



COOPERATIVES IN VANUATU

Members of Port Patrick Producers Cooperative and vanilla farmers are undergoing capacity-building training, April 2025, Port Patrick, Aneityum Island

Contribution of cooperatives to Vanuatu's economy

- 460 cooperatives in Vanuatu
- 17,428 members in cooperatives (5.3% of Vanuatu's population)
- 374 professionals employed in cooperatives
- \$8.62 million cumulative revenue generated by cooperatives (113 cooperatives)
- Total dividend distributed to members in 2024 amounted to approx. \$356,900
- Savings and loan cooperatives in Vanuatu mobilised \$1.07 million in savings and disbursed \$0.76 million in loans

(All figures as of 2025)

Did you know?

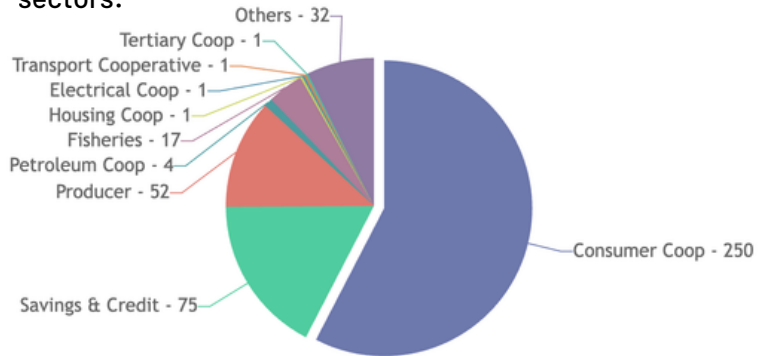
- The cooperative movement in Vanuatu began in 1962.
- The Vanuatu Cooperative Federation (VCF), the erstwhile apex body for cooperatives, was revived and renamed the Vanuatu Cooperative Business Network (VCBN) in 2018.
- 80% of the members of savings and loans cooperatives are women.
- Around 80% of employees in cooperatives are women.
- In the 2019 Voluntary National Review of Vanuatu, cooperatives are reflected in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) notably SDG 1 (No Poverty), 2 (Zero Hunger), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), contributing to rural livelihoods, agricultural productivity, market access, and inclusive community-based development.
- The Office of Registrar of Cooperatives and Business Development Services (ORCBDS), Vanuatu, joined ICA as a member in 2015.

The cooperative movement in Vanuatu

Cooperatives in Vanuatu play an important role in supporting rural livelihoods, community trade, savings mobilisation, and local economic participation across the islands. With increasing emphasis on stronger governance, improved institutional systems, and enterprise development, the sector is gradually expanding its contribution to financial inclusion and community-based economic resilience.

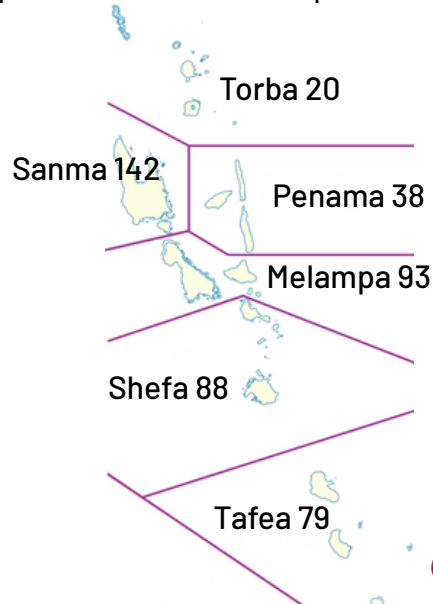
Types of cooperatives in Vanuatu

Cooperatives in Vanuatu are present in the following sectors:



Geographical presence of cooperatives in Vanuatu

Cooperatives in Vanuatu are present across all provinces.



