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2012: The Year of the Cooperative

By Jessica Reeder

nyt

Friday, April 13 at 10:00am

What do coffee growers in Ethiopia, hardware store owners in America, and Basque entrepreneurs have in common? For one thing, many of them belong to cooperatives. By pooling their money and resources, and voting democratically on how those resources will be used, they can compete in business and reinvest the benefits in their communities.

The United Nations has named 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, and indeed, co-ops seem poised to become a dominant business model around the world. Today, nearly one billion people worldwide are cooperative member-owners. That's one in five adults over 15 — and it could soon be you.

Why Cooperatives?

Cooperatives have been around in one form or another throughout human history, but modern models began popping up about 150 years ago. Today's co-ops are collaboratively owned by their members, who also control the enterprise collaboratively by democratic vote. This means that decisions made in cooperatives are balanced between the pursuit of profit, and the needs of members and their communities. Most co-ops also follow the [Seven Cooperative Principles](#), a unique set of guidelines that help maintain their member-driven nature.

From their beginnings in England, cooperatives have spread throughout the world. In Ethiopia, cooperation helps women and men rise above poverty. In Germany, [half of renewable energy](#) is

owned by citizens. In America, 93 million credit union member-owners control \$920 billion in assets. In Japan, a sixth of the population belongs to a consumer co-op. And in Basque Country, a 50-year-old worker co-op has grown to become a multinational, cooperative corporation.

If a “multinational cooperative corporation” sounds strange to you, you’re not alone. The past century’s multinational corporations, in most cases, were anything but cooperative. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the business landscape was dominated by large, private corporations controlled by a small number of people; those corporations tended to pursue profit without consideration for people, the environment, and in many cases, ethics.

While 20th-century corporations were good at making money, the 21st century finds humanity in need of new business models that value sustainable growth and community benefit. The UN stands behind cooperative models, and in 2012 will dedicate its efforts to raising awareness of co-ops, helping them grow and influencing governments to support them legislatively.

Raising Cooperative Awareness

Cooperatives are more widespread than you might think. From banks and credit unions to apartment buildings to worker-owned businesses, co-ops appear in every facet of today’s economy. In most cases, they formed in response to economic crises like the Great Depression, or to let small groups compete in monopolized markets. In 2012, both of those conditions exist — and unsurprisingly, so do cooperatives.

Far from being limited to grocery stores, modern American co-ops also include agricultural marketing groups like Land O’Lakes and Florida’s Natural; retail outlets like R.E.I.; electrical utilities in the Southeast; housing cooperatives in New York; credit unions; and countless local farm-to-store programs. Purchasing co-ops like ACE, True Value Hardware, and Carpet One let independent stores compete with chain outlets. Yet, in many cases, Americans don’t think of these well-known brands as cooperatives. In fact, the United States is full of co-ops — around 30,000 of them with nearly 900,000 members. Thirty percent of Americans belong to cooperatively-owned credit unions, the largest of which serves 3.4 million Department of Defense employees and has \$45 billion in assets. In 2004, the ten largest co-ops in America earned over \$12 billion in revenues.

If you knew how many successful cooperatives surrounded you, and what a positive impact cooperative enterprise can have on the world, would you be more likely to join or [start your own co-op](#)? The UN believes you might. This is one of the primary goals of both the UN and the International Cooperative Alliance: to make you aware of the cooperatives in your own backyard, as well as their potential to influence your life and future.

“Cooperatives, in their various forms, promote the fullest possible participation in the economic and social development of all people, including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples, are becoming a major factor of economic and social development and contribute to the eradication of poverty.” - UN Resolution [64/136](#), 2010

The UN officially launched the Year of the Cooperative campaign in October 2011. The preparations continued in November, when the International Cooperative Association held a

General Assembly in Cancun. There, Mexican President Felipe Calderón hailed co-ops as “a great opportunity” to create jobs and help Mexico recover from the economic crisis. Cooperative-related events will continue throughout 2012, highlighted by two major summits in Venice, Italy and Quebec City, Canada. Meanwhile, individual countries and independent groups will throw events, publish new research, and celebrate the possibilities cooperation brings to a 21st-century world economy.

Promoting Cooperative Growth

In the developing world, cooperatives often function as building blocks for stronger, more stable economies. One of the most fertile breeding grounds for co-ops has been sub-Saharan Africa. Since the economy was liberalized in the 1990s, Africa has entered a renaissance of cooperative enterprise.

