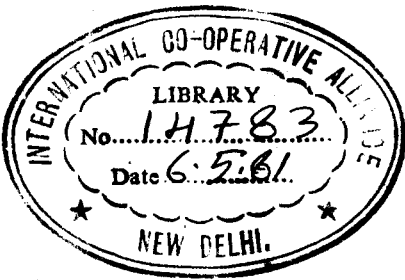


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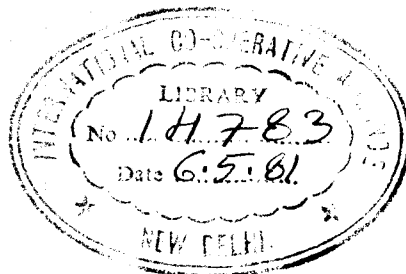
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INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE

ICA Women's Conference on  
"Women and Work in Co-operatives"  
10th and 11th October 1980  
Hotel Cosmos, Moscow, USSR

334:3-055-2  
ICA.

WOMEN AND WORK IN CO-OPERATIVES IN THE SOVIET UNION



Paper presented by

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## WOMEN AND WORK IN CO-OPERATIVES

Dear women-co-operators,

Dear guests,

Allow me, on behalf of the Centrosoyus Women's Committee and all Soviet women-co-operators to convey to you cordial, fraternal greetings and wish the women's conference every success in its work.

No one can deny nowadays, that women play an important role in the co-operative movements of many countries. Moreover, further development of the co-operative movement depends to a considerable degree upon an active participation of women in its activity.

It is woman who is particularly interested in the development of trade, public catering, supply, marketing, small-scale production, i.e. in the fields of economic activity where co-operatives have gained substantial results.

However, the participation of women in the co-operative movement does not depend purely on their will but on the conditions, as well, created for them by the society.

From the very beginning of its existence the Soviet state engaged itself in creating these political, social and economic conditions in order to provide real opportunities for women, formerly backward and illiterate housewives, to participate in labour and social life.

Already first decrees of the Soviet power, the Constitutions of 1918 and 1924 abolished all former laws which humiliated women in society and family and proclaimed the equality of women with men. Still it was important not only to proclaim but

to secure this equality, which meant quite a lot: the foundation for democratism and equity of the whole structure of life was being laid.

The founder of the Soviet state V.I.Lenin said that "to effect her complete emancipation and make her the equal of the man it is necessary for the national economy to be socialised and for women to participate in common productive labour. Then women will occupy the same position as men". (V.I.Lenin, Collected Works, Moscow. V. 30, p. 43).

The recognition of maternity as a social function was an important step towards real emancipation of women.

For the first time in history, a unique system of motherhood and childhood was created in our country, ranking among its most humane social achievements.

It was already by the end of 1920s that public economy, i.e. state and co-operative sectors, became predominant on the national level, which had its immediate effect on the percentage of women engaged in the socially useful labour.

By 1928 women accounted to 24 per cent of all employed in the national economy.

Nowadays, under the conditions of developed socialism, half of all material and cultural values are created by the hands and intellect of women.

In this country the concern shown by society for women's participation in productive labour and state management is optimally combined with individual interests of women.

It is typical that when 10 thousand women working at industrial enterprises in big towns were questioned whether they would

like to quit their jobs, 93 per cent out of them answered negatively. There are more than 90 per cent of able-bodied women who either work or study. It is labour that determines in this country the status of a person, his social and family prestige. Socially useful work became an inherent necessity for millions of Soviet women.

The basic right of the man - the right to work - is guaranteed in this country by its socialist planned economy, stable and dynamic development of which ensures full and rational employment of all able-bodied. This was the basis on which emerged and firmly established itself a most characteristic feature of the Soviet people's mode of life - their confidence in the future; this was the basis which made it possible not only to proclaim in the new Constitution of 1977 extensive socio-economic rights of Soviet citizens but to guarantee their implementation as well.

Articles 35, 53 and 66 of the Fundamental Law of the USSR give a detailed and precise account of guarantees women are provided with in exercising their equality with men.

Equal opportunities with men which became a habitual standard for women do not release them however from their domestic chores and family duties.

Taking this fact into account the state displays its constant concern for problems related to children and family. This policy is incorporated in the state plans for economic and social development and in the state budget. Today, we have a full right to speak not only of equality but of certain privileges for women. The new USSR Constitution guarantees material and moral support accorded by the state to the family, the mother and the child.

Special attention is paid to improvement of working and living conditions of women. The Soviet legislation defines measures aimed at health protection of working women.

Legislative documents are issued regularly listing types of production and professions with difficult and harmful for woman's health labour conditions where women's work is prohibited. The system of moral incentives for working women is successfully implemented as well. In 1978 the USSR Council of Ministers and the USSR Central Union of trade unions adopted the Decision "On additional measures aimed at improvement of labour conditions for women engaged in the national economy", which provided a new scope of allowances for working women.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR has elected standing commissions from among the deputies dealing with matters of women's work and way of life, protection of maternity and childhood, which monitor the execution of the laws in question and submit their recommendations to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. The same deputy commissions are set up by the Supreme Soviet of Union Republics and the executive committees of the Soviets of People's Deputies of Territories and Regions. Women's commissions function in all the trade unions, from the USSR Central Union to factory ones.

Steady rise of the Soviet people's well-being and permanent concern shown by the Soviet state for women promote the growth of their social and productive activities.

Nowadays, women play an important part in all spheres of life of Soviet society - political, social, economic, scientific, cultural. In the Soviet consumer co-operatives women occupy a sig-

nificant position as well.

There are two million women, i.e. two thirds of the total number of workers employed in the Soviet consumer co-operatives. Thus, among those engaged in the co-operative trade women constitute nearly 80 per cent and in the public catering - more than 85 per cent.

Quite a number of women work at co-operative research institutes persistently exploring most effective methods of co-operative management.

In general, women are widely represented at all managerial levels. During the co-operative electoral campaign which took place at the end of the last year 1 260 thousand women were elected to governing and control bodies, i.e. 49.5 per cent of the total number of those elected.

Every third board chairman and every second vice-chairman of a consumer society or a union of consumer co-operatives is a woman. This index is even higher in some Republican unions. In the Latvian Union of consumer co-operatives, for instance, more than half of board chairmen are women.

Many women hold the highest position at the co-operative enterprises and establishments. Every second director of a retail trade unit, restaurant, canteen or a public catering complex, every third chief of a department, section or office is a woman.

Women are entrusted with 83 per cent of all posts of material responsibility, they predominate (80 per cent) among engineers, technicians, economists, commodity experts, accountants, inspectors and other specialists.

It is confirmed by life itself that woman can run business not

worse and at times even better than man. It was in march of 1972 that Galina Stagurova was elected chairman of the Gluboksk district union of consumer co-operatives (Byelorussia). She is a person of principle, exacting, sensitive and attentive to people's needs. She <sup>is</sup> characterised as well by her skills to organise and her ability to reach the set targets.

Raisa Zolotaryova, board chairman of the Nikolayev district consumer co-operative (Volgograd Region), Merited worker of trade of the Russian Federation, Sidika Kasymova, board chairman of the Chinzan town consumer co-operative (Tashkent Region), Merited worker of trade of the Uzbek SSR, "Exemplary worker of the Soviet consumer co-operatives" title bearer, mother of five children also proved to be efficient leaders.

In general, the co-operative enterprises are equipped with manpower.

However, high development rates of the Soviet consumer co-operatives which provide trade services for nearly half of the country's population and open annually new specialised shops, canteens, cafes, restaurants, big purchasing and processing units result in additional demand for manpower.

