inequality in the sector.

**Keywords:** Coop Agenda, Diversity, Equity, Development, SDGs.

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## Resumo

A Aliança Cooperativa Internacional (ACI) aderiu a agenda das Nações Unidas para promover o desenvolvimento sustentável até 2030. Entre os 17 compromissos estabelecidos, elegemos igualdade de gênero e redução das desigualdades para refletir sobre a promoção da equidade no cooperativismo brasileiro. Utiliza-se como metodologia a pesquisa documental, tendo como principal fonte os anuários da Organização das Cooperativas Brasileiras (OCB), e análise de conteúdo das notícias publicadas sobre o tema pela OCB. A pesquisa revela a ausência de dados sobre pertencimento racial e inconstância de informação sobre gênero nos anuários. Contudo, percebe-se que as mulheres estão em posição desfavorável na atividade e ocupam menos cargos de dirigentes, assim como se observa a reprodução da divisão sexual do trabalho. As mulheres têm presença maior nos ramos relacionados ao cuidado, mas são poucas no agropecuário e infraestrutura. Baseado nesses resultados, propomos uma agenda de trabalho que contemple a produção de estatística desagregada por gênero e pertencimento racial; estímulo à produção de conhecimento acadêmico-científico sobre gênero e raça no cooperativismo, e criação de grupos de trabalho para pensar políticas de enfrentamento à desigualdade no setor.

**Palavras-chave:** Agenda Coop, Diversidade, Equidade, Desenvolvimento, ODS.

## Introduction

The United Nations (UN) established in 2015 a plan to promote sustainable development, providing for actions to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and improve life quality. The 2030 Agenda, as it is known, is made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>5</sup> that cover a wide range of interventions in the environmental, educational, economic and social areas. This agenda was joined by the International Cooperative Alliance, which was committed to encourage cooperatives, through the *Coops for 2030 campaign*, to incorporate the SDGs into their practices (ACI, 2019).

Cooperativism, as an activity formally committed to economic and social development, is considered to be in line with the SDGs as it is guided by principles of “equity, solidarity, democratic management, commitment to the environment and which constitute a set of guidelines that value human beings over capital” (FERNANDEZ-GUADAÑO, LOPEZ-MILLAN, SARRIA-PEDROZA, 2020, LIMA, 2012). These authors end up establishing a direct relationship between the guiding values and their incorporation in the management of these organizations. However, different studies indicate that, even potentially favorable, cooperatives do not represent spaces that are more egalitarian for women, for example, contradicting their own organizational principles (VIDAL, 2019 and MEIRA, MARTINHO and CASTRO, 2020).

If we expand the search for researches that deal with aspects related to racial diversity, the invisibility of inequities is even bigger. In this sense, the perspective based only on normative values presents fragility for not problematizing and bringing analyzes of specific contexts on how and if the principles are introduced in cooperative praxis. Furthermore, it is important to consider that organizational culture assimilates local characteristics (TORQUATO, 2012)<sup>6</sup>, this means reflecting on how cooperativism deals with the racism and the sexism that permeate and structure relationships in Brazilian society.

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<sup>5</sup>The Sustainable Development Goals are: 1) Poverty eradication; 2) Zero Hunger and Sustainable Agriculture; 3) Health and well-being; 4) Quality education; 5) Gender equity; 6) Clean water and sanitation; 7) Clean and affordable energy; 8) Decent work and economic growth; 9) Infrastructure innovation; 10) Reduction of inequalities; 11) Sustainable cities and communities; 12) Responsible consumption and production; 13) Action against global climate change; 14) Life in the water; 15) Terrestrial life; 16) Peace, justice and effective institutions; 17) Partnerships and means of implementation. Available at: <https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/sdgs>

<sup>6</sup> For Torquato (2012), the organizational culture is formed by four main characteristics: 1) Historical aspect: the experience over the years weighs on the community, radiates values and internal cohesion; 2) Technical nature of the company: the services and products produced contributes to shaping behaviors, 3) Organizational management model: companies tend to have differentiated management according to family control, self-management, etc. and, finally 4) Geographic Osmosis: incorporation of regional characteristics due to the proximity of the company.

