

SPEECHES
ON
COOPERATION
19

**Cooperative
Development
in the
Eighties**

Speeches by :

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International Cooperative Alliance

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19. Cooperative Development in the Eighties

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205

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Cooperative Development in the Eighties

My association with cooperatives is almost 25 years old. I was appointed Registrar in as early as 1954. When I think of the changes that have taken place in the cooperative movement over these 25 years, I wonder whether in 1954 I could have ventured to say something about what would happen to cooperatives in the 60's or in 70's. In any event, I am not too sure I would have been on the right track. Therefore, now when things are even more complex than they were 20 or 25 years ago, one must confess in all humility that we do not know enough as to what might happen to the cooperatives, to the environment in which the cooperatives operate and so on over the next decade. In fact, things change so fast that the next 10 years will perhaps see more changes than the last 100 years have seen. In this fast moving world, any kind of forecast-

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ing exercise, any kind of effort to project what might happen to an institutional system like cooperatives becomes very very difficult. What I say is subject to this obvious limitation.

When I think of cooperative development in the 80's, I am not thinking of the entire cooperative movement. I do not think one can think of entire cooperative movement in this Region because the movement embraces all kinds of activities, all kinds of sectors. If one were to discuss the housing cooperatives in the 80's, one would have one kind of focus. If one discusses urban consumer cooperatives, one would have another kind of focus. If you are thinking of thrift and credit societies you have still another kind of focus. Therefore, I thought that perhaps the best way to discuss is to think primarily of agricultural or rural cooperatives because they are the most important for a large part of this Region in terms of membership, activities and importance.

Cooperative development in the Region in the 80's can probably be discussed around three principal questions : (1) What will be principal characteristics of the socio-economic environment in the 80's in which agricultural or rural cooperatives operate? What will be main problems or challenges which the rural economies of the countries in this Region face or the problems or difficulties which will spill into the next decade from the decade which is going out? In other words, what are the problems external to the cooperative movement? (2) What will be or what is the identification of

problems which are internal to the cooperative movement and which will spill into the 80's and which to some extent might get accentuated or enlarged as the 80's proceed? (3) What will be the reaction of the cooperative movement? One way of dealing with this last question, which is perhaps the hard core question, is to try and see what will happen if the past is projected into the future. Another would be to try and say what the cooperatives ought to do to be able to react more meaningfully to the problems that will arise in the 80's. One would be merely a projection of the past and the other a deliberate planned effort to adequately meet both external and internal challenges.

Taking up the first question first, it is not easy to generalise about the socio-economic problems of this Region because, in some ways, the problems of rural economics differ. We have on the one hand a country like Japan as part of this Region. On the other hand, there are the developing countries, most of which have common problems.

While cooperators, are discussing cooperative development in the 80's, others engaged in the economic activities are discussing similar questions in meetings of the FAO, UNIDO, ESCAP and so on. Discussions are taking place on what will happen in the 80's, and what will happen in the two decades following the 80's and even what will happen in the two decades following the 90's. In fact, FAO has produced a very interesting document for a World Conference on agriculture in 2000 AD. Very recently the UNIDO drew up a document

called "Industries in 2000 AD". The ICA has set up a small group to prepare a document "Cooperatives in 2000 AD". I happen to be a member of that group.

Cooperatives must take cognisance of the situation that may emerge. The most striking feature of the socio-economic environment in which cooperatives will operate, has the following three or four characteristics. First, all cooperators must pointedly take cognisance of the fact that all the world population of the poor people, 89 per cent are living in countries represented in this Region, i.e. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia etc. The numbers are very striking. The South Asian countries have 350 million poor persons. East and South-East Asian countries have 168 million poor. This is the size of the population which is projected as at the end of 1979 and which will spill into the 80's as one basic contour of the rural economy within which the cooperatives will operate.