Evolution of the cooperative movement

→ 1930 - 1969

- In 1939, a group of Melanesian farmers started a copra production and marketing cooperative in the province of Malekula. During the French and British colonial period, the term "native cooperatives" was used as membership was restricted to the indigenous people.
- Beginning in 1951, joint regulations were issued with both colonial jurisdictions in consensus, for governing cooperatives. The cooperatives were given monopoly over the import of commodities such as rice and sugar.
- The modern cooperative movement began with the passage of the 1962 joint regulation. The New Hebrides Cooperative Department provided services related to basic accounting and management training for cooperators. Most cooperatives were marketing local produce such as copra, coffee, cocoa and retailing some consumer goods.
- In the late 1960s, the first cooperative transport societies and a cooperative shipping business were established.

→ 1970 - 1990

- In 1973 two apex cooperative organisations were established, the New Hebrides Cooperative Foundation (NHCF) for the English-administered, and the Syndicat des Coopératives Autochtones sous Contrôle Français (SCAF) for the French-administered areas. Many local copra producers formed cooperatives to wrest control of the trade from the colonists. NHCF became one of the most powerful and successful rural business empires.
- By 1979, the cooperative movement was going strong with 287 societies and members accounting for 80% of the nationwide household heads.
- Post-independence, in 1981, NHCF changed its name to VCF, while the SCAF was liquidated when the French withdrew. The VCF struggled with the lack of finance, absence of trained staff and mismanagement. By 1986, it had stopped importing goods at wholesale prices and instead arranged for private wholesale markets.
- The post of the Registrar was set up in 1986.
- In 1989, the Vanuatu Cooperative Savings Bank was restructured, due to financial and management difficulties, into the National Commercial and Trading Bank. It was later renamed the National Bank of Vanuatu.

→ 1990 - Present

- During the 1990s, nearly all of Vanuatu's cooperative societies were wholesale and retail consumer cooperatives. Many primary and secondary level cooperatives continued to fail.
- In 1998, the Cooperatives Department, which used to be a part of the Ministry of Finance and Economy, was transferred to the Ministry of Trade. In 1999, the VCF finally closed.
- In 2001, the Cooperatives Department established a fund to offer loans and business trainings to small productive cooperatives.
- Interest in cooperatives renewed in 2008 when the government decided to stem urban migration by creating more employment opportunities in rural communities. This saw the establishment of the Department of Cooperative and Ni-Vanuatu Business Development Service. In 2013, both these organisations merged with the Cooperative Registrar to form the ORCBDS.
- In 2014, the ORCBDS recorded a 0.9% average growth rate of active cooperative societies. They also deregistered 357 cooperatives that were inactive/unsustainable.
- In 2020, the VCBN signed an MoU with the Vanuatu National Provident Fund (VNPF) to establish a fruit canning facility in Santo where agricultural cooperatives will sell their produce. The dividends will be paid back to each participant.
- In 2024, National Co-operative Policy 2024 to 2027, themed "Cooperatives Build Better Communities", was launched with two main objectives: transforming the regulatory role of ORCBDS and strengthening the cooperative movement into an integrated system of enterprise aligned with the Vanuatu 2030 People's Plan.

Law on Cooperatives

- **1951:** The French and British administrators passed the Joint New Hebrides Native Cooperatives Societies or Company Regulation No.9. The two-page document allowed their district agents to monitor cooperatives.
- **1962:** The Native Cooperative Joint Regulation No. 11 of 1962 was the first detailed government regulation addressing the operation of cooperatives. The 1975 amendment removed the term "native" and a 1981 order changed the name of the New Hebridean Cooperative Federation Ltd to VCF.
- **1982:** The Cooperative Societies Act [CAP 152] (COSO Act), enforced in 1987, made provisions for the formation, registration and regulation of cooperatives.
- **2011:** An amendment to the COSO Act introduced the Department of Cooperative and Ni-Vanuatu Business Development Services' director who would also serve as the Registrar of Cooperative Societies. A later amendment granted the Registrar rights such as performing on-site inspections of a cooperative's business premises.
- **2017:** Another amendment was made to the COSO Act to protect cooperatives from money laundering and corrupt practices. It required applicants to disclose the source of capital funds, ensured key persons met fit and proper criteria, and expanded the Registrar's powers to include on-site inspections and information sharing with law enforcement agencies.

