



COOPERATIVES IN CAMBODIA

Contribution of cooperatives to Cambodia's economy

- 2,425 cooperatives in Cambodia including agriculture, forestry and fisheries.
- 678,954 members in cooperatives.
- Total percentage of women members is approximately 44.5%.
- 298 individuals employed in cooperatives.
- Total capital of agricultural cooperatives is approximately \$675,921.

Source: Cambodia Agricultural Cooperative Alliance, 2025

Did you know?

- Agricultural cooperatives in Cambodia first began forming in 1956 as voluntary associations among farmers.
- The Department of Agricultural Cooperative Promotion (DACP) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF), Cambodia, spearheads cooperative development.
- Cambodia has 21 agriculture cooperative unions linking 323 member cooperatives, strengthening collective capacity and advocacy.
- The Cambodian Agricultural Cooperative Alliance (CACA) serves as the national apex body for cooperatives.
- The Agricultural Cooperative Development Fund (ACDF), managed by MAFF, provides financial and technical assistance to cooperatives.
- Preah Vihear Meanchey Union of Agricultural Cooperatives was Cambodia's first cooperative union, established in 2016.
- 39% of board members in cooperatives are women, highlighting growing gender representation in cooperative leadership.
- CACA joined the ICA as a member in 2023.

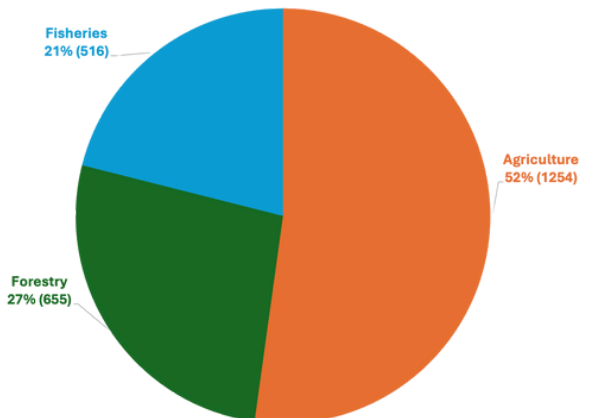
The cooperative movement in Cambodia

Cooperatives in Cambodia are still at a nascent stage, with most agricultural cooperatives focusing primarily on credit services, savings, and the supply of farm inputs. Efforts are underway to promote pilot joint ventures between cooperatives and private enterprises, aiming to improve market access and demonstrate the benefits of organized farmer networks.

Types of cooperatives

Cooperatives in Cambodia are present in the following sectors:

SECTOR-WISE DISTRIBUTION OF COOPERATIVES (%) AND NUMBERS



Geographical presence of cooperatives

Cooperatives are present in all 25 provinces of Cambodia. Number of agriculture cooperatives in each province indicated in map below.



Evolution of the cooperative movement

The cooperative movement in Cambodia has progressed through five major phases, each reflecting the nation's socio-political context and rural development priorities:

→ 1956–1975: Early Beginnings

- The cooperative movement began in 1956 as voluntary associations among farmers aimed at helping smallholders access credit, agricultural inputs, and markets.
- These early cooperatives operated on principles of voluntary membership and democratic control, providing support to their members and fostering self-reliance.

→ 1975–1979: The Khmer Rouge Era

- During the Khmer Rouge regime, the nature of cooperatives radically changed. Instead of voluntary associations, all Cambodians were forced into collectivized cooperatives as a state policy to eliminate private ownership.
- These forced cooperatives imposed communal farming, harsh working conditions, and the loss of individual rights, resulting in mistrust of collective models.

→ 1980s–1990s: Post-Conflict Rebuilding

- After 1979, Cambodia faced the challenge of rebuilding both its economy and the trust of its citizens in collective systems.
- Most early post-war cooperative efforts struggled due to limited resources, lack of confidence, and the negative legacy of forced collectivism.

→ 2000s–2010s: Modern Revival and Government Support

- In the early 2000s, cooperatives were reintroduced as tools for rural development and poverty reduction, emphasizing voluntariness and self-governance.
- 2001: A royal decree enabled the legal creation and registration of agricultural cooperatives.
- 2003: The first official agricultural cooperative was registered, with strong support from international partners like the German Cooperative and Raiffeisen Confederation (DGRV) and local NGOs.
- 2013: Adoption of the Law on Agricultural Cooperatives, establishing a legal and regulatory framework for cooperative operation.
- 2014: Formation of the Department of Agricultural Cooperative Promotion (DACP) under the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, marking a new phase of government involvement.