In this path that points out the need to consider local particularities, thinking about the 2030 Agenda and the actions of the Coops campaign for 2030 for the Brazilian scenario demands taking race and gender as markers of social inequality (CARNEIRO, 2011; BENTO, 2016; ALMEIDA, 2019). This means that the promotion of development needs to incorporate these two variables: gender and race. The objective of this article is to analyze how gender equality (SDG 5) and inequality reduction (SDG 10) have been incorporated into the Coops agenda for 2030 and to contribute to stimulate this debate, which is still incipient in Brazilian cooperativism. It is important to emphasize that the analysis covers information from cooperatives linked to the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB), which represents the largest share of these organizations in the country, but it is not the only one. Brazilian cooperativism is heterogeneous in terms of management of ideological principles and guidelines, keeping specificities in relation to the profile of its members, structuring and representation<sup>7</sup>(GAIGER, 2013).

The text unfolds into three sections. The first discusses the link between SDGs, cooperativism and the promotion of equity, then the methodology is presented and, finally, the discussion of the results.

### Sustainable Development Goals, equity and cooperativism

The concepts and ways of measuring the development of countries changed throughout the 20th century under the influence of different areas of knowledge, social movements and treaties of multilateral organizations. The ambition related to “sustainable development”, commonly established as a commitment to future generations, was assimilated by the international community, mainly through the United Nations (UN), in the late 1980s (VEIGA, 2015).

Criticism of the emphasis on economic growth associated with scientific evidence about the limits of nature and the advancement of the debate on human rights contributed to the understanding that development must incorporate, in its elaboration, social and environmental justice (VEIGA, 2015). Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize in Economics and author of the series of lectures that gave rise to the work “Development as Freedom”, emphasizes the importance of effective opportunities for people and the elimination of substantive deprivations of liberty, caused by, among other factors, the poverty conditions, lack of access to public services, discrimination, intolerance or repression of totalitarian States (SEN, 2010).

In the case of gender, it is important to highlight the disparity historically assigned to women in terms of access to goods and services, social and legal treatment when compared to men, especially white and upper class men. Thus, 'the gender system' is a social model capable of shaping identities and behaviors. In the approach established by the United Nations, Giannini (2019, p. 97) points out that two systems are crossed: gender balance and gender mainstreaming. Gender balance “refers to the possibility that men and women can effectively participate in all activities associated with the UN” and “gender mainstreaming refers to actions dedicated to understanding the impact that policies, actions, strategies and other events have on a gender group”.

According to Giannini (2019), with the founding of the United Nations, the recognition of gender equality as a fundamental international right happens, supported by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), created in 1947, and others such as the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979). In 1976, the “UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace” was established, with the sequence of four conventions about women, with emphasis on Beijing (1995), the first international event in which the word gender was used. In 1976, organizations dedicated to combating gender disparity, such as UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund, currently known as “UN Women”), emerged within the UN itself.

As well as addressing the issue of gender, the promotion of racial equity has been incorporated by the UN, the proponent agency of the 2030 Agenda, which advocates the need for measures to promote racial justice. One of the most relevant documents is that of the 2001 Durban Conference against *Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*. A convention similar to the one made by UN was carried out by the Organization of American States (OAS) which advances in attributing responsibility for the practice of racism and implementation of

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<sup>7</sup> In 2014, Unicoopas (National Union of Solidarity Cooperative Organizations) was founded, formed by four national organizations: Unisol Brasil, Unicafe, Concrab and Unicatadores. The entity places itself in the role of representing the “solidary cooperativism” closest to the Solidary Economy debates. The profile of its members and the emphasis or not on the SDG guidelines will not be discussed in this article.

racism to the private sector as well, not only to the State, to overcome it and promote equity. According to the convention, it is up to public and private entities to:

[...] promote affirmative actions, also known as material equality, equality of opportunities; prioritizes the state and private obligation to promote racial equality, placing the punishment of racial discrimination at an accessory level; it equates the responsibility of the private sector with the responsibility of the public sector (CEERT, 2016. p. 5-6).

In order to mobilize a global pact around agendas considered important for the new 21st century, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), established by the UN for the term from 2000 to 2015, already had among their goals aspects related to equality between gender and environmental quality of life (VEIGA, 2015; DEERE, 2018), but without any mention of racial discrimination.

Although the MDGs were an important articulation, focusing mainly on issues related to hunger, infant mortality and some diseases, it was observed that, in general, their goals were still limited in the face of global complexities and its very development comprehension. The reformulation of these objectives was done in a more participatory way, which significantly expanded the set of guidelines incorporated in the SDGs (VEIGA, 2015).

Veiga (2015) considers that, unlike the MDGs, which established precise goals, the Sustainable Development Goals present claims that have brought immense political and cognitive advances and certain inaccuracies, which do not affect their historical importance, but imply their practical action. In the same direction, Deere (2018) states that, even with the recognition of its limitations, the 2030 Agenda has a notable feature as it is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, integrating these rights into a global pact for development, encompassing economic, social, political and environmental dimensions. In this same perspective, González (2019, p. 20) states that “the SDGs try to be the political and social response to pressures for greater global economic integration, with the implication of all States and, seeking political and social homogenization in a world in a wide globalization process”<sup>8</sup>.