Key highlights of the COSO Act*

- Cooperatives need to consist of at least seven members.
- Applicants must disclose the source of capital funds used to pay the society's capital as a condition of registration.
- All societies to have the words 'Cooperative' in their name and 'Limited' at the end.
- Establishes a Statutory Reserve Fund with deposits of one-fourth of annual net profits. The fund is to be used at the time of liquidation to cover the liabilities of the cooperative.
- Members cannot hold more than one-fifth of the cooperatives share capital.
- School cooperatives can register only after the written consent and consultation with the Ministry of Education.
- Provides for cooperatives to be on probation for two years until they meet all the requirements for registration.
- Registrar to audit every society at least once every year, including on-site inspections of business premises during business hours.

*(includes amendments till 2017)

Cooperative landscape of Vanuatu

The ORCBDS and VCBN continue to advance the development objectives of Vanuatu 2030: The People's Plan, working with cooperatives and their members toward a pristine natural environment, climate resilience, and equitable economic growth across the islands. Central to this is strengthening cooperatives' role across Vanuatu's blue-green economy, from food production on land to coastal fisheries and marine livelihoods at sea, ensuring cooperatives remain a proven delivery mechanism for local capital, shared assets, and community resilience.

Diversifying Community Commerce through Member-Owned Enterprise: Lakatoro Consumer Cooperative

Lakatoro Consumer Cooperative (LCC), registered under ORCBDS and located in Lakatoro, the capital of Malampa Province on Malekula Island, is one of Vanuatu's longest-running and most active rural cooperatives, serving 670 members and employing 14 staff. The cooperative operates a diversified business portfolio that includes retail and wholesale trade, fuel distribution, and bakery services, making it a key supplier of essential goods in Lakatoro and surrounding communities. In a province where nearly 80% of the population depends on subsistence agriculture, the cooperative plays an important role in improving market access, supporting livelihoods, and contributing to SDG 10 on reducing inequalities.

In 2025, LCC generated an annual turnover of approximately \$688,000 and profits of nearly \$139,000, while returning close to \$53,000 to members through rebates, demonstrating strong member-oriented business performance and contributing to SDG 8 on inclusive economic growth.



PC: ORCBDS

Community Savings Driving Financial Inclusion: Tontar Savings and Loan Cooperative Society

Tontar Savings and Loan Cooperative Society, registered under ORCBDS and based in the Tontar community in the Eniu area at Erakor, Vanuatu, was built on a strong foundation of community savings discipline. The cooperative traces its roots to the Tontar Community Savings Group, established in June 2022 with just over 30 members. Built around a simple model of weekly collective savings contributions, the initiative grew rapidly and showed early on that financial discipline, mutual support, and cooperative values could thrive at the grassroots level.

Since then, the cooperative has expanded significantly to serve 928 members and employ 3 staff members. It has mobilized regular savings of approximately US\$664,500 and special savings of approximately \$56,200, while generating profits of around \$74,500. Nearly \$33,200 has been returned to members through rebates, reflecting a strong member-centered approach that directly contributes to SDG 1 on poverty reduction and SDG 8.



PC: NGEF

Empowering Last-Mile Communities through Clean Energy: Wintua-Lorlow Electrical Cooperative

Wintua-Lorlow Electrical Cooperative, established in 2019 in the communities of Wintua and Lorlow on the remote island of Malekula, Vanuatu, operates the country's first ever community-run solar microgrid, funded by the Government of Austria in partnership with the Department of Cooperatives. The cooperative serves 2,814 community members and provides electricity to seven key institutions, including two schools, a police post, a health center, a community hall, a market area, and an airport, making a direct contribution to SDG 7 on access to affordable and reliable energy.

By eliminating external operators and profit-driven intermediaries, the cooperative is able to keep electricity fees affordable while ensuring that revenues remain within the community, thereby strengthening local economic resilience and contributing to SDG 11 on sustainable and inclusive communities.