The second, almost equally staggering, set of numbers which present the kind of socio-economic backdrop is with regard to the position concerning under-nourishment. There is a very interesting analysis available. Of the total population of developing countries comprised in this Region, nearly 22 per cent have their food intake which is below the desirable nutritional level. The number worked out by the UN Agencies is that these countries roughly account for nearly 415 million under-nourished. This is for all the developing countries taken together. But, in this

region something like two thirds of this number is accounted for.

Another most distressing feature is the degree of unemployment and under-employment in the rural economy in these areas. I have some ready numbers in respect of India. I think one can look for similar numbers for other countries. In India, we have estimated in the Planning Commission that, as at the end of 1978, the total number of persons unemployed in the country was nearly 20 million. This is in terms of what is known as person-years. To this, over the next two decades, the total addition of the labour force which will seek employment, will be of the order of 70 million.

Now this is the type of the problems which the cooperative movement in individual countries as well as in the groups of countries represented in the Region will have to take note of.

This in turn determines what are the principal tasks and social which the people of these countries and cooperatives as representing a large segment of people will have to deal with. A large part of employment growth will necessarily be in the agricultural sector. As far as one can see, in most parts of these countries the employment that may be generated in the organised sector of the economy, in the industrial sector, is very very small. For instance, we have computed for India that if industrial production grows roughly at about 7 per cent per annum, which is a reasonably high rate of growth, the growth in employment in the organised

sector of the economy is only about 12 per cent. In other words, for the entire and additional labour force, as much as over 80% must get gainful employment in rural economy in non-organised sector of the economy, or what you can call informal sector of the economy. Therefore, a great deal of the employment development is linked to development of agriculture irrigation, development of allied activities and so on and so forth.

The other major task is that of distributive justice. The problem is how to redistribute the purchasing power among the mass of the people so that you have greater equality and greater nutritional intake among the mass of the people in this region. It has been projected that, in this region, the population will grow roughly at about 2% per annum. If some of these tasks are to be met, the economy must grow at a certain order to generate necessary surpluses for this purpose. The historical growth rate in this Region for all countries taken together has been somewhere around 4.7 per cent. There is a potential for growing at 6.8 per cent. I am mentioning these figures largely to highlight that there is a large problem of increasing agricultural development per cent but more than that of redistributing the gains of the agricultural production among those who ought to be beneficiaries of this process, the small farmers, the marginal farmers, the agricultural labour, the rural artisans and so on and so forth. This is where I think a whole set of tasks are involved. First of all, purely economic tasks will be devolving on the cooperative movement--the cooperatives role in providing credit, in providing agricultural inputs, in pro-

viding marketing and processing. This, of course, is well known but I want you to have a feel of the kind and the size of operation that will grow in the 80's and 90's. Of the increased production that will come about in these countries over the next decade, only about 28% will be accounted for by area increase. As much as 72% will come by increases in yields—that is greater productivity. Now if that is to fructify, a great deal of expansion of irrigation, of use of irrigation, of use of inputs and of irrigation facilities etc. will be involved. By way of illustration, the figures of fertilisers are somewhat like this. In 1979 the quantity of fertilisers used in developing countries would be around 19 million tons. This would have to increase to roughly about 94 million tons by 2000 AD.

Now let us consider the specific problems the cooperatives will be confronted with as instruments of economic and social growth in the 80s. Some problems are internal. Mr. Rajaguru has prepared an excellent paper which deals with a large number of such problems.

Cooperatives have been busy with certain activities like credit and processing facilities. The next decade will see a very large expansion of these activities. This means the cooperatives will have to do much more than what they have been doing. But it is not going to be merely a differences in quantities. It will almost mean a qualitative change as large managerial inputs will be needed to handle the large volumes of business.

Cooperatives will have to operate in an environment where the political leadership will be concerned with measures which have a considerable direct bearing on removal of poverty and unemployment from the rural agricultural economy. In this context, there will be a certain amount of scrutiny of the functioning of the cooperatives as the decade progresses. Most of the countries represented here had the old British Cooperative Legislation which talked of a cooperative member as a person of limited needs. This was a definition which had some kind of social orientation. It indicated some body prone to exploitation and who can, therefore, join hands with his fellow members and organise services and economic activities for himself and for his colleagues. As things have progressed, one wonders whether cooperatives still retain that kind of a moral-cum-social-ideological orientation. The FAO report says many agricultural cooperatives in different parts of the world "seem to be operating in such a manner as to strengthen the position of the rural elite thereby accentuate the problems of inequality in this sector of the economy".