We can see through SDG 5 that there is a wide scope planning to overcome the inequalities faced by women and girls at a global level. Furthermore, to place women issue as a centralized agenda, it is necessary to recognize the problematic situations of the gender inequality reality, but without fragmenting it in relation to other inequalities, such as race and class, promoting a transversality of the gender perspective along the other objectives (GONZÁLEZ, 2019).

As previously mentioned, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) adhered to the Sustainable Development Goals, highlighting the cooperatives potential, worldwide, in promoting the SDGs, since the mission and institutional values of these organizations are aligned with the pretensions of the 2030 Agenda.

In different documents produced by the ICA and the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives<sup>9</sup>(COPAC), it is highlighted that:

Cooperatives can strengthen the means of implementation toward the achievement of the SDGs. With their values and principles such as democratic ownership, transparency and accountability, cooperatives can be key partners in making development processes and institutions more effective and participatory. Principle six of the seven cooperative principles is ‘cooperation among cooperatives.’<sup>3</sup> In implementing this principle, cooperatives have created multiple partnerships within the cooperative movement. The seventh cooperative principle “concern for community” drives cooperatives to work for the sustainable development of their communities through actions approved by their members. (COPAC, 2021, p. 2)

In this sense, we consider that race and gender are central categories for the promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Brazil. Social indicators reveal how racism and sexism

<sup>8</sup> In the original: “los ODS tratan de ser la respuesta política y social a las presiones para una mayor integración económica global, con implicación de todos los Estados y, buscando la homogeneización política y social en un mundo en amplio proceso de globalización” (GONZÁLEZ, 2019, p. 20)

<sup>9</sup> COPAC is a multi-stakeholder partnership of global public and private institutions that promotes and advances people-centered, self-sustaining cooperative enterprises, guided by the principles of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – in all aspects of its work. The Committee’s current members are the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Co-operative Alliance and the World Farmers’ Organisation (COPAC, 2021, p.7).

place black people<sup>10</sup> and women as the most vulnerable groups in the country. In the labor market, for example, inequality “remains present in all 11 levels of education, including the highest: white people earn about 45% more than black or brown people” (idem). Black people and women, although they are the majority in Brazilian society, are at a disadvantage and occupy, respectively, 29.9% and 39.1% of managerial positions (IBGE, 2019 and 2018).

This scenario that characterizes Brazil has not been a cause for concern in academic research related to cooperativism. The invisibility of these agendas (SDGs 5 and 10) can help us understand that, although “potential and favorable”, gender and racial equality still need to advance in these organizational structures and in research on the subject. The situation is illustrated by the fact that the *Revista de Gestão e Organizações Cooperativas (RGC)*<sup>11</sup>, the main national journal for publishing knowledge production in this field, has only published one article that discusses gender and race since its first edition in 2014. Cardoso and Lopes (2021) points out the absence of racial and gender diversity in the communication of three credit cooperative systems in their text.

A similar situation can be verified in the researches presented at the Brazilian Researchers in Cooperativism Meeting (EBPC). Created in 2010, the event had five editions held in 2021, three of which made the presented works available online<sup>12</sup>, totalizing 211. Only five of them referred to gender studies and one about race and gender (CARDOSO, LOPES, 2021), which was found published in the journal RGC. The other studies brought different perspectives of gender in cooperativism. Júnior and Benevenuto (2012) address how the involvement of women in solidarity activities adds to their insertion in the market; Souza and Silva (2012) deal with work to qualify a group of women composed of mothers and daughters, in the products sale (residual oil and handmade soap), generating employment and income in the community; Pedroso and Nunes (2017), through a study carried out with six female presidents of cooperatives in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, observe the narratives of these women in regards to gender and leadership in cooperativism; and Siqueira and Melo (2019) analyze the challenges faced by women who occupy management positions, board of directors in three credit unions.

What are the justifications for the absence of the race or gender theme or that articulate both in researches on cooperativism? We have two hypotheses for this question: the first is endogenous to the activity and it concerns the naturalization of principles, as if the existence of these values represented their incorporation. It means seeing cooperativism as a plural activity. Nevertheless, cooperatives take part on a racist society, such as the Brazilian one, in which race has served to inferiorize some groups and value European ancestry. In this context, Nembhard (2020) affirms “co-ops can’t automatically be anti-racist [anti-chauvinism]. We have to deliberately promote and practice racial [and gender] equity—and deliberately unlearn racist [chauvinistic] attitudes and stereotypes”.