→ 2020s–Present: Contemporary Developments

- In 2023, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) launched the Agricultural Cooperative Strategic Promotion Plan 2023–2030. This long-term strategy aims to strengthen cooperative governance, promote integration into value chains, and enhance service delivery. The plan includes initial milestones toward the adoption of a National Policy on Cooperative Promotion.
- Recent efforts focus on promoting public-private-producer models, such as contract farming frameworks, to strengthen partnerships between cooperatives and the private sector. Planned government incentives and extension services aim to formalize cooperation between companies and organized farmer networks.

Laws on cooperatives

Cambodia's cooperative development is primarily governed by the Law on Agricultural Cooperatives (2013), which provides a comprehensive legal framework for the formation, registration, governance, operation, and dissolution of cooperatives. This law was a significant milestone and laid the institutional groundwork for a modern cooperative sector in Cambodia.

Key highlights of the Law on Agricultural Cooperatives (2013)

- Cooperatives are recognized as private legal entities with democratic, member-driven governance.
- The law applies to agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and related value-chain enterprises.
- A cooperative must have at least 15 Cambodian (Khmer) members, aged 18 or older, residing in the same locality.
- The law mandates that cooperative registration must be completed within 20 working days.
- 20% of annual profits go to a Reserve Fund; 3% to a Training Fund, calculated before dividends are paid.
- The law allows agricultural cooperatives to form unions across administrative boundaries and permits private entities engaged in agriculture to join these unions on a voluntary basis.

Cooperative landscape of Cambodia

Cambodia's cooperative landscape spans agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, with agricultural cooperatives also providing credit and savings services. They play a key role in rural development by improving market access, promoting sustainable farming, and empowering smallholders, women, and youth, contributing to national goals of poverty reduction and sustainable growth.

Women Leading Change: Rith Chamroun Toul Ampil Agricultural Cooperative

Established in 2017 with 68 members and \$750 in shared capital, Rith Chamroun Toul Ampil Agricultural Cooperative has grown into a dynamic women-led enterprise. It now includes 956 members, with 607 women, and operates across 52 villages in Basedth district. The cooperative has expanded its capital base to \$13,600 and holds total business assets worth \$49,650. Members engage in vegetable production, poultry raising, irrigation improvements, and market access.

The cooperative offers services such as input supply, training, transport, and business planning. It currently manages 15 vegetable net houses and plans to build 31 more. Advocacy by its leadership resulted in a five-kilometer paved road and the allocation of one hectare of land for group cultivation. With a target of 2,500 members by 2030, it continues to advance inclusive, community-driven development.



PC: Heifer International

Leading with Organic Vision: Svay Chochep Meanchey Agricultural Cooperative



PC: Asian Farmers

Established in 2011 in Kampong Speu province with 72 members, the Svay Chochep Meanchey Agricultural Cooperative has emerged as a leader in Cambodia's organic rice sector. By 2021, it had mobilized over 430 farming families to supply 2,500 metric tons of organic and Sor-paddy rice. Focusing on self-managed marketing, quality control, and fair pricing, the cooperative secured a \$100,000 loan under the Assuring Resiliency of Family Farmers Amidst COVID-19 (ARISE) program to purchase members' harvests. Farmers received \$0.05 per kg above market price, alongside timely payments and training in Internal Control Systems (ICS) for organic certification.

The cooperative's management also earned \$31,250 in coordination incentives. Despite challenges such as poor roads and low literacy among some members, its strong planning, financial discipline, and commitment to sustainable farming have positioned it as a model for cooperative-led agricultural transformation.

Enhancing Market Access through Agroecology: Ecofarm Agricultural Cooperative

Formed in 2015 from producer groups in Sotr Nikum, Siem Reap and officially registered in January 2019 as Sovatepheap Thoamacheat Agricultural Cooperative—the Ecofarm Agricultural Cooperative has grown to over 120 members, 75% of whom are women. Certified under the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS) for safe vegetables, Ecofarm produces more than 30 crop varieties year-round, selling around 1,000 kg monthly to trusted buyers such as Phsar Koom Khmer and local restaurants. Members earn a premium of \$0.12 per kg above the market price.