Constantly growing co-operative trade turnover is the evidence of ever extending scope of consumer co-operative activities. By the end of 1980 it will reach 73.7 billion roubles and grow by 17-fold as compared to 1940. It goes without saying that rapid development of all fields of co-operative economy is accompanied by increase in number of workers and employees.

On the one hand, the scientific and technical progress extend the limits for utilisation of woman's labour, it opens for woman the access to operation of new technical equipment, to quickly



~~extending~~ - a range of more qualified professions. On the other hand, new highly productive technology makes it possible to eliminate gradually manual labour and reduce the number of working places. Thus, the problem of providing manpower for the co-operative enterprises is being solved in two ways. First - by recruiting rural women busy with their individual plots of land and domestic chores, second - by reducing the share of manual labour.

A housewife may get interested in working at a co-operative enterprise only in case she spends less time on housekeeping, i.e. she is provided with more free time.

Pursuing this objective the state allocates, especially lately, large resources for housing and cultural construction in the rural area, mechanisation of agriculture, improvement of consumer services, transformation of the rural dwellers' mode of life, levelling up the conditions of life in town and countryside. I would like cite some examples. The volume of consumer services increased by 2.3 times from 1971 to 1978. In 1979 this growth index for the whole country amounted to 7.9 per cent, while for the rural area it reached 9.7 per cent.

The changes which can be observed in the structure of the turnover are the result of the growing incomes and solvent demand of the rural population. Thus, there has been a steep rise in the rural sales of radios, bicycles, electric and household appliances, furniture, cars.

Taking into consideration requirements of the rural dwellers, both co-operative members and non-members, the construction of such retail units as supermarkets, department stores, specialised shops "Goods for Women", "Goods for children" etc. is given priority.

Advanced methods of trade are being widely introduced, among them - self service, sales by samples or on preliminary orders, mail-order business, deliveries to home or work etc.

Industrial bread-baking, extension of trade and public catering network, production of consumer goods out of local raw materials, purchasing and marketing of agricultural production and wild plants being in possession of rural dwellers - all this many-sided activity of the consumer co-operatives is directed to the solution of an important social problem, namely, to making house-keeping less time consuming.

Facilitation of women's labour by utilisation of technological devices, improvement of conditions of work, life and recreation, raising the qualifications of the personnel is one of the most important objectives set up by the consumer co-operatives.

Improved technological equipment of production leads first of all to reduction of women's manual labour.

Reconstruction of functioning and building of new enterprises, introduction of more productive trade equipment, new working techniques and methods, comprehensive mechanisation and automation of labour consuming production processes are carried out on a wide scale.

During the last four years 96 per cent of the total growth of the industrial produce, 73 per cent of the trade turnover and the whole volume of construction and assembly works have been due to the risen level of mechanisation and increased labour productivity.

The 10th Congress of the Soviet consumer co-operatives which took place at the end of the last year approved, inter alia, the

scientific and technical program for further reduction of manual labour at the co-operative enterprises. The program, to be implemented in the next five-year period, envisages, in particular, further growth in production of equipment and means of small mechanisation by the Centrosoyuz plants. The equipment destined for the co-operative enterprises is designed and modernised with due regard for peculiarities of woman's labour.

Equipment of the co-operative enterprises with new modern technology goes hand in hand with measures aimed at improvement of production organisation and work.

Among the measures we can mention rational location of co-operative enterprises with account of needs of the population and manpower availability; broad specialisation and industrial co-operation; improvement of material and technical supply; reduction of the equipment demurrage; utilisation of progressive methods of work.

Tireless concern is shown for labour and health protection.

During the period of 1979-1980 it was spent twice as much for these purposes than in 1977-1978.

Special concern is shown for women who combine working with upbringing of children. It is forbidden to make expectant or nursing mothers work in night shifts, overtime or on their days off. In accordance with medical certificates given to them expectant and nursing mothers, as well as mothers with children under one are transferred to easier jobs with retention of the average pay they received at their previous jobs.

Besides her maternity leave woman has the right to get an additional one until her child is one year old. In case of her getting this leave, the job is reserved for her and the working

record is not interrupted. Mothers have the opportunity to work part-time or at home.

Women-co-operators receive medical care both from state and co-operative institutions.

There are medical offices, sanitary rooms, rest rooms for women-workers at the co-operative enterprises. Medical examinations are carried out regularly.

Striving to satisfy the requirements of women-co-operators the boards of co-operatives in collaboration with trade unions promote the development of the network of shops, canteens, buffets sections to order foodstuffs, consumer services.

Ever growing assistance is accorded to families in the field of child's care and upbringing.

More than 60 thousand school-children spend annually their holidays at specialised recreation and health-building institutions. The network of kindergartens and creches is constantly growing. The co-operatives allocate annually up to 10 million roubles for maintenance and running of these institutions. With the consent given by the co-operative members a great number of pre-school institutions are built with the help of deductions made from dividends. Children of co-operators may go as well to pioneer camps and sanatoria run by trade unions.

Great attention is paid to improvement of housing and living conditions of co-operators.

They get annually 25 000 sq. m. of floor space built with the help of co-operative funds. The housing is allocated to co-operators by the state as well.

Health-building institutions are fully available for women-co-operators. Centrosoyus has got 11 sanatoria, 88 recreation

centres, boarding-houses, dispensaries run by co-operative organisations and enterprises. The network of these institutions is constantly growing. The Uzbek Union of consumer co-operatives, for instance, has recently put into operation a new cardiological sanatorium, a sanatorium for people having gastric and intestinal diseases and a recreation centre are being under construction. All expenses for construction, maintenance and running of health institutions are covered by the co-operatives and from social insurance funds.

Women's requirements in the field of culture are growing. There are 60 thousand women who are members of various amateur art groups. In Georgia, for instance, women-co-operators' vocal ensembles, folk song-and-dance groups, folk instruments groups are organised. On the whole, within the framework of the Soviet consumer co-operatives there function nearly 6 thousand club-houses and 2.5 thousand libraries.

The co-operative club-houses in Uzbekistan, Estonia, Moldavia and other republics are active in organising literary and art soirées, displays of books, children's drawings, hand-made goods. "Weeks of women's art" are gaining popularity. Persons working in the arts and culture, in crafts etc. are invited to participate in these "Weeks".

More than 25 thousand women-co-operators go in for sports and take part in walking tours. They have at their disposal well-equipped stadiums, sports grounds and halls, gymnasiurs and tourist centres.

The property of the co-operative cultural and sports centres (books, musical instruments, props etc.) are provided for co-operators free of charge. The co-operatives employ qualified specialists

responsible for cultural and educational as well as for sporting work.

Public examination of working, living and recreation conditions of women-workers jointly organised by co-operatives and trade unions was of a great importance. This initiative gave birth to numerous proposals pertaining to improvement of women's labour conditions. 14 thousand out of all proposals were submitted by co-operators, 12 thousand have been implemented.

Improvement of conditions of work, life rest and leisure contributes to preservation of woman's health, raises her capacity for work, creates opportunities for her all-round development. Maybe, this is the reason why women-workers seldom leave co-operatives which allows us to speak about the stability of the working body.

Mechanisation and automation while considerably facilitating women's labour require at the same time an adequate advance in qualification and systematic refreshment of knowledge. The Soviet consumer co-operatives carry out on a planned basis training of specialists of mass trades out of whom women constitute nearly two thirds.

There function 153 vocational schools, 11 schools for auditors and instructors, 10 comprehensive schools, 2 schools for decorators and publicity agents, 2 thousand schools-enterprises which train specialists of nearly 40 professions. In 1979 the above-mentioned institutions had 165 thousand graduates.

But the most wide-spread type of training workers is that organised directly at the enterprises, establishments and offices in conjunction with plans of economic training which is carried out in the form of group, individual or course studies. Workers receive either paid leaves for these studies or attend them after

the working hours. In this way nearly 200 thousand women refreshed their knowledge in 1979.