The second hypothesis refers to the national culture that incorporated the myth of racial democracy that, according to Hasenbalg (1995, p.369) this “notion of myth to qualify 'racial democracy' is used here in the sense of illusion or deception and it is intended to pointing to the distance between representation and reality, the existence of prejudice, discrimination and racial inequalities and their negation in the discursive plane”. In cooperativism, this can be seen as a discourse of plurality or even in the absence of information about the racial belonging of the cooperative members and workers, a posture that leads us to infer that race is not considered a relevant variable to think about equity policies in dialogue with the SDGs<sup>13</sup>.

## Methodology

This article combined two methodological procedures: documentary research and content analysis. Documentary research aims to analyze primary documentary sources and extract information from them, as in feasible documents, where the historical context, authenticity, authorship and nature of the text are evaluated (SÁ-SILVA; ALMEIDA; GUINDANI, 2009). Content analysis, on the other hand, allows the interpretation of different types of materials, with objectivity

<sup>10</sup> In Brazil, black people are considered to be the sum of black and brown people. The racial categories used by IBGE are: white, brown, black, yellow and indigenous.

<sup>11</sup> We searched for the words woman, gender, race and racial in the title and abstract of the articles. Three articles appeared in the abstract, however two of them referred to gender as a variable of the survey respondents and they did not mention gender discussion, which is why they were not in the scope of the research.

<sup>12</sup>The first and third editions of the event do not have the works available on the websites of the organizing committee.

<sup>13</sup> In the next topic, we will analyze the yearbooks data.

and depth on the subject, going through the stages of exploration, treatment and interpretation of the results (SILVA; FOSSÁ, 2015).

Thus, the documents studied were the yearbooks of 2019 and 2020 of the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives (OCB), which are based on research done by the institution with affiliated cooperatives. The choice of OCB is due to the fact that it is a representative cooperatives body in Brazil and an important source for comprehending this movement in the country. In order to verify whether these reports provide information on the racial and gender variable belonging among the cooperative members and the employees who work in this activity, we chose the OCB material because it is the broadest document with information and statistical data on the different branches of national cooperativism. After analyzing the content, it will be highlighted whether the gender and racial distributions are represented and, if so, how it is done in the different branches of Brazilian cooperatives.

If, on one hand, the yearbooks make it possible to know the numbers of the sector and to think about policies to face inequalities, according to the commitment of the *Coops campaign for 2030*, the content analysis allows us to verify how the SDGs 5 and 10 that deal with gender equality and poverty reduction have been reported by the OCB. We searched for news published on the website of the organization studied by the acronym “ODS” and “Sustainable Development Goal” between 2018 and 2020. We found 65 news items (28 in 2020; 19 in 2019 and 22 in 2018). Most of them alluded to events, the Cooperate Day and other activities involving partnerships aligned with the SDGs. Only seven texts were associated with the topics covered in this work.

## Result and discussion

This section focuses on the exploration of yearbooks to perceive how gender and race appear in statistics to think about policies to combat inequality and reduce poverty and, later, it is dedicated to the analysis of published news about the SDGs analyzed in this work.

