

Background Note on The National Cooperative University Bill, 2023

Background

A cooperative university is an educational institution that operates under the principles of cooperation and collective ownership. The efforts are being made for the establishment of a Cooperative University to firmly deepen the foundations of the cooperative movement in the country. The Union Ministry of Cooperation is planning to set up the world's largest university for the cooperative sector that will award 9,600 degrees, 16,000 diplomas and 800,000 certificates annually by 2026-27. The plan is to award degrees for managerial positions, diplomas for supervisory jobs and certificates for operational-level positions. The proposal involves setting up sector-specific schools for dairy, fishery, rural credit and cooperative credit among others at an investment of around ₹750 crore over a three-year period.¹

The Ministry of Cooperation is also in the process of formulating the New National Cooperation Policy. A national-level committee was constituted on 2nd September 2022 under the chairmanship of Shri Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu, consisting of experts from the cooperative sector. Representatives from National/ State/ District/ Primary level cooperative societies, Secretaries (Cooperation) and RCSs from States/UTs, officers from Central Ministries/ Departments will be involved to formulate the New National Cooperation Policy.²

Need for the Cooperative University

India has around 854,000 cooperatives registered under the State Cooperative Societies Act and Central Multi-State Cooperative Societies Act. The new university is expected to provide 2,000 teaching and non-teaching staff jobs and also help in capacity building of existing cooperative society employees.³ Therefore, the National Cooperative University might provide a structure to the cooperative societies in efficiently managing as well as operating the whole system as well as give more and better opportunities to the stakeholders involved in the cooperative.

At a time when cooperatives are being neglected, setting up a cooperative university will fill a big void in the cooperative education system benefitting the members and the wider community. A cooperative university will give a big boost to social justice, cooperative principles and values. There is also a lack of quality research in the

¹ World's largest varsity for coops mooted : <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/worlds-largest-varsity-for-coops-mooted-11673461528196.html>

² Govt setting up Co-op University; Shah informs Lok Sabha
<https://www.indiancooperative.com/from-states/govt-setting-up-co-op-university-shah-informs-lok-sabha/>

³ Ibid

cooperative sector. The cooperative university will take up this field as its prime focus and will bridge a knowledge gap in the field of cooperatives.⁴

It is also seen that professionally, a career in cooperatives can offer stability, as there are many cooperatives who find a sense of satisfaction working for the poor and downtrodden sections of the society for whom cooperatives are primarily meant. For instance, well-off cooperative organizations like IFFCO, KRIBHCO, AMUL etc offer salaries on par with MNCs. Cooperative organizations and cooperative banks offer job opportunities at all levels. It is also expected that with a cooperative study background, there are employment opportunities in institutions of higher learning, government ministries, research institutions, NGOs, etc. This can be said in the light of the good opportunities created for IT-trained people at various levels in these cooperatives due to the government's focus on the digitalisation of primary agriculture cooperative societies (PACS).⁵

Expectations from the Bill

The National Cooperative University Bill, 2023, could potentially seek to establish a national-level cooperative university system within a country. The key points that might be addressed in such a bill could include:⁶

- **Purpose and Objectives:** Defining the purpose and objectives of establishing cooperative universities, include promoting cooperative values, fostering inclusive and participatory education, and addressing societal challenges through cooperative principles for the students interested in pursuing a career in the cooperative sector. This will also be beneficial for the people or staff already involved in the cooperative sector.
- **Governance and Structure:** Outlining the governance structure of the national cooperative university system, including the formation of a board or council responsible for overseeing the functioning and administration of these universities.
- **Academic Programs and Research:** Specifying the academic programs, courses, and research activities that these universities will offer, with a focus on cooperative principles and study the areas of work of cooperatives. The courses offered in the nature of diploma/degree/postgraduate or doctoral degrees in various areas of cooperatives. **Recognition and Accreditation:** Addressing the process of recognition and accreditation for the cooperative universities to ensure the quality and standards of education provided through this University.

⁴Co-op University would be better than traditional one: Jamia VC
<https://www.indiancooperative.com/ncui/co-op-university-would-be-better-than-traditional-one-jamia-vc/>

⁵ Cooperative University to be launched to teach new business principles:

<https://www.educationtimes.com/article/campus-beat-college-events/92616728/cooperative-university-to-be-launched-to-teach-new-business-principles>

⁶ Cooperatives: Characteristics, activities, status, challenges :

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635541/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)635541_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635541/EPRS_BRI(2019)635541_EN.pdf)

- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Encouraging collaborations and partnerships between cooperative universities and other educational institutions, organizations, and industries to promote knowledge exchange and address real-world challenges. There are many national universities like Rajiv Gandhi University of Cooperative Management in Assam, all Arts colleges of Kerala the University of Mysore, Pondicherry University, Annamalai University offer a course in Cooperation or a specialization in the areas of work of cooperatives.⁷
- **Accountability and Evaluation:** Establishing mechanisms for evaluating the performance and impact of cooperative universities and ensuring accountability to stakeholders and the wider public.

Conclusion

The National Cooperative University would primarily be for individuals, professionals, and leaders involved in the cooperative sector. Overall, a National Cooperative University in India could serve as a catalyst for cooperative development, education, and research. By promoting cooperative principles and values, it has the potential to contribute significantly to the socio economic growth and inclusive development of the country.

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⁷ Cooperative University to be launched to teach new business principles:
<https://www.educationtimes.com/article/campus-beat-college-events/92616728/cooperative-university-to-be-launched-to-teach-new-business-principles>