Great attention is paid to professional training of young women-workers. In this respect a method of patronage has become very popular. Most experienced and qualified workers share their know-how with young people assisting them in their work.

Training co-operative specialists with higher and secondary specialised education is undertaken by 7 institutes and 127 secondary specialised schools; women constitute 70.8 per cent of those graduated last year from the co-operative institutes and 83.6 per cent of specialised secondary schools' graduates. Women-co-operators may study at these institutions either on internal or extramural basis. All the studies are carried out free of charge and on a single program both for men and women.

That is how the right to education is ensured with us.

Overwhelming majority of women-co-operators work conscientiously and enthusiastically. We can name quite a number of women standing high in the co-operators' esteem due to their efficient work. Among them are Mucharam Yuldasheva, director of a shop run by the Karakul district consumer co-operative ( Bukhara Region, Uzbek SSR), who has a 30-year working record in a co-operative and is awarded the title "Exemplary worker of the Soviet consumer co-operatives", Young Communist League prize-winners Galina Dementyeva, confestioner, Lyudmila Lavrova, cook in a restaurant, Galina Rondina, senior shop-assistant, Glafira Dorosh, cook in a public catering complex, author of 18 dishes cooked now not only at her enterprise but at the restaurants of Kiev, the Ukrainian republic capital.

Many women occupied in the spheres of production and services combine their main work with creative one by devising and submitting important proposals aimed at rationalisation of trade and public catering, improvement of labour organisation and raising its productivity.

The scientifically-grounded system of material incentives contributes to effective development of production initiative. Both co-operative and state enterprises observe the principle of equal remuneration for equal work in accordance with its quantity and quality. Last year new terms of remuneration were introduced for all co-operative workers and employees.

The minimum wage has been set with the level of it raised by 3.5 times as compared to 1950. Wage rates and remuneration were raised for the categories of workers and employees with average earnings. For those who are paid by piece or by time the method of surplus remuneration in a form of special prizes for highly productive labour is widely applied.

Various forms of moral incentives play an important role as well. Best women-workers are awarded orders, medals, diplomas, they are given honorary titles, their names are put down in the Book of Honour or on the Board of Honour, etc. Mass information media as well as the Centrosoyuz pavilion at the USSR Exhibition of Economic Achievements give them wide publicity.

In this country has the greatest respect for a working person. Trade unions, public organisations show constant concern for uniting working people, creating the climate of benevolence, friendly co-operation and mutual assistance in the working groups, promoting the development of woman's personality, full uncovering of her abilities which allow her to occupy a high position in society and



family.

Progress of the Soviet consumer co-operative movement depends to a considerable degree on social, political and working activities of women-co-operators.

Soviet society as a whole is interested in the solution of an important social task, that of equality of women. Pursuing this objective the state program of development envisages further measures aimed at improvement of working and living conditions of working mothers.

Thus, Lenin's thesis that one of the ways leading to women's equality and flourishing of their personality is their active participation in common productive labour has found its full confirmation in the practice of the Soviet consumer co-operatives.

Under the conditions of the Soviet socialist state favourable opportunities are created making it possible for women to combine motherhood with active participation in work and social life.

So, you were able to see from all the facts mentioned in this paper that women-co-operators make full use of these opportunities and have achieved a considerable progress in their co-operative work.

ICA Women's Conference on  
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WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN CO-OPERATIVES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

THE CASE FOR EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

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## WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN CO-OPERATIVES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

### THE CASE FOR EAST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

More than fifty percent of the world population are women. In Africa, more than eighty percent of the population live in the rural areas. It therefore follows that the majority of those who live in the rural areas are women.

In the slow development and sometimes stagnancy or retrogression in rural areas, women have a greater share of the burden of keeping life going. Life of most rural African women is one where a woman is busy from dawn to dusk. The day of most rural women is monotonous and tiring. The rural woman mostly spends her day as follows (though the order of tasks performed may vary):

She has to be up very early in the morning, even before the sun is up. With a child on her back, she has to prepare something to eat for the family. She then takes the hoe and goes to the field, usually continues up to the afternoon, when she goes back home with a load of firewood on her head. In cases where there are big daughters in the house, they usually help their mother with fetching water and preparing the evening meal.

In most rural homes, the man does not take part in house-keeping, nor taking care of the children. In the contrary, he has to be taken care of in terms of food, hot water for baths, etc.

It is very difficult to measure the amount of labour that women put into domestic work. This is because this work is not "productive" in the economic sense, since the greater parts of it are services and not concrete products. It is only her work in the field that can be measured more accurately.

In most African traditions, it is the men who own land, though women also take part in farming alongside their menfolk. With the introduction of cash crops in most African countries, men took control of it. Women mainly took control of food crops for subsistence, e.g. bananas, peas, etc.

With the introduction of agricultural marketing co-operatives, during the colonial period, it was men who mostly became members, since initially co-operatives dealt mainly with export crops. In the case of Kenya and Tanzania, one had to be a bonafide farmer in order to be a member of the agricultural marketing co-operatives. Customary laws regarding inheritance favoured males more than females. It was only in a very few exceptional cases that girls inherited land.

Although it was men who were mainly members of these societies, women did take part in production. In many cases it was the women who carried the produce on their heads to primary societies. However, this did not give them any rights to membership. The men attended the meetings, voted and were the ones to be elected for office in these societies.

The situation seemed to be different in Zambia and Botswana, where women in the agricultural marketing co-operatives were members from the very beginning. This was due to the socio-economic set-up in these particular countries. In both Zambia and Botswana there was a high degree of migrant labour system affecting men mostly. Most men were travelling to South Africa and Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) to work in the mines. It meant that for most part of the year only women and children were left behind. This forced women to take up farming, both for cash crops and subsistence, to maintain the family. It also meant that women became members of agricultural marketing co-operatives quite early. They became active members of their societies since it was them who attended meetings and who were voted in as committee members, chairmen, etc.

#### Independence period and the position of women in economic activities

With political independence attained in most African countries, beginning in Ghana in 1957, changes in policies as regards the woman's place in national development also emerged. Women played a big role in giving support and actively participating in the struggle for national independence. Governments started to encourage the formation of national women's organisations in these countries.

Initially, there were women's organisations, but on a small scale and only for certain classes of people, e.g. wives of teachers and government officers. These groups initially started as sewing groups, cookery classes, etc. It was these groups which finally led the way to the formation of national or semi-national organisations. Thus, in the countries of the Region too, these organisations were formed.

In the 1960s these women's organisations began encouraging their womenfolk in taking an active part in economic activities. Women were encouraged to start different businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, shops, bars, etc. Since these economic groups did not, for the most part, have any co-operative backing they were not functioning on a co-operative basis, but were running under the umbrella of the women's organisations.

Let me point out here that in the urban areas, co-operatives in the form of consumer societies were also appearing as were the savings and credit societies. Although there were no restrictions in these as regards women's participation, most women still preferred to join the women-oriented economic activities, which were managed by women. This also meant that very few women were members of co-operative societies.

Since any economic undertaking cannot flourish without education and training, the ICA Regional Office with its role of educating and training co-operators, saw a need of also ~~concerning~~ concentrating some of its efforts on women. Thus, in the early 1970s seminars (national) were held, mainly for women leaders from the three countries of the Region, i.e. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The aim was to expose them to co-operative ideas, with an aim of making them aware of the importance of having co-operative economic groups rather than just women's economic groups. The result was worth the effort. Countries such as Tanzania established a women's section within the Co-operative College, which was specifically dealing with co-operative education for women. The women's section arranged its programmes and went down to grassroots level to educate rural people on the importance of being involved in co-operative economic activities. Rural women were exposed to the role of co-operatives, i.e. what they

dealt with, what role members played, etc. Many began to realise that they were being left out of an organisation in which they could participate productively.