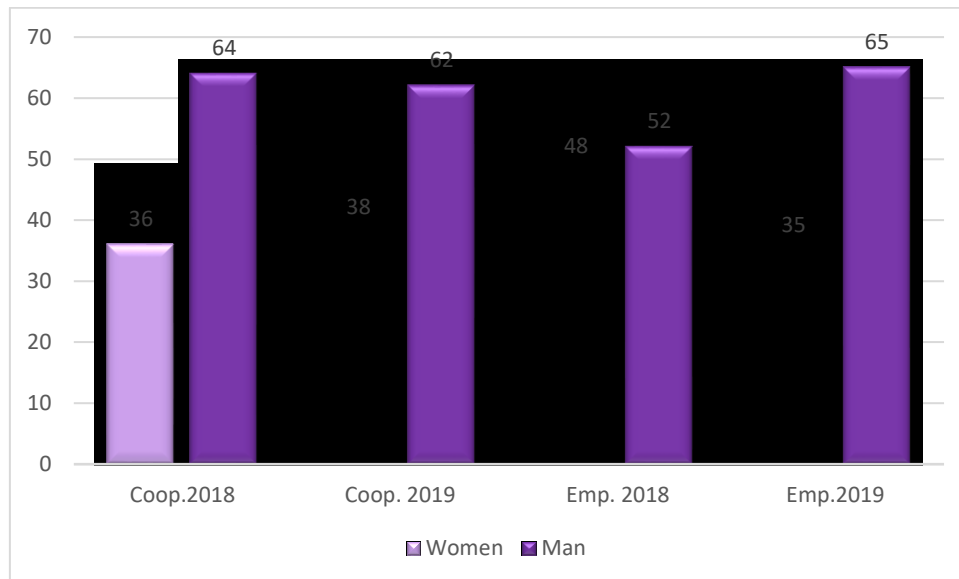
### Gender and race in the yearbooks

In the analyzed editions of the 2020 and 2019<sup>14</sup> OCB Yearbook, it is possible to verify the male overrepresentation both in the social framework and among workers of the sector (Graph 1). Men accounted for 48.2% of Brazilians (IBGE, 2018), however, they represented 62% of cooperative members and 65% of workers of the sector in 2019. In the previous year (2018) they corresponded respectively to 64% and 52% of the membership and workforce. Women, despite being the majority of the population, did not reach half of the positions in the two verified periods. Nevertheless, a small reduction in inequality can be seen with an increase in female participation by 2% in the constitution of the cooperatives' membership in 2019 compared to the previous year.

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<sup>14</sup> The OCB yearbook began to be published in 2019 and, until 2018, it published a management report, with less details than the current document.

**Graph 1:** Comparison of cooperative members and cooperativism employees in 2018 and 2019 by gender (%)



Source: Authors based on OCB Yearbook 2019 and 2020

With regard to employees in the sector, in 2018 there was greater parity between men and women, with men occupying 4% more positions than women. In the two years analyzed, there was a reduction from 48% to 35% of female cooperativism workers, while men had an increase from 52% to 65%.

In the 2020 yearbook, men accounted for 30% more of the workforce compared to women. This reflux of the female presence in the sector is aligned with what is observed in surveys that indicate that the female population is the most educated, 16.9% have college education compared to 13.5% among men (IBGE, 2018). These data help to understand the face of gender discrimination, even though women are the most prepared for the job market, they earn less and are the first to lose their jobs.

Another aspect that deserves to be observed in the yearbooks is the withdrawal of statistics on women. The last document (2020) did not provide information on directors by gender, while the one from 2019 showed that only 25% of management positions were held by female cooperative members (OCB, 2020). If we consider the 13% reduction in female workers in the sector, there must probably have been a significant decrease in the presence of women as leaders in these organizations.

How to think about the commitment to the SDGs and, above all, the promotion of equality without knowing where women are in cooperativism, their education, income, racial belonging and other relevant information to think about gender equality policies? For gender equity, we adopt the conception of Kaaber (2005, apud ACI, 2016, p. 10) who refers to “[...] an ideal state in which women are receiving and gaining access to the same benefits (stable employment, income, safe working conditions, leadership roles, and social mobility) as men”. This perspective can be broadened to refer to racial equity, in which black people would have the same conditions of access and social mobility as white people.

If statistics on female participation in cooperativism are inconsistent and, therefore, fragile, data on racial belonging are non-existent. The negligence in collecting data on race is usually associated with non-discrimination, that is, as if race was not a relevant variable. This practice is common in Brazil where it is “recognized the existence of race and racism, but structural components and other elements of race and racism are denied beyond an individual level and a visual reading, and the problems of racism are attributed to discussion or its recognition” (NOBLE and ROBERTS, 2020, p. 38).

The inexistence of the race issue is one of the ways of denying the existence of racism, as well as making it difficult for policies to be claimed, as highlighted in a document by Fenaj (2006):

The implementation of policies to promote racial equality requires, at an operational level, facing a basic problem: the (mis)information about color, both for workers or employees of a company or public agency, and for users of public and private services. .

It is worth remembering that the inclusion of the racial issue is an old claim in the black social movement that, in 1995, elaborated the Program for Overcoming Racism and Racial Inequality, handed to the Brazilian president at the time, Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

The document requested the inclusion “of the color issue in any and all information system on the population [...]. The creation of this database on the black population is fundamental for the formulation of specific public policies for all areas of interest in the racial issue” (SANTOS, 2014, p.132). Although this was a request made to the Brazilian State, nothing prevents cooperativism, as an activity concerned with the social development of society, from adding this information to the collection of the yearbooks data, especially since the adherence to the SDGs implies reducing poverty and promoting gender equity. Therefore, it means looking at the women situation as a heterogeneous social group and understanding the situation of black women within cooperativism.