Most of these cooperatives start small. Poverty in Africa is still high, and, as in many parts of the world, women and older or younger people have traditionally received much lower wages for their work. A cooperative like the coffee growers’ group at Indido in Ethiopia allows all workers to receive equal wages while selling their coffee at better market rates.

In Kenya, cooperative banks and credit unions are revolutionizing the economy, making small loans available to farmers and growers at affordable rates. But the cooperative model is still controversial. During the global economic downturn that followed 2008’s food shortages, co-ops were forced to cut back on the number of loans they offered to members, while taking infusions of cash from external sources. Cooperatives were born in crisis and are specifically designed to weather economic storms -- so why did these institutions falter? Will the resulting drop in consumer confidence hinder their growth?

In 2012, the UN will focus on how cooperatives can grow and thrive. The trend is well-established: The cooperative model is expected to be the world’s fastest-growing business model by 2025. However, there are still some inconsistencies holding co-ops back. In many cases, cooperative models are still under development and each company must come up with its own self-sustaining plan.

Dr. Joni Carley, a values-driven leadership expert, believes that the cooperative model’s perceived newness is one of its greatest challenges to widespread adoption.

“While cooperation is really our oldest model of work, it feels brand new and we don't have the systems down yet. It also usually takes much longer than anyone thinks it should to make some decisions, to develop infrastructure, and to create the kind of cooperative alignments that serve for the long haul ... Although we now have some excellent tools to quantify culture, few leaders understand the value of deploying those tools and few see themselves as able to devote the time and attention required.”

In other cases, a lack of regulation and legislative support can undermine co-ops. During the recent crisis in Africa, pyramid schemes in the Savings and Credit Cooperatives led to a serious thinning out of available capital. With better regulation, that situation could have been avoided and the money kept inside the member-owner community it was intended for.

Developing Cooperative Legislation

One of the greatest cooperative success stories is that of Mondragón Corporation. Founded in 1956 by a Catholic priest in the autonomous Basque region of Spain, Mondragón (named after the town of Mondragón where it is based) began as a cooperative trade school and a group of five workers selling paraffin heaters.

Less than 50 years later, Mondragón is the world's largest cooperative, and Spain's seventh largest business. A paragon of co-ops, Mondragón has operations in 19 countries and employs 83,000 worker-owners. Yet for every international job the company creates, it employs two people in Spain.

What has allowed Mondragón to grow steadily without abandoning its cooperative principles? For one thing, it has embraced innovation, and worker-owners have repeatedly chosen to reinvest in the future of the corporation. It's also based in the Basque community, known for its strength and cooperative nature.

Mondragón also got a head start with early support from the Spanish government. In the years after Franco, Spain created a framework of loans designed to help farmers and small businesses recover financially; meanwhile, the Spanish economy remained relatively insular, protecting the same businesses from external competition. Mondragón benefited from that governmental support, without governmental interference in the company's autonomy.

The UN's third objective in 2012 is to influence governments and regulatory bodies to develop frameworks that will support cooperatives in their various forms. This can be a delicate procedure: One of the seven Cooperative Principles states that cooperatives can't make agreements that would interfere with their autonomy and democratic control. European nations, for the most part, have developed a system that supports cooperative business without interference. Canada has also been highly successful at fostering cooperative growth. But for many nations, co-ops can appear risky, regulation can be lacking — or, quite simply, the government may have an interest in controlling its citizens' actions.

A Cooperative Future

UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon calls cooperatives “a unique and invaluable presence in today's world. Cooperatives are a reminder to the international community that it is possible to pursue both economic viability and social responsibility.”

Nowhere is that statement more apt than in the United States, where cooperatives are etched into the public consciousness as hippie grocery stores.

According to Dr. Carley, this is a dangerous misconception:

“Unfortunately, in the US, there is a highly vested interest in maintaining the mythology that values have to be compromised to make money and that they have no place in the workplace. What we know now is that when personal and organizational values are aligned, profits, share prices, stakeholder loyalty, innovation and more go up.”

The UN's goal for the United States is to rebrand cooperatives — and it may get some help. In 2009, the United Steelworkers, North America's largest industrial trade union, announced a new affiliation with Mondragón. The goal: To help steelworkers purchase and run their own mills cooperatively, focusing on sustainable business and environmentally sound practices.

In 2000, poverty expert Barbara Peters visited the town of Mondragón. She labeled it a “town without poverty” — and also noted the absence of “extreme wealth.” Peters immediately made the connection between this small town in Spain's industrial region, and the suffering Rust Belt of North America. If the USW's new plan succeeds, cooperatives may be able to reinvent faltering towns, even as they reinvent their own image for American workers.