PC: DoE

Divers Bay Memorial Consumer and Marketing Cooperative (DBMCMCS): Building Local Island Markets

Divers Bay Memorial Consumer and Marketing Cooperative Society (DBMCMCS), officially launched on 3 December 2024 on Ureparapara Island in Torba Province, is one of Vanuatu's most recently established and geographically remote cooperatives. Registered under ORCBDS and supported by the Cooperative Development Fund (CDF), the cooperative serves 41 members and employs 2 staff members. It operates a retail and wholesale business with an annual turnover of approximately \$60,500 and has returned around \$2,490 to members through rebates, demonstrating early commercial viability and contributing to SDG 8.

Beyond its retail operations, DBMCMCS provides an important market outlet for locally caught marine products and agricultural produce, thereby supporting local livelihoods, rural food security, and SDG 2 on zero hunger.

The cooperative is also VAT registered, contributing to national government revenue, and functions as an important communication and service access point for members, government agencies, NGOs, and visiting sailors. In doing so, it helps address the extreme geographic isolation of Ureparapara and contributes to SDG 10 on reducing inequalities and improving inclusion for remote communities.



PC: Ministry of Trade and Commerce, Vanuatu



Vanuatu and the international cooperative movement

- The French government facilitated and funded the formation of an apex marketing cooperative, the Vanuatu Organic Cocoa Growers Association (VOCGA), in 2000 to supply certified organic dry cocoa beans.
- The Cooperative Development Fund was established in 2001 with a \$1.35 million grant from the Chinese government.
- In 2008, the United Nations Development Programme launched the Vanuatu Trade Integration and Capacity Building project wherein people received training on establishing savings and loans cooperatives.
- In 2015, Cyclone Pam struck Vanuatu and destroyed over 12% of the cooperative societies. ICA and its members stepped in to provide monetary support.
- In 2015, ORCBDS started two projects in 12 different places with the FAO and UNDP to establish, promote, and build the capacity of cooperatives. A management information system, which includes a database of cooperatives and online training resources, is being developed with the help of the Japan International Cooperation Agency.
- In 2019, the VCBN established a joint initiative with government agencies and the Chinese embassy to implement a program to target youth entrepreneurship and to empower the rural economy.
- In 2024, the National Co-operative Policy 2024 to 2027 was developed with financial and technical support from the Australian Government's Governance for Growth program, deepening the bilateral partnership between Australia and Vanuatu's cooperative sector.
- In June 2024, Vanuatu participated in the UNDESA Capacity Building Workshop on "Empowering Cooperatives for Inclusive Economic Growth and Sustainable Development in the Pacific" in Fiji, contributing to regional discussions on cooperative governance and the establishment of a Pacific Island Cooperative Network.

Engagement with ICA-AP

- In 2016, ORCBDS participated in a Workshop on Cooperative to Cooperative Trade and the Melanesia Spearhead Group (MSG) Cooperative Development meeting.
- Mr. Joe Natuman, Deputy Prime Minister of Vanuatu and the Minister for Trade, Tourism, Industry and Cooperatives, attended the 10th Asia Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference (APCMC) in 2017 where he presented the country statement.
- The Forum on Development of Cooperatives in Pacific Islands was hosted in collaboration with the ORCBDS and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu in Port Vila in 2018.
- To mark the 2018 International Day of Cooperatives, Vanuatu held a special edition of Coop Mic where Prime Minister Charlot S. Tabimasmass and Deputy Prime Minister Bob Loughman were present.
- In January 2026, Vanuatu participated in the ICA-AP Regional Dialogue on "Cooperatives as Drivers of the Blue-Green Economy in the Pacific" in Nadi, Fiji. During the dialogue Vanuatu also shared its cooperative digitalization experiences and contributing to the collective agreement to explore the establishment of a Pacific Island Cooperative Network.

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

References

ORCBDS Annual Reports	Wintua-Lorlow
ORCBDS Dashboard	Wintua-Lorlow-Energy
Movement's History-ORCBDS	Tontar
Internal Reports- ORCBDS	Coops4dev-LFA
COSO Act, 1982 (2017)	ICAAP Annual Reports

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 122 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. ORCBDS: coops@vanuatu.gov.vu



This publication has been co-funded by the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the ICA-AP and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.