Through the Agroecological Practices to Improve Commercialization and Inclusion (APICI) project—supported by Groupe de Recherches et d'Échanges Technologiques (GRET), the French Development Agency (AFD), and Cambodian partners—the cooperative has strengthened irrigation systems, improved composting techniques, and enhanced marketing strategies. As a result, member incomes have tripled, governance is now women-led, and plans are underway to expand compost production and develop value-added products. With its strong focus on sustainability, inclusive leadership, and market-oriented production, Ecofarm is rapidly positioning itself as a national model for agroecological farming in Cambodia.



PC: GRET

From Food to Medicinal Oil: Sambo Meanchey Agricultural Cooperative



PC: AP Farmers Forum

Founded in 2010 with 88 members and an initial capital of \$1,415, Sambo Meanchey Agricultural Cooperative has grown into a thriving enterprise with 1,989 members cultivating over 2,000 hectares. Initially cultivating paddy and cassava, the cooperative shifted to lemongrass in 2016 to meet rising market demand and, after joining the Cambodian Farmers Association Federation of Agricultural Producers (CFAP) in 2017, diversified into vegetables, rice seed, and fruit production. By 2023, it supplying up to 10 tons of lemongrass daily—around 1,500 tons annually—plus 30 liters of oil monthly to Phnom Penh markets, generating \$375,000 per year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it secured a \$40,780 loan from the Ministry of Agriculture to stabilize operations and maintain market supply.

Recognized as a model farming cooperative for 2021–2027, Sambo Meanchey also provides members with credit facilities, agricultural inputs, and transport services. Looking ahead, the cooperative seeks support to expand its processing and packaging capacity, while promoting climate-resilient enterprises that create new opportunities for women and youth.



- Since 2003, Cambodia's DACP and CACA have worked with the German Cooperative and Raiffeisen Confederation (DGRV) to strengthen cooperative governance, legal frameworks, and capacity development through seminars and institutional training.
- Since 2015, the Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC) and Groupe de Recherches et d'Échanges Technologiques (GRET) have co-developed eco-agriculture initiatives, farmer training programs, and cooperative business models for sustainable rural livelihoods.
- Under the Second Land Allocation for Social and Economic Development Project (LASED II, 2019–2024), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the World Bank have worked with cooperatives in land allocation sites to improve sustainable production systems, strengthen governance, and facilitate inclusive market participation.
- Heifer International Cambodia has partnered with cooperatives, government, private sector, and financial services to build market-led agricultural value chains across 14 provinces, enhancing institutional capacity and ecosystem support.
- Cambodia collaborated with ANGKASA under the Asia Pacific Cooperative Development Platform to promote cooperative models in schools and mosque communities, creating opportunities for women, youth, and entrepreneurs.

Engagement with ICA-AP

- In September 2024, Cambodia participated in the ICA-AP Trade Dialogue on 'Empowering Cooperatives through Digital Transformation' in Kunming, China, engaging in discussions on e-commerce, Big Data, and AI for cooperative growth.
- Cambodia has been actively participating in ICA-MAFF training programs on sustainable agriculture, women's empowerment, and cooperative development, applying the learnings to strengthen agricultural cooperatives and rural economies.
- In July 2025, Cambodia's cooperatives, represented by the Southeast Upland Agricultural Cooperative, contributed to the ICA-AP and Heifer International Asia's 'Seeding Strength' campaign, showcasing women-led innovations in greenhouse farming, solar-powered irrigation, and climate education.

What are cooperatives?

Cooperatives are autonomous associations of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

Cooperative values

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

Cooperative principles

The **seven cooperative principles** are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training, and Information
6. Cooperation among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

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About International Cooperative Alliance Asia and Pacific

ICA-AP is one of four regional offices of the ICA. Established in 1960 in New Delhi, India, it unites, promotes, and develops cooperatives in the region. ICA-AP's 114 members from 29 countries spans a variety of sectors, including agriculture, credit and banking, consumer, education, fisheries, forestry, housing, and insurance.

Contact information

ICA-AP: info@icaap.coop



[ICAAPAC](#)



[International Cooperative Alliance - Asia & Pacific](#)



[ICAAsiaandPacific](#)



[icaasiapacific](#)

1. Cambodia Agricultural Cooperative Alliance (CAC Alliance): info@caca-cambodia.org

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