The cooperatives will have to rationalise their structure, develop a very proper kind of integration between the apex society and the primary societies, eliminate some of the middle tiers and develop professional cadres.

The principal question all over the world, especially this part of the Region, is : does the cooperative movement have any clear vision of the kind of socio-econo-

mic system it is trying to promote or has it reduced itself to a way of conducting business? Is it just that it observes certain rules and procedures and regulations, say "one member one vote", limited returns on share capital etc? If a joint stock company were to observe all these rules, does it become a good cooperative? In the 80's will the cooperatives only become bigger and bigger or will they become cooperatively better?

The ICA has its membership drawn from large parts of the world and to date the membership of the affiliated organisations of ICA is around 346 million. In terms of sheer numbers, it would constitute a largely populated country if all these cooperators were living in one country. Yet one is left with a question mark. Why does a worldwide movement with such a large membership not command adequate voice or adequate influence in the shaping of policies? Basically, while cooperatives in some ways have some common points, they do not articulate them adequately or do not seem to develop enough measures to forge some kind of unity and solidarity as a system of developing an economic organisation which will have some common points of a kind of social vision. Therefore, the net result is that a very large well-organised cooperative movement somehow manages to make a rather limited impact on the total situation.

Cooperative Development in the Eighties

The subject assigned to me is one that calls for a kind of forecast which hopefully will be fair and reasonable over the next ten years. Having neither a crystal ball nor any of the other apparatus used by the professionals in divining the future, I must submit that my amateurish attempt would be fraught with many an error and even inconsistencies. However, to do what justice I can to the subject assigned to me, I shall try to make a brief survey of the recent past in respect of the overall trends and development in the economic field in this part of the world and thereafter venture into some speculations which I sincerely hope will hold good, if not for the decade we are concerned with at least for a few years in the eighties.

The decade that we will be concluding at the end of next month would be the Second Development

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Decade of the U. N. and the Cooperative Development Decade as declared by the ICA in 1970-71. In trying to make guesstimates for the future I believe this aspect too would be of relevance as the decade we are just completing is one where the U. N. world body and the ICA had emphasized as Development Decades. There is no such emphasis or underlining of intent in respect of the decade that is to follow. I, therefore, think that it would be appropriate to place before you the thinking behind the factors that led to the declaration of the 70's as Cooperative Development Decade (CDD) and leave it to you to judge whether within your own national environs, within your own movements, the CDD has had any special impact and if so whether in the ensuing decades the development process will be impaired by the absence of such focus. The intention behind the ICA's declaration of the 70's as the Cooperative Development Decade was "to undertake a concerted and intensive campaign for the promotion of cooperatives in developing countries. It was a means of channelling to developing countries that tangible help essential for bringing strength to the young cooperative movements in those areas." (ICA Studies and Reports, January 1971).

The 70's could, to my mind, be justly called the era in which most governments in the region accepted the cooperatives as a necessary instrument to ensure economic development of the weaker sections of the community and to usher in an era of equity and social justice. Many of the countries would have during this period made significant changes in their laws governing

the cooperatives and brought the movements under closer supervision and control by governments. The decade is characterized also by the emergence of very strong and large sized cooperatives, some of which are effective enough to compete with the growing strength of the Multi-Nationals whose pervading influence we had occasion to discuss at the last Open Asian Conference held in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1978. In many of the countries of the region, through a process of amalgamation of cooperative societies, especially in the agricultural sector, larger societies were created to perform the multifarious services at the village level. In the urban consumer movements, one noticed a trend towards the establishment of supermarkets, to effectively compete with the private sector. There has been also increased emphasis on the development of fishery cooperatives, industrial cooperatives and even housing cooperatives, but the achievements in these sectors have not been very encouraging in many of the countries of the region. At least in some countries positive steps have been taken to enter into joint ventures between cooperatives of different countries or between different cooperatives within a country or even between cooperatives and private entrepreneurs from other countries. Notwithstanding these developments in the fields of production, development of regional or international cooperative trade has been most disappointing. In fact, except for a few transactions on the basis of bilateral agreements between the cooperatives of two countries, the achievements have been poor. The international organisation set up to help inter-cooperative international trade has been compelled to find alternate