In other countries of the Region (Kenya, Uganda and Zambia) women training officers, at both the apex organisation and the provincial levels, were employed, especially where there were strong unions. The ICA Regional Office emphasised the role that women training officers could play in encouraging women to take an active part in co-operatives.

The ICA Regional Office co-ordinated these programmes through its Training Officer. Seminars which mainly aimed at training the trainers were organised. In their turn, those who had benefitted from this training were asked to disseminate the ideas to others at grassroots level.

Thus, education resulted in more participation of women in co-operatives. A number of economic groups which had already been in existence since the 1960s, but which were collapsing, were being revived. Leaders of societies were being informed of their roles. Although it is true that not many women could be reached, due to limited resources, the few that were reached began to come up in a very positive way.

Today, one can say that more women are involved or are members of co-operatives than before. It is a common sight to see consumer co-operative shops being run by women only. Such activities as handicrafts, milk kiosks, tailoring shops, etc, which are run by women, are numerous.

Recently, there have been some questions with regards to the encouragement of exclusive women's co-operative societies. One of the co-operative principles is open membership. Therefore, the question arises: Why are there co-operatives just for women? This is a big question and one which has been raised in different discussions and meetings.

The situation today in the Region is that there are some co-operatives which are being run exclusively by women, while

there are others where women form a small part of a large co-operative society. The Kalola Multipurpose Co-operative Society in Zambia is a good example of such a society. Within the society there is a group of women who keep poultry and pigs and are involved in farming within the co-operative society as a whole. This means that they are not working separately from the large co-operative society. This is a very good situation, as women get a lot of assistance from the society, e.g. fertiliser, chicken feed, transport for their live-stock, etc. These women tend to get more support from men since they feel they are part of them.

In a situation where women have their own co-operative society, they face many problems, one of them being competition from other co-operatives and private businesses. Sometimes, due to the wrong kind of information, women start a lot of businesses which tend to be on a small scale. Working under these conditions can mean "suicide" to their business. As a small group, for instance, it is not easy to get credit from banks and the turnover is so small that there is very little to pay to the members at the end of the year.

In Botswana, apart from agricultural co-operatives, many women are also members of consumer co-operatives. The situation there is very encouraging as women are not only members but leaders too. It is very common to find an equal number of representation in a committee of men and women, and many times, the women are actually chairmen. One of the big problems which they face is providing education for members. Due to limited resources, education has not penetrated to the grassroots or to the members. Thus, one finds a situation where many members are women but, unfortunately, without understanding what their role or their rights are, etc.

There are certain activities where one finds women's participation is higher, and this may result in exclusive women's co-operatives. This is the case especially in handicraft societies and other similar types of specialised co-operatives.

Handicraft societies have not been doing very well as they are confronted with a number of problems. Although in the whole Region a lot of women are involved in the production of handicrafts, they

constantly face frustrations. The most common problem is marketing; there is competition from larger industries, producing similar commodities. Though some women's organisations, such as the "Maendeleo ya Wanawake" in Kenya, have tried to collect these products from the rural areas and sell them they have not been very successful. Face with transport problems, they cannot cover large areas. As a result, middlemen take advantage of this. They go to the rural areas and buy from these women very cheaply, since these women prefer to sell the goods off rather than risk wasting their input. These middlemen then go to town and sell them at high prices to tourists, especially in Nairobi.

In Uganda, there is a big handicraft society managed by women. They also face the problem of marketing. The society is called "Tusitukirewamu Handicraft Co-operative Union".

While women are encouraged to become involved in small-scale industries, there is a need to look into existing problems first to see how best they can be solved before embarking on new ventures. I think that one of the first areas which has to be thoroughly investigated is the opportunity for marketing. As women who produce handicraft items do not have direct access to market outlets it is important that the organisations they depend on for marketing have links outside the countries in which they are operating. In Tanzania there is a good system where "HANDICOOP" is the body which deals with marketing products locally and internationally. Thus handicraft products are sent to "HANDICOOP" and they look for markets

It is important to find out also whether it is true that there are no markets or whether markets are just not known. Once markets are found, it is important to see to it that there is sufficient and regular supply of the products. Many times, only a few items are produced, whereas outside markets usually require bulk supplies. If this is not looked into, we may come to the ironic situation where markets are found but production is too low, i.e. the demand is higher than the supply. This can mean the loss of marketing outlets so carefully secured.



## Women's participation in Co-operatives in the Year 2000

The year 2000 is only 20 years from now. As far as development is concerned it is a very short period. Although it is rather difficult to look ahead and predict what will happen in 20 years' time, one can presume certain things will take place by looking at the present trend.

We should expect more active participation of women in co-operatives in the year 2000. I am saying this because the present trend shows great enthusiasm among women so far as co-operative and government leadership is concerned. Furthermore, the attitude that most men had towards women are now slowly dying away, especially as husbands realise that when their wives are engaged in co-operatives, they are helping the family as a whole.

As rural women spend a lot of their time taking care of the home and children, and thus have little time for other income generating activities, co-operatives in collaboration with women's national apex organisations should greatly stress the setting up of day care centres. Already, there are many day care centres being set up through the initiative of women's organisations.

However, these organisations need help in order to set up and run these centres. Co-operative societies should be able to offer part of this help, if women are to be relieved from some of their daily duties in order to take an active part in co-operatives.

The year 2000 should see large co-operatives with a membership of both men and women. I think small co-operatives will be defeated, especially because of big companies and economic organisations springing up. If they are to survive competition, they must become strong economic groups. There may be a few exclusive women's co-operatives here and there in specialised areas, but these will have to be amalgamated to form bigger units too. Many women's groups need material support to develop. If many of these spring up in isolated cases, then we shall need a lot of reserves. This thus calls for bigger units so that reserves could be used meaningfully.

Since these women would be involved in income generating activities, more women should be found as members of savings and credit societies. The situation now is that it is mainly urban working women who are members of these savings and credit societies.

One big problem which developing countries face is unemployment. It is usually easy for some politicians to say that one cannot be unemployed since there is plenty of land. I think that our rural areas are so underdeveloped, as the tools used are outdated, resulting in very low production. This means that a woman who works on land in Africa from dawn to dusk produces so little compared to the work done on land in highly mechanised areas.

### Co-operatives and creation of employment for women

Looking at co-operatives broadly, they should be able to bring about some changes in the community. However, governments should also be sympathetic to co-operatives or should be co-operative-oriented if real success is to come.

Gone are the days when co-operatives were seen as a single-purpose unit, dealing with one activity only. In developing countries there is a greater need to have multi-purpose co-operatives which can also help change the environment. For example, co-operatives should organise people into digging water wells, building day-care centres, etc. Such activities can further the success of co-operatives. Due to the fact that development has been mainly concentrated in the urban areas, there is a great exodus of young people from rural areas. Youths, finishing primary schools, with no employment facilities and with a tedious type of agricultural work with inadequate tools, prefer going to towns to look for a job. However, once they are there, they find it difficult to find employment.

It is important that co-operatives try to cater for young people also. If this exodus is to be stopped, it is necessary to create employment in the rural areas through rural industrialisation. Industrial co-operatives should not only be emphasised in urban areas, but in rural areas also. In fact, this is where they are now needed most.

## Conclusion

We find that more and more women now see the importance of being members of co-operatives. Women's organisations throughout the Region also realise the importance of identifying themselves with co-operatives. On their part, women's co-operative societies and women leaders should to a greater extent work in collaboration with women's organisations, with the aim of changing them into co-operative-oriented organisations.

