

National Conference on Children's Cooperatives

29-30th June 2026

Organized by **Butterflies**

At

Vishwa Yuvak Kendra

Teen Murti Marg, Pt. Uma Shanker Dikshit Road, Chanakyapuri

New Delhi



**International Year
of Cooperatives**

Cooperatives Build a Better World

Concept Note

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” For the past 25 years, children have embodied this spirit through *Children's Cooperatives*—a pioneering model of secondary cooperatives created by **Butterflies**. These cooperatives build children's capacities in health, education, financial management, and life skills through collective decision-making and shared responsibility.

Founded in 1989, Butterflies is a Delhi-based grassroots organisation working with street-connected and out-of-school children. Its child-centred approach emerged from early research by its founder, Ms. Rita Panicker, which highlighted the urgent need to recognise children as active participants in decisions that shape their lives.

In 1995, Butterflies transformed its health programme into the **Child Health and Sports Cooperative (CHSC)**. Through this model, children learn health, hygiene, nutrition, emotional wellbeing, and leadership in child-friendly ways. The cooperative has strengthened resilience, encouraged democratic participation, and enabled children to take collective action on issues such as sanitation, play spaces, and community health.

Children's Development Khazana (CDK) introduced children to budgeting, saving, prioritising needs, and democratic decision-making. With rules shaped by children themselves and supported by adult facilitators, CDK quickly became a highly engaging platform that built responsibility, confidence, and future-oriented thinking.

These experiences have shown that programmes are most effective when children identify needs, shape solutions, and take ownership of outcomes. The cooperative approach not only strengthens programme sustainability, but also nurtures democratic values, mutual respect, responsibility, and collective wellbeing.

These learnings led Butterflies to adopt cooperatives as an overarching philosophy across its programmes, including *Cooperative Learning* introduced in 2018. This teaching-learning approach promotes peer learning, participation, and better learning outcomes. Notably, CDK and CHSC have also been adopted by like-minded organisations in India and beyond, reaching over 6,500 children.

In 2020, Butterflies' Executive Director, **Smt. Rita Panicker**, received the **International Cooperative Innovation Award** from the *U.S. Overseas Cooperative Development Council*, recognising the organisation's pioneering contribution to cooperative development.

The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the value of children's cooperatives. Children applied prior learning on hygiene, masking, distancing, vaccination awareness, and savings to support their families and communities. In many cases, CDK savings became a critical safety net, underscoring how cooperative-based learning can build both immediate resilience and long-term capability.

Against this backdrop, Butterflies proposes a two-day national conference to examine the promise of cooperatives—especially children's cooperatives—as a powerful approach to social development. The conference will create a platform for reflection, evidence-sharing, policy dialogue, and stronger conceptual grounding for future action.

The *objectives* of the conference are to:

1. Convene policy makers, academicians, and practitioners to present trends and practices at the intersection of Cooperatives, children's participation and development.
2. Identify policy and programmes that foster cooperatives as an approach to make social development.
3. Highlight scalable programmes that delivers improved learning outcomes, life skills education on health, mental health and financial management through cooperatives approach.
4. Engage children and adolescents in sharing lived experiences, deliberating and designing future roadmaps for cooperatives for social development.
5. Develop an outcome declaration with action recommendations for policy and practice.

The conference will feature invited speakers from India and abroad, children's panel discussions, paper and case-study presentations, poster sessions, and digital storytelling by

children. Together, these exchanges will deepen understanding of the social impact and future potential of cooperatives.

Themes:

1. Secondary Cooperatives and its application for betterment of children-Conceptual and theoretical underpinnings
2. Secondary Cooperatives and Health Outcomes through sports and other mediums for children
3. Secondary Cooperatives vis-à-vis Financial Management and Democratic Values for children
4. Cooperative Learning- Learnings Outcomes and Challenges

Day 1 Deliberations:

Plenary Session:

The Plenary session will bring together government heads and officials and leading practitioners on cooperatives to deliberate on the relevance of cooperatives for social development especially in the context of children's health and mental health wellness. One of the special attractions would be children's voices about their cooperatives.

Panel 1: Secondary Cooperatives/Non-credit Cooperatives and its application - Conceptual and practical aspects

The Panel will bring together academic, practitioners, national and international bodies to deliberate conceptual and practical aspects of secondary/non-credit cooperatives for social development. It will examine how cooperative principles are relevant in theory and in practice. The special lens would be on how cooperatives can be used as an approach to teach children about health, mental health wellness and financial management.

The Panel will begin with a brief ignite talk of children where children will talk about how cooperatives approach has been safe and supportive spaces for them.

Panel 2: Holistic Health including Mental Health Wellness through Cooperatives

In this Panel, representatives and practitioners from different organizations, who have implemented Child Health and Sports Cooperatives (programme conceptualized and initiated by Butterflies), will provide insights into show the CHSC has been put to action and how effective it has been and what are the factors. The convened panel will deliberate on how the CHSC has been providing mental health wellness.

The Panel will begin with a brief ignite talk of children where children will talk about their lived experiences of Child Health and Sport cooperatives.

Special Plenary Session of Alumni of Children's Cooperatives

This special plenary session will involve alumni of children's cooperatives of Butterflies, and these adolescents will deliberate on 'Children's Cooperatives During the COVID Pandemic'. This special session will shed light on the functioning and effectiveness during the pandemic.

Day 2 Deliberations

Plenary session:

The Plenary session will bring together government heads and officials and leading practitioners on cooperatives to deliberate on the relevance of cooperatives for social change especially in the context of children's education and importances of financial management for children. We will witness and learn from children's sharing of their experiences of being part of Children's Development Khazana (a Butterflies concept and initiative) and Cooperative Learning.

Panel 3: Cooperatives a Life Skills Education Teaching Financial Management and Democratic Values for children

This panel will convene policy makers, academics, and practitioners to explore and analyse the trends, methods and programmes to teach financial literacy or financial management especially among children and adolescents. How this cooperative brought a behavioural change in children in terms of prioritising needs, budgeting and saving for future goals. Children's narratives will give an insight to what extent they have been successful.

The Panel will begin with a brief ignite talk of children members of Cooperatives.

Panel 4: Financial Education and Inclusion: Perspectives and programmes

This panel will have bankers and practitioners from banks or financial education institutions, and they will share the experiences and relevance of financial inclusion programmes especially for children. What the latest research in this area conveys, and roadmap for future.

The Panel will begin with a brief ignite talk of children members of Children's Development Khazana.

Valedictory Session

This session will report on the proceedings of the conference and then will bring all the relevant stakeholders under one roof to understand the relevance of cooperatives. The valedictory session will be delivered by an eminent scholar in the area of cooperatives and social development. One of the children will be given opportunity to give a special valedictory address.

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