economic activities to keep itself going, because the member support and member patronage on which its success would depend, was unfortunately not readily forthcoming. However, though inter-cooperative international trade has been disappointing this does not mean that individual cooperatives, in many countries have not expanded their international trading activities even though with even this expansion, the share of the cooperatives in the international trade of the region would be quite insignificant.

The trend, therefore, in the development of cooperatives in many countries in the region has been towards the growth of the larger size cooperative, some with membership of over several thousands, and with the governments playing a dominant role in assisting their growth and also supervising and controlling them. Having identified this trend it is worthwhile taking a look at two important elements in a cooperative—its management and its element of democratic control. In a recent statement made by the Prime Minister of a very big democracy in the Region, he said “The Co-operative body seems to be doing all right—but the cooperative soul seems to have got lost.” This statement clearly illustrates the concern of many a cooperator in the region. As many of you are aware, there has been during this decade, a continuing debate, not only in this part of the world, but also elsewhere, about the substance of the cooperative, its role and content. With the increasing size of the cooperative society and control passing from the general body to a representative body and finally to bureaucrats or technocrats, the con-

tinuing debate has been, what is it that distinguishes a cooperative from any other organisation for economic activity, is democratic control any longer relevant, or should there be several concepts depending on the size of the organisation and the number and spread of its membership. This is a debate as mentioned earlier, not confined to this region but in fact having increasing emphasis in the developed world.

It is necessary to emphasize the need to professionalize management, especially to meet the increasing volume of business of the large societies. An area in which the cooperative movement in many countries have fallen short of expectations is that of the development of management cadres. Many movements had to fight hard for decades to break away from the heritage of the honorary office-bearer performing management functions. This was followed by the reluctance of the honorary office-bearers to fix attractive salaries for managers. Cooperative managers all over the region, by and large remained ill paid. As a result, cooperatives generally attracted the incompetent and the hangers-on. In many places the gap was filled by the deputation of government officers, on a temporary basis, to carry on until the societies were able to attract suitable managers to their cadres. The sad fact is that in many instances, the bureaucrat turned technocrat has come to stay. The societies and the movements are finding it difficult to shake them off. This is not to imply that the technocrat has not done a commendable job in either increasing the efficiency of the services rendered by the cooperative or in even increasing its

profitability. This they have done in many cases, but the overall effect on member relations, promotional prospects of the lower down cooperative employee and even growth of leadership has not been very encouraging.

According to the traditional concept, which still remains, the cooperative management is elected by the members from among themselves and is subject to control by the general body through its general meeting. This concept went through a gradual metamorphosis in some countries, starting with an occasional nominee on the board of directors from the government or the banks to safeguard the interests of the government or banks. A point was reached in the 70's when either the majority or the entire directorate was nominated by the government. Sometimes the persons so nominated came not from the cooperative ranks but from the political camp-followers in the area. Today the top management of many cooperatives in some countries is a mixture of nominees from government, bank and political ranks, with not even one representative elected by the members. There are many instances in Asia and elsewhere of cooperative societies registering themselves outside the cooperative law to safeguard their cooperative character.

There is increasing involvement of women in cooperative activity, both as members and in roles of leadership. The U.N. focus on the International Year of Women and Child and population education, nutrition and health, has brought to the cooperative fold women

from many ranks, apart from the usual textile weavers and those engaged in handicrafts and cottage industries. This, then, is another achievement of the 70's. To this can be added the concern of cooperators in schools cooperatives, the teaching of the subject of cooperation in schools, colleges and universities and some significant achievements made in this regard.