Ultimately, the key to equal employment and fair wages may be as simple as taking control of our own economic realities, stepping up and sharing the responsibility for our future. The United Nations thinks you'd be a great boss — don't you?

This article was published at NationofChange at: <http://www.nationofchange.org/2012-year-cooperative-1328196076>. All rights are reserved.

Resources to check out:

www.the350project.net

www.cfwnv.org

www.liu.edu/global

www.ridgehouse.org

www.kiwanisbikes.org

www.appiafinancial.com

www.nac.nevadaculture.org

www.Arts4Nevada.org

www.nevada.cgweb.org

www.nvdm.org

www.urgc.org

Bridgewire is a place where creative individuals gather to share their interests with like-minded individuals and learn new skills and ideas.

Bridgewire is a dynamic Makerspace with members working with electronics, welding sewing, woodworking, home brewing, lock-picking, solar cooking, Arduino programming, model rocket building, and much more.

We provide the tools, what you do with them is up to you!

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Latinos in College Scholarships for Hispanics Help me Find a College

www.latinosincollege.com

At Latinos in College we answer the concern Help me find a college, scholarships for Hispanics, find a mentor, internships and more.

Public Utility, Private Profit: Privatization of Water is as Benign as Lucifer

www.truth-out.org

Water is the basis of all life. It is preposterous that it might be owned and that some may be thereby deprived of it. Thanks, however, to the World Bank, which is actually just the operative arm of the largest U.S. banks and whose policies can bring down governments -- c.f. Italy and Greece in the...

SEMINOLES HAVE BECOME A FORCE IN INDIAN GAMING

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. -- Sitting in the lounge of NYN Steak in the newly remodeled Seminole Coconut Creek Casino, Tony Sanchez Jr., took a few moments to ponder a question about the nature of the Seminole Indian Tribe's relationship with its home state of Florida.

<http://erj.reviewjournal.com/ct/uz3688753Biz12645987>

Operation Fairy Garden

The outdoors is a magical place for kids where they can explore, imagine and learn. These parents brought their daughter's love of the outdoors IN! [Feel the fairy magic.](#)

Where the Colorado Runs Dry Jonathan Waterman, New York Times

Most visitors to the Hoover Dam and the Grand Canyon probably don't realize that the mighty Colorado River, America's most legendary white-water river, rarely reaches the sea.

LADWP to file second suit against Mammoth Community Water District

Benett Kessler , Sierra Wave

In its tradition of bullying small towns to grab their water, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's latest victim is Mammoth Lakes and its water district.

Repeal \$11.14 Billion Water Bond Kristin Lynch, California Progress Report

Corporate agriculture giants are plotting a massive, multi-billion dollar water heist and they want you to pay for it. Part of their thirst was quenched in December when Senator Feinstein made it easier for them to resell public water for private profit. Now these water barons have their eyes set on a bigger prize: passage of an \$11.14 billion bond measure to help them tap the Sacramento River. In order to protect California's fiscal and environmental health, the state legislature should repeal this wasteful bond.

REGION: Environmental groups join Santa Ana sucker lawsuit

Janet Zimmerman, Riverside Press Enterprise

Four environmental groups were made party to a lawsuit filed by numerous Inland water agencies challenging federal habitat protections for the Santa Ana sucker, an algae-eating fish.

It is Time to Restore Salmon to the San Joaquin River

Monty Schmitt, California Progress Report

Reaching a great milestone: #salmon will be re-introduced in the San Joaquin River for the first time since the 1940s. Last year marked the fifth year of the San Joaquin River Restoration Program and the two year anniversary of renewed river flows - the first since the 1940s when the operation of Friant Dam dried up the river and ended the historic salmon runs. Thanks to years of hard work on the part of state and federal agencies, farmers, conservation groups, water districts and other stakeholders, the San Joaquin River once again flows all the way to the sea.

Privatize Everything in the Universe? Dan Bacher, Bay Area IndyMedia

I wrote this song, "Privatize Everything," back in 2000. The song was meant as political satire, but unfortunately, many of these lyrics have already become reality in recent years. The oceans are being privatized under NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco's "catch shares" program that concentrates ocean fisheries in fewer, increasingly corporate hands.

Innovative Wetlands Park Opens in South Los Angeles

Ed Fuentes , Los Angeles Times

Artificial wetlands carved out from the industrial tundra of South Los Angeles were dedicated last week, giving neighborhood stakeholders and local schoolchildren the chance to go past the fence and explore the completed new green space for the first time.