Established co-operative societies in the Region should also consciously try to give as much support as possible to women co-operators. The aim should be to have women sub-committees within existing co-operative societies and unions. This will give women a greater voice and a chance to be active participants.

So far as education and training are concerned, this should be intensified with the aim of developing women wholly. Co-operatives should not work in isolation. Co-operative training officers should work in collaboration with other agencies which are concerned with women's education, e.g. those dealing with health, nutrition, family planning, etc.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE

ICA Women's Conference on  
"Women and Work in Co-operatives"  
10th and 11th October 1980  
Hotel Cosmos, Moscow, USSR

WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN CO-OPERATIVES  
IN THE REGION OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA

Paper presented by

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## I. Introduction

The ICA Regional Office and Education Centre for South-East Asia serves 14 countries in the Region of South-East Asia. These are: Australia, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Of these countries two, namely Australia and Japan, have highly developed economies; the rest are in various stages of development. Except for Singapore, where trade and commerce are the main occupation, the others are all agricultural in character, and the majority of their population live in the rural areas, and are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.

All over the Region land holdings are small. Cash incomes are low and agriculture is largely dependent on the vagaries of the monsoon. These and other factors make life hard for rural people, most of whom are subsistence farmers.

We are concerned here mainly with women, both in the rural and urban areas in the countries of the Region. Because of illiteracy, low levels of literacy, social traditions and similar set-backs to the advancement of women, life is also hard for women in the urban areas - especially those belonging to the poorer section of society. Either they cannot succeed in finding employment, or working as unskilled labour they are exploited. There are, of course, in every country highly educated and highly skilled women, but we are speaking now of the majority who do not belong to this class. It is the duty of co-operatives and similar agencies, and of men and women leaders, to see that women have equal opportunities for building a better life for themselves and their families. There are families who do not even have the basic necessities of life in the way of food, water, shelter and clothing.

## II. Co-operatives of Interest to Women

Co-operatives are one of the agencies which can help women to attain a better standard of living, and because of their particular needs we find that the types of co-operatives which attract women most are producer, thrift and credit and consumers' co-operatives. We will

briefly deal with each of these.

There are many producer co-operatives and their activities are very varied. There are the ancillaries which are dependent for work on large enterprises. The women either make small components for larger machinery, or do assembly work. They are given on-the-job training, and when the work is completed the concerned enterprise will collect the goods and transport them to their destination. The women are paid for their labour. Such societies do not face problems with regard to raw materials or marketing, and in some cases they are even provided with working space.

There are other forms of co-operatives which enable women to earn supplementary incomes. These may be broadly classified as follows:

- a) Societies which process, preserve and manufacture foodstuffs, including juices, squashes, spices and other edible items;
- b) Those which undertake tailoring, production of ready-made garments, knit-wear, household linen, embroidery and bead work, bags and similar items;
- c) Village based traditional type societies dealing in handicrafts, handloom weaving and cottage industries;
- d) Societies which run crèches, canteens, and similar services for working people.

In the Kaira District of Gujarat State in India, rural women are involved in the milk co-operative societies which are linked to the well-known Amul Dairy. The men are farmers, and the women milk, feed and take care of the cattle. Special milk collection centres have been set up, and twice a day the women deliver milk to these centres. The milk is tested and weighed, after which the women are paid in cash for the milk supplied.

Men and women workers are the members of the thrift and credit co-operative societies which make available to their members loans in times of distress, on reasonable terms of interest and repayable in easy instalments. In India there are some banks which are entirely owned and operated by women such as, for instance the Indira Co-operative Bank in Bombay, Maharashtra State. These banks provide their members with loans for productive purposes.

In the wake of rising prices, hoarding and blackmarketing, food adulteration and a lack of proper consumer protection, housewives prefer to patronise the consumer co-operative stores. In Bombay the Laxmi Consumer Co-operative Society - an all-women's society - owns and operates a number of consumer stores. By and large, however, women are not the members of the consumers' co-operatives, apart from Sri Lanka, where the situation is different. Here there are women members also in the consumers' co-operatives, and there is an on-going "Women's Consumer Education Project" - the first of its kind in the Region - which was initiated by the Union of Consumers' Guilds in Sweden. This project is being run on a pilot basis by the National Co-operative Council of Sri Lanka with assistance from the Swedish Co-operative Centre. It is linked with nutrition, income-generating and other welfare activities aimed at improving living conditions of the members of consumers' co-operatives. Later the project will be taken over entirely by the Co-Co-operative Movement of Sri Lanka and will cover the whole country.

### III. The Position of Women in Co-operatives

Women's entry into the co-operative field is of very recent origin. In 1962, when the ICA Regional Office held a Regional Seminar in New Delhi - the first of its kind - on "The Role of Co-operation in the Emancipation of Women", there were representatives from international, national, government and voluntary agencies, including women's organisations, but hardly any women co-operators, as very few were to be found. One of the aims of the Seminar was to explore the possibilities of drawing women into the co-operative fold.

In pursuance of this aim, the ICA requested an eminent Pakistani woman co-operator to undertake a study entitled "Co-ordination of the Activities of the Co-operative Movement and Women's Organisations in South-East Asia". During her study visits to the different countries of the Region, Dr. Shah Zaman had discussions with co-operative officials at the national level and with the women's voluntary organisations to seek their suggestions as to how collaboration could be developed between the co-operatives and the women's organisations.

After the study report was prepared it was circulated in the Region, but the response was very poor - in most cases only acknowledgements were received.

In Japan women were already organised in the agricultural consumers' and fisheries sectors of the Movement. In India it was in 1966 that "Women's Wings" were set up all over the country for the special purpose of promoting and developing women's participation in co-operatives. By the Seventies women's co-operative activities had started to develop in the other countries of the Region as well.

It was around 1975 that women's contribution to the Co-operative Movement came to be taken more seriously. As a result of the United Nations International Women's Year, attention came to be focussed on women and their problems, and a wealth of literature on women, written by women, was produced. In the co-operatives too, greater attention was given to the involvement of women. The ICA Regional Office, in support of International Women's Year, held a Regional Conference in July 1975 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. At that Conference certain facts emerged:

- a) except for Japan and India, women were not extensively involved in co-operatives, and
- b) apart from these two countries, there was no special machinery for involving women in co-operatives.

The Conference, therefore, recommended that:

1. surveys be conducted by the member movements of the ICA in the different countries of the Region, to ascertain the position of women in co-operatives and to suggest ways and means for accelerating their active participation in co-operatives, and
2. there should be women's committees at all levels to act as extension agencies of the co-operatives.

As a direct outcome of this Conference, women's committees were set up at national and other levels in several other countries (besides Japan and India), namely in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. The idea of forming women's committees,



was to establish a network of women leaders from the grass-roots' level to the top, which could act as an extension arm of the co-operatives at all levels. In the Philippines this movement was started at the national level where a core of active women have formed a steering committee and are in the process of forming an All-Philippines Federation of Women for Co-operatives, which will have branches all over the country.

The ICA Regional Office is still in the process of trying to persuade its member organisations to undertake surveys and establish women's committees in those countries where they do not as yet exist.

#### IV. Why Women's Co-operatives?

We find that women in the Region tend to form their own societies with exclusive women membership - especially societies of the income-generating type. There are a number of reasons for this. Women are by nature shy. In some social circles they are used to mixing with men, but this does not apply everywhere. Thirdly, they are new to the field of co-operatives and are more vocal in their own groups rather than in male-dominated groups. Such factors hold them back from being equal partners with men in the co-operatives.

There are also some very practical reasons why women join together to form their own producer type co-operatives. These co-operatives usually carry on activities which are undertaken by women and which come naturally to them such as, for instance, preparation of food-stuffs, sewing, embroidery, knitting, etc. Another factor is that housewives can undertake work in these societies when they are free from their household tasks, so they decide the timings when they wish to work. In some cases they collect the raw materials from the society and take it home. When the work is completed and returned to the society, they are paid for their labour.