Still regarding statistics, this seems to be a problem of international cooperativism. Researches funded by the ACI and developed by Duguid and Weber (2016) point to the scarcity of disaggregated and standardized data on female participation in this sector. The authors emphasize:

There is a lack of universal and/or standardized data about women and co-operatives. Without routinely collected sex-disaggregated data based on indicators reflecting women’s empowerment and gender equality – even the basics, such as number of female board members, number of female members, number of females employees, or number of females in leadership positions – it is difficult to grasp the complete picture of the individual co-operative, sector, geographical jurisdiction, or the co-operative movement as mechanisms for supporting women’s agency, empowerment, and gender equality. Additional gender indicators such as time use, paid and unpaid work, and wage differences are also valuable to understanding co-operatives’ role in gender equality and women’s empowerment. Without disaggregated gender data there can be no baseline from which to gauge success or areas that need improvement, no forecasting towards a gender equal future, and no benchmarking trends towards improved gender equality and women’s empowerment (DUGUID e WEBER, 2016, p.56).

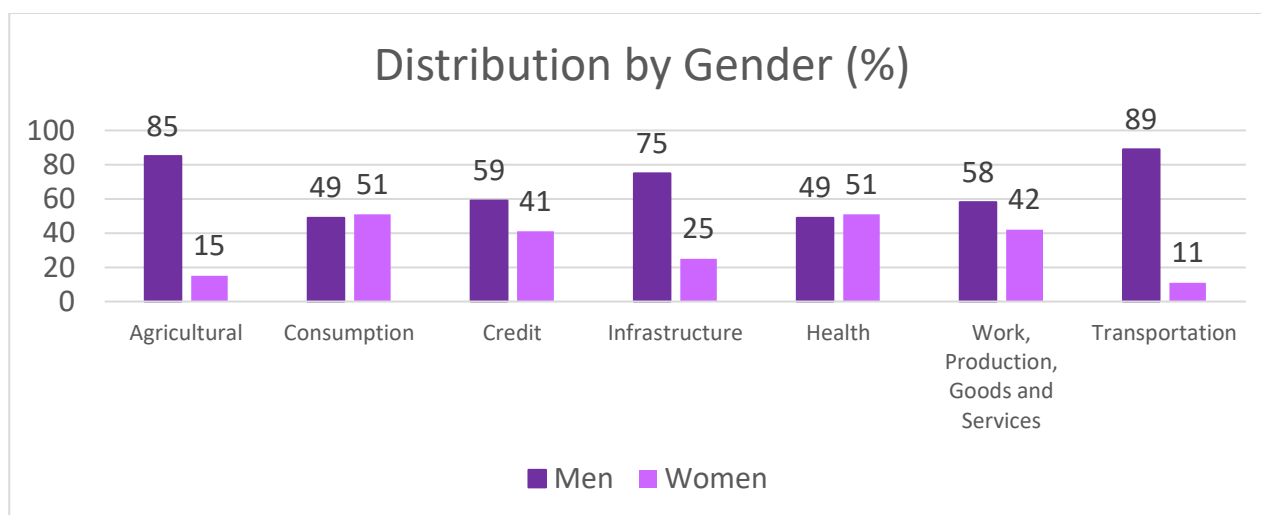
Knowing the profile and reality of women is relevant to promote equity. In the same direction, the UN, as a proponent of the 2030 Agenda, already expressed the need to produce data on gender at the end of the 20th century. “The equitable distribution of power and decision-making at all levels depends on governments and other actors carrying out statistical analyzes of gender and incorporating a gender perspective into the process of policy formulation and program execution” (UN WOMEN, 1995, p. 87).

### **Distribution of women and men in the branches of Cooperativism**

As highlighted in the previous item, the lack of adequate data on gender and the lack of information on racial belonging already demonstrate the importance given to the themes in the annual documents organized and published by the OCB. If we analyze the distribution of men and women by Branches of Cooperativism, other elements stand out in relation to gender debates. The data used in this section are based only on the 2020 yearbook due to the restructuring of the Branches carried out by the OCB, decreasing from 13 to 7: Production of Goods and Services; Infrastructure; Consumption; Transportation; Health, Agriculture; Credit.

When comparing the branches of cooperativism, the inequalities are even sharper than the total distribution between men and women presented before, as shown in the following chart:





Source: Authors based on OCB (2020)

Of the seven branches organized by the OCB, three of them stand out in relation to the differences in membership between men and women. The agricultural sector<sup>15</sup>, characterized in Brazil by encompassing large agribusiness cooperatives, brings together 1,223 cooperatives, reaching almost 922,111 cooperative members, with a female presence of only 15%. In the case of almost 210 thousand employees, female workers account only for 19%. These data may reveal not only inequality in the Brazilian countryside and the fact that women still have less land titles or have their work recognized. The Agricultural Census (2017) reveals that only 19% of rural landowners are women in Brazil, a rate below the world average, which is 30%, already considered critical by the UN for evidencing significant gender inequality (FAO, 2017).