Teens dig in on hands-on habitat help

Keith Reid, Stockton Record

Landowners, schools partner on restoration project

Middle College High sophomore Jacean Fortuna carefully dug a small hole beneath a massive oak tree at the LangeTwins Family Winery and Vineyard on Tuesday, then filled it with a young wild blackberry vine.

<http://www.sciencedebate.org/>

***EPA finalizes ban on cruise ships dumping sewage in California's ocean waters**

Paul Rogers, Mercury News

The Obama administration announced Thursday it has finalized the paperwork needed to allow a California law to take effect that bans sewage dumping by cruise ships in state waters out to three miles from the coast.

The ban grew out of a bill by state Sen. Joe Simitian, D-Palo Alto, which was signed into law in 2004 by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

I am facilitating a discussion about the documentary, "Finding Dawn" at the University of Illinois on March 8. It is about the disappearance and murder of Native women in Canada. If anyone has any stories, data, or comments about this issue that you would like to include in the discussion please post it here or inbox me. Thank you. HAGD!

By: **John Bird**

Interracial marriage in US hits new high: 1 in 12

By HOPE YEN Associated Press Feb 16

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Interracial marriages in the U.S. have climbed to 4.8 million - a record 1 in 12 - as a steady flow of new Asian and Hispanic immigrants expands the pool of prospective spouses. Blacks are now substantially more likely than before to marry whites.

A Pew Research Center study, released Thursday, details a diversifying America where interracial unions and the mixed-race children they produce are challenging typical notions of race.

"The rise in interracial marriage indicates that race relations have improved over the past quarter century," said Daniel Lichter, a sociology professor at Cornell University. "Mixed-race children have blurred America's color line. They often interact with others on either side of the racial divide and frequently serve as brokers between friends and family members of different racial backgrounds," he said. "But America still has a long way to go."

The figures come from previous censuses as well as the 2008-2010 American Community Survey, which surveys 3 million households annually. The figures for "white" refer to those whites who are not of Hispanic ethnicity. For purposes of defining interracial marriages, Hispanic is counted as a race by many in the demographic field.

The study finds that 8.4 percent of all current U.S. marriages are interracial, up from 3.2 percent in 1980. While Hispanics and Asians remained the most likely, as in previous decades, to marry someone of a different race, the biggest jump in share since 2008 occurred among blacks, who historically have been the most segregated.

States in the West where Asian and Hispanic immigrants are more numerous, including Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico and California, were among the most likely to have couples who "marry out" - more than 1 in 5. The West was followed by the South, Northeast and Midwest. By state, mostly white Vermont had the lowest rate of intermarriage, at 4 percent.

In all, more than 15 percent of new marriages in 2010 were interracial.

The numbers also coincide with Pew survey data showing greater public acceptance of mixed marriage, coming nearly half a century after the Supreme Court in 1967 barred race-based restrictions on marriage. (In 2000, Alabama became the last state to lift its unenforceable ban on interracial marriages.) About 83 percent of Americans say it is "all right for blacks and whites to date each other," up from 48 percent in 1987. As a whole, about 63 percent of those surveyed say it "would be fine" if a family member were to marry outside their own race.

Minorities, young adults, the higher educated and those living in Western or Northeast states were more likely to say mixed marriages are a change for the better for society. The figure was 61 percent for 18- to 29-year-olds, for instance, compared to 28 percent for those 65 and older.

Due to increasing interracial marriages, multiracial Americans are a small but fast-growing demographic group, making up about 9 million, or 8 percent of the minority population. Together

with blacks, Hispanics and Asians, the Census Bureau estimates they collectively will represent a majority of the U.S. population by mid-century.

"Race is a social construct; race isn't real," said Jonathan Brent, 28. The son of a white father and Japanese-American mother, Brent helped organize multiracial groups in southern California and believes his background helps him understand situations from different perspectives.

Brent, now a lawyer in Charlottesville, Va., says at varying points in his life he has identified with being white, Japanese and more recently as someone of mixed ethnic background. He doesn't feel constrained with whom he socially interacts or dates.

"Race is becoming a personal thing. It is what I feel like I am," he said.

According to the Pew report, more than 25 percent of Hispanics and Asians who married in 2010 had a spouse of a different race. That's compared to 17.1 percent of blacks and 9.4 percent of whites. Of the 275,500 new interracial marriages in 2010, 43 percent were white-Hispanic couples, 14.4 percent were white-Asian, 11.9 percent were white-black, and the remainder were other combinations.

Still, the share of Asians who intermarried has actually declined recently - from 30.5 percent in 2008 to 27.7 percent in 2010. In contrast, blacks who married outside their race increased in share from 15.5 percent to 17.1 percent, due in part to a rising black middle class that has more interaction with other races.