Before we pass on to the task of identifying the trends for the 80's it would be useful to take a look at the politico-economic developments of the 70's as these would play a decisive role in determining the course of development for the cooperatives. The late 1970's saw a reaffirmation of the faith of the ordinary citizen in many countries of the region and elsewhere in democracy and the concept of the open society. Many nations have revised their centralized national economic development plans to make room for a large element of decentralization, leading to the creation of several levels in the decision-making apparatus. This trend is bound to spill over into the eighties and gather momentum, and eventually have its influence on the nature and character of the cooperative society in these countries.

On the economic front we are faced with the dismal picture of many of the countries of the region increasing their rate of economic growth, but with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, with a large mass of the population hovering below the poverty line while the affluent 10% enjoy the benefits, at times as as much as 60% of the total pie. The increasing

influence of the Multi-Nationals, the severe energy crisis in the rising tide of double digit inflation, and the unfavourable terms of trade, coupled with the alarming population growth in many countries of the region have resulted in debates, discussions and strategies at the international level, and a search for satisfactory means of ensuring to the large mass of people at least a small portion of the good things of life. This international struggle and argument will spill over to the eighties and the creation of commodity funds and the concept of the 'Third Window' may eventually help the poorer nations to obtain some favourable terms from the developed North, but this remains to be seen. In the national sphere, the prevailing situations have led to the now famous slogans "Garibi Hatao" (Eradicate poverty) of Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the "Roti, Kapra aur Makan" (Bread, clothes and homes) of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. To this dismal picture must be added the fact of growing unemployment, both educated and otherwise, and alarming socio-economic problems arising out of the composition of the population. In some countries of the region over 50% of the population is below 40 years of age and many of the unemployed are in this age group. In many countries, 40% of the people in agriculture do not own the land they cultivate. These facts are likely to influence the process of planning and programming and will determine the path of development in the eighties.

In many countries of the region, even, in the coming decade, the emphasis will be on agriculture, though there may be increasing emphasis in other areas of

economic activity like small-scale industry, inland and marine fishery, and cooperative marketing and intra-regional and international trade. Due to internal changes in emphasis, the real benefits of the green revolution and the white revolution will become available to a larger mass of people—the actual cultivator, the agricultural labourer and the tiller of the soil. This is based on the presumption that most countries would follow a more meaningful and practical land reforms policy, as it has been accepted that one of the prerequisites for any economic advantage to flow to the mass of the peasantry is to ensure the right of ownership to the tiller. These changes, to my mind, will cast extra burdens on the cooperative movements, as many of the new owners, because of their smallness, will be compelled to use the cooperative form of organisation either to obtain their services, or even to pool their resources to benefit from the economies of scale. The societies will continue to be multipurpose, serving the needs of the members in respect of agriculture, day-to-day subsistence, marketing and supply.

Simultaneously, there will be tremendous pressure to develop small scale industrial cooperatives, the workers participative societies which can harness the resources available at the village level and provide employment to the masses who now exert increasing pressure on the meagre agricultural resources. This will be the result of a conscious effort by governments to achieve a multiplicity of objectives. The increasing shortage of energy and increasing pressure on cities will make it vitally necessary to stem the flow of the rural

population to the urban areas and even transfer some of the unemployed urban population to rural areas. The large mass of educated youth looking for job opportunities will have to be organised in decentralized development schemes and here, too, the cooperative form of organisation will help at least partially in finding workable solutions to the problem. Already in at least some countries of the region there is special legislation to ensure that the cooperatives play a dominant role in economic programmes meant for the weaker sections of the community. In some countries legislation provides for the reservation of management seats to the weaker sections. It is also required that a specified proportion of the lending of the agricultural cooperatives be made available to the weaker sections. In recent times the world body has voiced increasing concern in regard to cooperatives and the poor. This aspect will be in the forefront of economic planning in the decade ahead. Developments in these fields, leading to broad-basing and strengthening of the infrastructure will necessarily lead to a more equitable distribution of resources than at present and, hopefully, will accelerate the growth of savings and capital of the rural poor. The pure credit cooperative or the thrift and savings society may find a bigger clientele and may have to face a demand for conversion to provision of services other than credit only. In fact growing inflation alone may compel societies to find more profitable use for savings than mere lending.