In the case of the Infrastructure branch<sup>16</sup>, out of 265 cooperatives, the percentage of women in the membership reaches 25% of the total of 1,138,786 members and 21% of 7,315 employees. In this case, the low female participation may also relate to the characteristics of the professionals involved in this market, as in the case of engineering. Data from the 2019 Higher Education Census (2020) reinforce this argument if we analyze the indicators of graduates by gender in the areas of engineering, production and construction in which only 37.3% are female.

The Transport branch<sup>17</sup> is the one that presents the biggest difference in relation to the participation of women. Of the 1,093 cooperatives, only 11% of the 99,568 members are women and 36% of the 8,531 employees. Once again, the professional characteristic and the separation between genders in their occupation help to understand this sharp differentiation.

The credit<sup>18</sup> and work, production, goods and services<sup>19</sup> branches show rates in which women occupy respectively 41% and 42% of the membership. In credit unions, which are composed by 827 cooperatives and 10.7 million members, 49% of workers are women out of 71,700. Similarly, the cooperatives in the Work, Production and Goods and Services Branch<sup>20</sup> comprise 860 cooperatives, in 221,134 cooperative members, of which 58% are men and 42% women, and 9,759 employees, in this case, 45% are men and 55% women.

The only two branches in which the presence of women in the social framework is slightly higher are Consumption<sup>21</sup> and Health<sup>22</sup>, both with 51% of representation. In the case of consumption, there are 263 cooperatives with around 2 million members and 14,800 employees, with women accounting for 53%, that is, also the majority. In health, there are 783 cooperatives, of which 108,100

<sup>15</sup>The agricultural sector involves cooperatives that provide services, extractive, agro-industrial, aquaculture or fishing and in different production chains (OCB, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Cooperatives in the infrastructure sector include electricity distribution, basic sanitation, telecommunications, construction, irrigation and housing projects (OCB, 2020).

<sup>17</sup> In this branch, cooperative members must own the vehicle to provide cargo and/or passenger transport services, including motorcycles, taxis, vans, buses or trucks (OCB, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Organizations intended to provide financial services (OCB, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> They are cooperatives that provide specialized services and produce goods (OCB, 2020).

<sup>20</sup> They include cooperatives that provide specialized services to third parties and the production of goods (OCB, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> It encompasses cooperatives intended for the common purchase of products and/or services for their members, including educational ones, recently integrated into the branch (OCB, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> They involve cooperatives dedicated to providing or acquiring services focused on the preservation, assistance and promotion of human health (OCB, 2020).

are employees and 64% are women. It is very important to emphasize that these two segments comprise organizations with strong links with care tasks, whether educational cooperatives in the consumer sector, or nurses cooperatives or caregivers in health.

It is interesting to notice that, although there is a “more egalitarian” distribution, if we compare with the contingent of professionals trained in 2019, in the areas of “Education” and “Health and well-being”, we verify that the percentage of women is significantly higher, being 75.6% and 73.85%, respectively (HIGHER EDUCATION CENSUS, 2020). That is, even in spaces where we could have a more expressive presence of women, due to professional training, the cooperative members have greater participation in the social framework.

In this sense, aspects already found in the literature on the gender labor division that reflect the aspects of hierarchy and separation in the occupations assumed in the labor market between men and women seem to be very present in the conformation of the branches of cooperativism that have been studied. According to Hirata and Kergoat (2007)

The gender labor division is the form of division of social labor resulting from social relations between the genders; more than that, it is a priority factor for the survival of the social relationship between the genders. This form is modulated historically and socially. Its characteristics are the priority assignment of men to the productive sphere and women to the reproductive sphere and, simultaneously, the appropriation by men of functions with greater added social value (political, religious, military, etc.) (HIRATA, KERGOAT, 2007, p. 599).

Thus, there are specific jobs for women and specific jobs for men, the latter being the most valued (Ibidem, 2007). Lima (2012) in a study of a housing cooperative found that the “practical knowledge” that men have about tasks “recognized” as male related also operates in the construction of the gender labor division, where women should take care of “light work”.