Intermarriage among whites rose in share slightly, while among Hispanics the rate was flat, at roughly 25.7 percent.

"In the past century, intermarriage has evolved from being illegal, to be a taboo and then to be merely unusual. And with each passing year, it becomes less unusual," said Paul Taylor, director of Pew's Social & Demographic Trends project. "That says a lot about the state of race relations. Behaviors have changed and attitudes have changed."

He noted that interracial marriages among Hispanics and Asians may be slowing somewhat as recent immigration and their rapid population growth provide minorities more ethnically similar partners to choose from. But Taylor believes the longer-term trend of intermarriage is likely to continue.

"For younger Americans, racial and ethnic diversity are a part of their lives," he said.

The Pew study also tracks some divorce trends, citing studies using government data that found overall divorce rates higher for interracial couples. One study conducted a decade ago determined that mixed-race couples had a 41 percent chance of separation or divorce, compared to a 31 percent chance for those who married within their race.

Another analysis found divorce rates among mixed-race couples to be more dependent on the specific race combination, with white women who married outside their race more likely to

divorce. Mixed marriages involving blacks and whites also were considered least stable, followed by Hispanic-white couples.

Other findings:

-Broken down by gender, black men were more than twice as likely as black women to marry someone outside their race - 24 percent to 9 percent. The reverse held true for Asian men - 17 percent intermarried, compared to 36 percent among Asian women.

-White-Asian couples who married had the highest median income, nearly \$71,000. Behind them were the following race combinations: Asian-Asian (\$62,000), white-white (\$60,000), white-Hispanic (\$57,900), white-black (\$53,187), black-black (\$47,700) and Hispanic-Hispanic (nearly \$36,000).

-The top three states for white-black married couples are Virginia, North Carolina and Kansas, all with rates of about 3 percent.

--- Online: <http://pewsocialtrends.org/> <http://www.census.gov>

Interracial Marriage Rates Soar As Stereotypes Fall

Carol Morello, The Washington Post

Morello reports: "The prevalence of intermarriage in and around the Washington area reflects demographic changes that are pushing interracial marriage rates to an all-time high in the United States while toppling historical taboos among younger people."

[READ MORE](#)

1. One in four recent Nevada marriages interracial, third highest rate in the U.S.

o Feb. 16, 2012

One in four recent Nevada marriages is interracial or interethnic, the third-highest rate in the nation, according to a Pew Center report released ...

Webinar Announcement- Including Seniors and Members with Acquired Disabilities

Date: Wednesday, February 29th, 2012
Time: 3:00pm – 4:00pm EST (2:00 PM Central, 1:00 PM Mountain, 12:00 PM Pacific)

The National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP) is pleased to announce our next web conference to be held on Wednesday, February 29th at 3:00pm EST on including and supporting seniors and members with acquired disabilities. People can acquire disabilities at any point in their lives. For some seniors and those interested in volunteering and service, providing accommodations to someone with an acquired disability can be a sensitive subject; people are sometimes hesitant to identify as having a disability or they may be resistant to

disclose their limitations. This webinar will address how programs can include seniors and members with acquired disabilities and reduce or remove barriers to service.

Specifically, this presentation will:

- Define 'acquired disability' and how it relates to the definition of a person with a disability
- Discuss the invisible barriers to volunteering and service people with acquired disabilities experience
- Share ways to reduce or remove barriers to service as well as encourage members and volunteers to reach out for assistance and accommodation

The speaker for this presentation will be Robin Fisher, Foster Grandparents Program Manager for the State of Delaware.

To register for this event, please email roxy.rocker@umb.edu by 12:00 PM EST on Tuesday, February 28th with the following info:

- Name
- Organization
- Email
- Phone
- If you require CART* to participate, please also indicate that in your email.

Please note: We will send out confirmation emails by Tuesday afternoon, February 28th with instructions on how to sign into the web conference.

*CART service provides instantaneous translation of the speech text using real-time software. Teleconference participants receive caption services over the web. This is an accommodation we provide to participants who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

The National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP) is training and technical assistance provider on disability inclusion, under a cooperative agreement (#08TAHMA001) from Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). NSIP partners with the Association on University Centers on Disability, National Council on Independent Living, Association on Higher Education and Disability and National Down Syndrome Congress to build connections among disability organizations and all CNCS grantees, to increase the participation of people with disabilities in national service.

<http://readersupportednews.org/off-site-news-section/81-81/9970-poor-america-some-kids-are-making-ketchup-soup>