Many of these developments will have their beginnings in government plans and policies and the coope-

ratives will most often function, by and large, as instruments for implementation of government policy. This is something that one has to recognise as inevitable in the context of developing economies. Of course, there are among us, the purists in cooperation who abhor the very mention of government initiative or government plans and policies and who maintain that cooperation to be successful must emerge from the felt needs of persons who are fully aware of the potentialities of the cooperative form of organization to fulfil their needs. Theoretically, it is a useful concept, but in a situation of illiteracy, mass unemployment, massive poverty and ever increasing political pressure for massive action to ameliorate the lot of the masses, the restoration of human dignity and what-have-you, not all the goodwill in the world will produce this capacity to initiate cooperatives at that level. If over 40 to 50% of a nation's population is at that level and if cooperatives can help the well-to-do, why not use the cooperatives to help the less well-to-do ?

In this context I would like to quote from two statements made by ministers of cooperatives in two different countries to illustrate the type of dilemma that cooperatives face. In his inaugural speech at the opening of the National Convention of Consumer Cooperatives in India in early 1979, Mr. Mohan Dharia, Minister for Cooperatives and Civil Supplies, said, "While government support, including financial, may be sought in the initial stages or for specific programmes of development, it is absolutely essential for the consumer movement to generate strength from

within itself. Consumer cooperatives should, therefore, have mass membership of consumers who should be loyal to their institution, patronise them and give them a democratic base". Thus you will see, the intention is to help, to assist the poor man to find a place in the sun and this through a cooperative form—and of course he is expected to grow in strength and stand up on his own. I shall quote also from the speech made by the Minister for Food and Cooperatives, Sri Lanka, Mr. S. B. Herat, when he opened the Experts' Consultation on Member Education, also in early 1979 : "The organization of this Experts' Consultation has come at a very appropriate time, because the government, as a matter of principle, has decided to hand back the management of cooperatives to democratically elected bodies. With this view in mind we have already planned to complete the holding of elections in all multipurpose cooperative societies by the end of 1979. I am happy that we have been able through persistent effort to get the elections going. My intention as Minister in charge of the subject of cooperatives is to see that the movement is both de-politicized and as far as possible de-officialized. The pioneers of the movement in Sri Lanka, both official and non-official, succeeded in instilling a lasting devotion to member education in the first generation of cooperators and the remnants of their influence can still be found in many parts of the island today." Here we see an acceptance of the problem of the present but a firm direction towards which one expects the movement to grow. This is true of many other developing countries of the region as well.

In the complex task that lies ahead one would see the need for involvement of all sections of the population at all levels. This necessarily means the evolution, by individual societies, by federal organisations and others, of meaningful programmes which would give the membership the correct orientation in regard to the present and the future.

It is often said that the youth of today do the thinking for the future. If that be so, there arises the need for education of the youth to get their perspectives correct and ensure the progress of the cooperatives towards the desired goal.

The trend in the eighties, to my mind, would be towards the development of a medium-sized society, the large-sized society being the exception. This has its advantages as the society itself and the federal organisations and governments can emphasize the education approach and thus help to build the democratic base of the movement. An increase in the number of societies will necessarily lead to an increase in the demand for managers and other employees, and cooperative training institutes and others will be hard put to satisfy the growing demand. In this sector, as also in developing suitable systems to meet the challenges of the times, there is likely to be increasing international collaboration, with the international bodies or the more affluent cooperatives in the developed countries providing technical assistance.

The question may well be asked : what emerges

from all this a cooperative movement as we understand it or a cooperative system as we have it in many countries now? This, I believe, is where you come in—to decide what is best and to use your experience and knowledge to influence the course of cooperative development in the years to come.

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