There are, of course, certain co-operatives such as handloom weavers' co-operatives, thrift and credit societies and consumers' co-operatives, where men and women are members, and now the thinking in co-operative circles is that women should be integrated into on-going societies along with men rather than form their own separate

societies. Hence the trend is changing in this direction, and one of the signs is that we now have more women's representation in co-operative meetings, conferences and seminars, and also at higher managements levels.

#### V. Conclusion

As stated earlier, women in the Region used to form their own co-operatives. These were usually small in size and tended to remain static rather than grow and flourish. Many even closed down after a short while because of a variety of problems. There are women's co-operatives which are doing well but these would be in the minority. Then there are the mixed co-operatives like thrift and credit societies, handloom weavers' societies and others, where again women would be in the minority. In the Philippines, however, the credit co-operatives have a large membership of women in the schools and universities, by virtue of the fact that there are more women teachers than men - and in this case there would, of course, be larger representation on boards, etc. than men.

If we really want to see women's successful participation in co-operatives, we must turn to Japan - where women support the policies and work of the agricultural, consumers and fisheries sectors of the Movement. In fact, member activities in the Japanese Consumers' Movement are being very successfully carried out and they are entirely in the hands of women. (A Study entitled "Member Activities in the Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Movement" has been published by the ICA Regional Office and gives details on this subject.) Although the Women's Agricultural Association Councils are not the members of the Agricultural Co-operatives, they play a very positive role in supporting the policies and programmes of the agricultural co-operatives. The agricultural co-operatives, in turn, recognise their valuable contribution and assist them in every possible way.

We would like to visualise the extent and quality of women's contribution to the Co-operative Movement in 20 years' time. This is not easy to do, as it will go hand in hand with national development and numerous other factors affecting the different

countries in the World. It will also keep pace with developments in the Co-operative Movement itself - but one thing is certain - if the Co-operative Movements in the different countries of the Region are to expand and grow in strength, the active involvement of women, who form roughly half the population - is a must.

Keeping in view the overall aim of the Co-operative Movement, namely to help its members to attain a better standard of living, we should realise that co-operatives cater not only for individuals, but for whole families and communities, which make up nations.

If women are to be drawn into the mainstream of co-operative activity, they must be fitted for the part through information, education and training. They can certainly make valuable contributions in the field of agricultural, consumers' thrift and credit, housing and other co-operatives - all of which are aimed at improving living conditions through self-help and mutual help. As members and office-bearers from the grass-roots level to the policy-making level - and as responsible employees of the co-operatives - women can play an equal role with men, given the same opportunities. For specific matters pertaining to the home, such as improvement of kitchens, balanced diet, joint buying, household economy, child care etc., women's groups can be formed within the co-operatives to help them to improve their home life.

All this will mean membership in co-operatives along with men; equal opportunities for participation in different sectors of the movement; attendance at general assemblies and other meetings where co-operative policies, programmes and implementation are discussed; education and training in specific areas, and all other facilities to build them into the existing membership - which is the foundation of a strong co-operative movement. The idea of enrolling women as members is not merely to swell membership in co-operatives, but to find a definite role for women to play in improving levels of nutrition, health, child care and the many things which go into bringing about a better standard of living through co-operative activities.

At present, the newly formed women's committees are functioning to a limited extent because they suffer from lack of finances, accommodation, staff, contacts with other co-operatives etc. In fact, all they have is the will to serve - and that they do largely at their own cost and in their own time as, apart from India, there are no full-time paid workers to look after women's affairs in the voluntary movements. The committees need to have a legal entity and full support from the national co-operative movements if they are to function effectively.

School and university co-operatives can be an important training ground for future co-operators, and produce a blend of young men and women who can provide professional services to the co-operatives

All over the world the cost of living is rising. Food, shelter and clothing are still people's main needs - and in the developing countries even the minimum requirements are beyond the reach of many. Peace is also becoming one of the most sought after values in life. Women can do much to ease these ills - and, I repeat, if they are given the necessary grounding and if their talents are properly harnessed and channelled in the right directions, in twenty years' time we should see a stronger World Co-operative Movement without boundaries.

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*Handwritten signature*

ICA Women's Conference on  
"Women and Work in Co-operatives"  
10th and 11th October 1980  
Hotel Cosmos, Moscow, USSR

REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE ICA WOMEN'S COMMITTEE - 1976 to 1980

Paper presented by

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The ICA Women's Committee, an auxiliary of the International Co-operative Alliance, organises a Women's Conference every four years in connection with the ICA Congress. The last Conference was held in September 1976 at UNESCO House in Paris. The theme was "The Problems of Food Resources and Energy - The Co-operative Answer", a theme, which is no less a topic today, than it was in 1976. The Conference was attended by about 150 delegates from 26 countries.

This year, the number of delegates and countries will be about the same. However, through the generosity of Centrosoyus, our host organisation, and member organisations in Bulgaria and Sweden, which have made available a number of scholarships to co-operators in developing countries, we are pleased to know that this time we have a much larger participation from the Third World.

Every four years, i.e. at the first annual Committee meeting after Congress, the Women's Committee re-elects its Executive, which is made up of 7 members. The present Chairman is Mrs. Ulla Jonsdotter from Sweden.

In this last four-year period, the number of representatives on the Women's Committee has doubled, i.e. there are now 70 representatives from 36 countries, including 10 developing countries. Forty-seven different ICA member organisations are represented. They cover consumers', agricultural, workers' productive and insurance co-operatives.

The Committee has met annually: 1977 and 1978 in the United Kingdom, 1979 in the German Democratic Republic and 1980 again in the U.K. The ICA would like to thank the Movements in the above-mentioned countries for their excellent hospitality. We would also like to include in these thanks the Movements of the Federal Republic of Germany and Denmark for hosting Women's Executive Committee meetings.

## COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ICA AUXILIARIES AND WORKING PARTIES

At the 1976 Congress the ICA passed a resolution on Collaboration between Co-operatives, which includes collaboration between the various ICA Auxiliaries and Working Parties. As women are interested in all co-operative activity, our Committee has always looked for ways of practical collaboration with these bodies, but it is perhaps due to the aforementioned resolution that during this last four-year period, we can show so many examples of collaboration.

### Housing

In 1979, largely on the initiative of the Women's Committee, a seminar on "The Role of the Family in Housing Co-operatives" took place in Sweden. This was jointly organised by the Housing Committee and the Women's Committee of the ICA. Among the aims of the Seminar was to focus attention on the need to use all human resources available in housing co-operatives. This includes the encouragement of women as equal partners in the housing co-operatives at all levels, i.e. administration and management, besides assisting with social welfare. The Seminar was attended by 39 participants from eight countries (25 women and 14 men !) There were lectures, visits to housing co-operatives and study group sessions. One of the main conclusions of the Seminar was that it was important for housing co-operatives not just to be seen as providers of housing for low-income groups, but also as providers of education for their members, committees and employees, as well as the general public on the principles and techniques of co-operation, both economic and democratic.

### Agriculture

The ICA Women's Committee has a small sub-committee called the "Women's Agricultural Working Party", which meets annually in connection with the full Committee, under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Mara Rupena, Yugoslavia. This group brings together several members of the Committee who have strong interests in agricultural co-operatives and is concerned with agricultural issues as they affect women, especially the rural poor. It keeps in close touch with FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations), IFAP (International Federation of Agricultural Producers) and

COPAC (Committee for the Promotion of Aid to Co-operatives), through an ad hoc group consisting of women representatives of those organisations and ICA. Through this group a consultant was engaged to write a paper on "Women's Co-operative Participation and Fight against Rural Poverty" for the 1978 COPAC Symposium on "Co-operatives against Rural Poverty".