### **Gender equity and poverty reduction in OCB communication**

In this final part, we make a non-exhaustive analysis of the news published by the OCB between 2018 and 2020. Sixty-five (65) publications were found, 75.4% of them are news that refer to disclosure, participation in events, meetings (43.1%) and about the C-Day (32.3%), among others. What interested us to see were the texts that deal with gender equity and poverty reduction, especially those that mention race and inequality. In the term studied, only seven news items were found, that is, 10% of the published texts addressed the respective themes.

**Table 1:** News about SDGs 5 and 10

Date	Title	Approach
07/10/2020	C-Day celebration shows strength of coops	Initial analysis of C-Day actions (general, pandemic, non-pandemic) by branch, SDG objectives (NOTE: 8 about gender; 208 about poverty eradication)
03/16/2020	ACI talks about equality and empowerment	ICA Message on International Women's Day; From several countries with information related to women in cooperativism
01/21/2020	<a href="#">Cooperative of Piauí receives support from UNDP</a>	Cooperative of artisan women, selected in a UNDP project in partnership with the Government of Piauí (ODS Piauí project)
07/16/2019	C-Day shows the strength of cooperatives in 400 cities	Celebration of the C-Day event and its partnership with the UN in combating world poverty by 2030
12/10/2018	<a href="#">Gender equality is key to the economy</a>	International Seminar on Gender and Cooperativism held by MAPA and OCB (Interview with Graciela Fernandez, president of ICA-Americas, talks about gender equality, the role of women in cooperativism)
10/29/2018	<a href="#">OCB participates in the 5th Summit of Cooperatives of the Americas</a>	Event with the theme: Cooperativism in the face of global challenges. (Graciela Fernandez became the first female president of ICA-Americas)
03/14/2018	<a href="#">Cooperatives are tasked with empowering women</a>	ICA Declaration on International Women's Day 2018 (Addresses on SDG 5 highlights the need for actions to promote equity).

Source: Authors based on OCB news

As it is possible to notice, there is no news that bring in the approach the association about poverty reduction and the development of actions to promote racial equity in cooperativism. The racial perspective is not adopted, which we consider a vulnerability of the sector to promote its values and, above all, the SDGs. The opposite can be seen about gender equity, the most frequent theme in publications. However, we perceive that the theme appears linked only to events and commemorative dates. Two texts talk about the promotion of equity related to events: “[Gender equality is fundamental for the economy](#)”, of the International Seminar on Gender and Cooperatives held by the Ministry of Agriculture and Supply (MAPA) and OCB, and “OCB participates in the 5th Summit of Cooperatives of the Americas ” which reflects on the challenges of cooperativism and highlights the first female president of ICA-Americas. Another four news focuses on C-Day and International Women's Day, as an example the text “[Cooperatives have the task of empowering women](#)”, which is an ICA declaration that highlights the need for cooperativism to promote gender equity actions.

The news published show a concept adopted by national cooperativism of promoting gender equity, which is very much associated with specific actions, such as events and commemorative dates. This seems to demonstrate that there are no actions or policies that seek to analyze and promote structural changes to empower women in cooperativism and in Brazilian society.

### Final notes to the creation of an agenda

The data provided by the OCB yearbooks explicitly show that women are at a disadvantage to men both among cooperative members and among workers. Data on the female presence by cooperativism branch lead to the interpretation that this activity reproduces the same gender pattern of Brazilian society, internally materializing the gender labor division, which restricts female participation to some segments. The yearbook (OCB, 2020) shows that women are minorities in branches/activities considered masculine (agriculture and infrastructure) and they appear as the main group in care activities (consumption and health).

The production of disaggregated statistics and historical series on women and black people within cooperativism shows itself an urgent need to think about policies to combat gender and racial inequality. Incorporation into the Coops Agenda for 2030 needs to be thought through concrete and

lasting political actions. The news published about the SDGs demonstrate that specific events and actions have been prioritized to the detriment of confronting inequality brought about by sexism and racism that prioritize social relations in the country, especially in the labor market and in the representation of women and black people in economic sectors, such as cooperativism.

Given the scenario, we suggest: 1) Production of statistics disaggregated by race and gender in cooperativism. This can be done by encouraging state Sescops to produce their yearbooks aligned with the collection of national data to have a national census of cooperativism that bring information about where women, black people and LGBTQ+ are in the sector, their education, income, between others; 2) Partnership with universities for knowledge production about gender and race, such as the Sescop/CNPq public notice (2018) that sought to stimulate research on the activity. However, the economic focus is in detriment of the social. Therefore, it would be better to think of a call with a social perspective that could serve guidance for policy implementation; 3) Creation of race and gender working groups to think about inclusion policies, affirmative actions, and others to reduce inequality in cooperativism.

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