So far as the ICA Agricultural Committee is concerned, their contact with the Women's Committee is mainly through the Women's Agricultural Working Party. The latter has a standing invitation to attend its meetings, where we can emphasise the problems of women in rural areas. Collaboration with this Committee is particularly important because agriculture is such an important sector of co-operative activity and we know that not only do farmers wives work as hard as their husbands in the agricultural enterprise, but in many cases, especially in African countries, where men work away from home in industry, the women are left with the hard toiling, more often than not with primitive tools.

In this connection the FAO World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, which took place in Rome, last year, must be mentioned. As a follow-up, FAO is collaborating with INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organisations), such as the ICA in looking for projects which it could finance under a programme entitled "People's Participation in Rural Development Through Promotion of Self-Help Organisations". The Secretary of the ICA Agricultural Committee attended the 1980 meeting of the Women's Agricultural Working Party and informed members about this FAO scheme, with the result that the representatives on the Women's Committee from developing countries are being asked to consider submitting proposals for income-generating projects involving women.

### Consumers

This is another very important subject for women and our Committee hopes, in the near future, to arrange a joint programme with the ICA Consumer Committee, along the lines of the collaboration it had with the Housing Committee. In the meantime, we shall continue to exchange minutes of our meetings with this Committee.



## Libraries

The Women's Committee has collaborated with the ICA Working Party for Co-operative Librarians and Documentation Officers in compiling a bibliography on "Women and the Co-operative Movement". Unfortunately we were not as successful as was hoped in gathering information covering the broadest possible geographical area. However, there is scope for on-going collaboration and it is hoped that a bibliography on the same subject, giving fuller information, can be published within the next year or so.

## Press

At the moment, plans are being made for a joint meeting of the ICA Press Working Party and the Women's Committee. This will take place on the occasion of the 1981 Central Committee meeting and the subject for discussion will be "Women and the Co-operative Press", a theme which should result in a very interesting discussion.

Through collaboration with these and other Committees and Working Parties of the ICA, we aim, as always:

- a) to make organisations aware of women's interest and participation in all the different co-operative activities; and
- b) hopefully, having started the dialogue, to encourage these organisations to nominate more women to ICA committees and as delegates to the various national, regional and international co-operative seminars and conferences which take place around the world, whether they deal with consumers, agricultural, workers' productive, housing or any other type of co-operative activity.

## DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

For some years now, we have had Women's Education Officers in the ICA Regional Offices, i.e. in Moshi and New Delhi, where women's programmes are well established. But the Women's Committee continues to pay attention to the situation of women co-operators in developing countries; at our annual meetings, progress reports are received from the Women Officers in East Africa and South-East Asia. As they are both here to present papers, I will leave it to them to give you more information about women's involvement in co-operatives in the Regions.

Unfortunately, the Women's Committee has no funds of its own to arrange events for women co-operators in the Third World, but ways of financing women co-operators to visit advanced countries and attend the Committee meetings are continuously being explored. In this way, for instance, we have been able to secure group travel grants from UNESCO for 12 women co-operators from South-East Asia, East and West Africa and Latin America to undertake co-operative study tours and to attend the meetings of the ICA Women's Committee.

On one of these occasions the Committee organised a consultation on "The Educational Needs of Women in Developing Countries", which provided an opportunity for first-hand exchange of experience and information between members from developing and industrialised countries.

Similarly, at the 1980 annual meeting, the Committee discussed with the UNESCO scholarship grantees from Africa and South-East Asia the subject "Equality for Women in Co-operatives - Legislation and Reality". This was quite a stimulating theme. It was seen, for instance, that while the state and/or co-operative legislation did not usually spell out discrimination against women, some unwritten and customary laws in developing countries certainly did affect women's rights and therefore often their full participation in co-operatives in a negative way. The Women's Committee would now like some in-depth research to be carried out in selected countries of the world, possibly at United Nations level. This would mean, in effect, a combined examination of legislation and customary laws as they affect women's participation in co-operatives and other social institutions, which, of course, reflect the status of women in society in general.

In connection with the above mentioned travel grants, ICA and its Women's Committee wishes to thank the Co-operative Movements of Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Sweden and the U.K., without whose generous hospitality the very extensive study tours could not have been organised.

## COLLABORATION WITH UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES

As ICA enjoys consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, it is entitled to send observers to many of the meetings of the UN Agencies, where it always tries to deliver statements on matters of special concern to us as co-operators. If such events are dealing specifically with women, the ICA normally asks the Women's Committee to appoint a delegation. Thus ICA was represented at the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, which took place in Copenhagen, Denmark, in July, by the Chairman of the Women's Committee and members from Denmark and Poland. They managed to present a statement on behalf of our organisation, which was accepted for inclusion in the documentation.

There are, of course, many UN events not specifically organised for women, but as women are interested in all aspects of life, the Women's Committee always endeavours to have a woman co-operator included in the ICA delegations. A good example during the last four years is the FAO World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development, which I have mentioned earlier on where the inclusion of a woman co-operator resulted in the ICA delegation highlighting the situation of women in rural areas in the Third World.

Here again, we must thank the various member organisations, which have over the past few years made it possible for Women's Committee representatives to attend many of these events.\*(See page 9)

### "BUY A BUCKET OF WATER" CAMPAIGN

Though the "Buy a Bucket of Water" campaign could have been mentioned under "developing countries" or "relations with UN Agencies" in view of the fact that UNICEF was the lead agency for this year, I think this campaign deserves a separate heading - for many reasons.

The campaign was, of course, adopted by the ICA as a whole as its contribution to the International Year of the Child, but the Women's Committee can really take credit for thinking up this scheme in response to UNICEF's recommendation that organisations should not mark this Year with large-scale conferences but

with practical schemes which would benefit women and children in rural areas of developing countries. This world-wide campaign which resulted in the collection of over a quarter of a million Pound Sterling has enabled us to sink water wells in many countries in South-East Asia, East and West Africa and Latin America. There is not time to go into details here, but a separate report is available for Congress.

We would, however, like to express our appreciation to co-operators all over the world - men, women and children - who with their action have proved that co-operation means more than gathering at national and international meetings; co-operation is also about helping people in need.

Last, under this paragraph, but certainly not least, it is my pleasure to thank my predecessor, Muriel Russell, who on her official retirement from the ICA took on the role of Project Co-ordinator for the "Buy a Bucket of Water" scheme. She would probably not wish me to mention it, but I think you ought to know that she directed this project, which from many aspects was much more difficult to organise than anyone could have foreseen, on an entirely voluntary basis.

#### LONG-TERM PROSPECTS AND PROGRAMME

At this point I would like to quote a remark which our Chairman made recently at the annual meeting. She said "The Women's Committee is the only Committee in the ICA which works towards its own self-destruction". This sounds a little startling at first, but we must always keep in mind that the Women's Committee was set up to promote the participation of women in all co-operative spheres and on all levels, rather than to create a separate niche for women. When I say "we" it includes men; I sometimes wonder whether they keep our aims in mind. It is hoped that the fact that the Women's Committee has doubled in the number of representatives does not mean that organisations have chosen to nominate women to this Committee rather than include them among male representatives to other ICA bodies.

It seems to me that while the last 4-year report to the Conference could show quite an improvement so far as women's participation

and representation on ICA Committees was concerned, this time we cannot be very enthusiastic. The ICA Central Committee, for instance, with approximately 300 members appointed by member organisations counts only 9 women. The ICA Executive has none at all.

The Housing Committee and the Agricultural Committee of the ICA have no women members, despite the fact that both areas are so very important to women. The Consumer Committee has some women representatives, but again the number is quite low, considering consumer policy affects women in the most direct way.

When the representation of women on all these Committees looks more like being on an equal basis with men; when member organisations nominate women co-operators to all ICA conferences, seminars, etc, including Congress, without constantly being requested to do so by members of the Women's Committee, then I think we have achieved our aims. A fair representation of women at the international co-operative level must surely mean a fair representation of women at national and local level around the world.

But until that day comes, we must and will continue, according to our constitution, to promote ideas, schemes and programmes, which we hope will promote the integration of women in co-operatives and ultimately change the attitude of complacency which accepts that in the nature of things, men occupy the overwhelming majority of high offices.

To be meaningful, women's participation must be reflected at all levels - from the primary co-operative to the international body.

\* There is also the possibility of working with these organisations in joint events, which they sometimes finance either wholly or partly. For example, in 1977 the former Secretary acted as consultant to the ICA/ECA Seminar on "The Promotion of Handicrafts and Small-Scale Industries through Co-operatives" in Kenya, and in 1978 she acted as Joint Director in a Women's Seminar for South-American countries, which UNESCO co-financed, the first ICA event for women in that part of the world.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE

ICA Women's Conference on  
"Women and Work in Co-operatives"

10th and 11th October 1980

Hotel Cosmos, Moscow, USSR

THE VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OF  
THE CO-OPERATIVE WOMEN'S ORGANISATION IN AUSTRIA

Paper presented by

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THE VOLUNTARY ACTIVITIES OF THE CO-OPERATIVE WOMEN'S ORGANISATION  
IN AUSTRIA

Already on the occasion of the Co-operative Congress in 1912, after a speech by the great Co-operative Pioneer, Emmy Freundlich, it was decided to create women's committees in all co-operative societies, in order to draw more women into the Co-operative Movement.

In June 1928, the first Austrian Co-operative Women's Conference took place. We can call this date the "hour of birth" of the Co-operative Women's Organisation, for at this Conference the various women's committees decided to act as a uniform organisation in future.

Already at that time, the women campaigned for the 'co-operative own production'. They organised afternoons for women and for children and generally endeavoured to further the positive development of the Co-operative Movement.

Unfortunately, the Second World War suddenly interrupted this activity. However, only a few weeks after the end of the war there were concrete plans for the continuation of the Co-operative Women's Organisation's activity. In June 1946, the first constituted assembly of the reorganised Women's Organisation was held and the women co-operators worked very hard to make the co-operative membership grow as quickly as possible.

The positive development of the Austrian Consumer Co-operative Movement culminated in 1978 in the creation of a uniform "Coop Austria".

Fifteen consumer co-operative societies merged in order to employ the material as well as the ideal forces of the Consumer Co-operative Movement in a better way. At the same time, the Co-operative Movement showed in a very impressive way how much it appreciated the activity of the Co-operative Women's Organisation, by building the role of the Women's Organisation into the Constitution of Coop Austria. This means that in paragraph 16 of Coop Austria's Constitution it says that "all women involved in co-operative activities form the Co-operative Women's Organisation". This means the 3,900 women who belong to the members' councils of the various co-operative branches.



In this Constitution the Women's Organisation was also mandated to draw up its Rules, in which the aims and duties of the Women's Organisation were to be re-organised and adapted to the activities of Coop Austria.

As far as possible, all women co-operators collaborated in forming the new Rules and at the Women's Conference in 1978 they were adopted unanimously.

The most important aims and duties of the Co-operative Women's Organisation were laid out as follows in these Rules:

1. Collaboration in the implementation of the aims and objectives of the Austrian Consumers' Co-operative Movement;
2. Collaboration in the democratic decision-making process of the Consumer Co-operative Movement;
3. Collaboration in the co-operative marketing policies and production policies, according to the members' needs;
4. Regular training and information events for women active in the Co-operative Women's Organisation;
5. Collaboration in the co-operative consumer activities;
6. Keeping contact with children and adolescents and in this respect especially devise measures for consumers' education and information;
7. Organising educational and leisure activities for the members;
8. Keeping contact with friendly organisations and institutions;
9. Membership with the Women's Committee of the ICA;
10. Membership with the associations and institutions which promote home economics.

In order to implement these objectives there are, as I already mentioned, 3,900 women co-operators who work within the Co-operative Movement in a voluntary capacity. In order to explain to you the

working methods of our Women's Organisations I would like to illustrate the democratic structure of our Co-operative Women's Organisation as follows:

The members' representatives who are elected annually at the Members' Meetings make up the so-called Members' Councils. These Councils are formed into district organisations. Each district organisation elects a delegate as well as a deputy delegate to the Regional Women's Council.

This Regional Women's Council meets twice a year. This Council, in close collaboration with the members' relations officers drafts a regional work plan. In a way, these meetings also provide a kind of training ground for these women co-operators.

The next higher organ in the democratic structure of our organisation is the National Women's Council. Each Region is entitled to one delegate per 15,000 members (of part thereof). This means that at the moment, the National Co-operative Women's Council consists of 51 women co-operators. This Council also has the right to propose, for election, the National President and Vice-President, both of whom have to be elected from among the five Regional Presidents.

In order to keep in close touch with the Regional Presidents, to keep them informed and to give them guidance for practical activities, a National Women's Presidium has been formed. This Presidium is responsible for the entire activity of the Co-operative Women's Organisation and the implementation of the work programme, as well as the appointment of a full-time Secretary.

The highest authority of the Co-operative Women's Organisation is the National Women's Conference, at which all the women co-operators who are delegates at the Annual General Meeting of Coop Austria, participate, as well as the members of the Regional Women's Councils. The National Women's Conference has the following tasks:

- to lay down the objectives for the work of the Co-operative Women's Organisation;
- to elect the President, Vice-President and the National Presidium

- to draft and pass resolutions affecting in particular women and address them to the Annual General Meeting of Coop Austria.

The above briefly sums up the objectives and the structure of the Co-operative Women's Organisation. Although the Women's Organisation is an organisation with its own set-up and structure, it is of course very closely linked with the organisations and bodies of Coop Austria.

This means, for instance, that the Constitution also provides for the participation of women co-operators in the Supervisory Council of Coop Austria. This means, usually, the presidents of the Regional Women's Councils. As President of the National Co-operative Women's Organisation I am personally the deputy President of the Supervisory Council and therefore I am a member of the Presidium of Coop Austria's Supervisory Council.

The Supervisory Council sets up various committees, the activities of which are of extreme importance; there are committees for marketing, cooperative own production, members relations and for consumer policies. Here the women co-operate very actively in the problem-solving in various spheres. This work, in which the women co-operators are involved is also seen as a contribution to the members' information activities.

But the Co-operative Women's Organisation is also engaged on the international level. In this respect I have since 1979 been a member of the Executive Committee of the ICA Women's Committee.

As it cannot have been too easy for you to visualise the above explanations in practical terms I have added at the end of my paper a table of the democratic set-up of the Co-operative Women's Organisation, which includes the most important points of the Rules.

May I now give you some examples of the concrete work, which is carried out in the five Regional Women's Councils:

In all activities carried out by women co-operators, emphasis is laid upon consumers' information and education. More than 70% of

the national income in Austria passes through the hands of women. This is why we have made it our duty, through housekeeping hints, practical advice and also information about legal matters, to train the women members to become more conscious consumers. As already mentioned, this is also of great importance so far as the national economy is concerned, i.e. the women are able to get advice and help in the running of the smallest unit of the national economy - the household. Thus they will be better equipped to carry out this activity in a meaningful way.

Numerous lectures, seminars, films and slide shows, as well as discussion meetings serve to bring women nearer to these themes. The main emphasis in such events is laid on:

- food hygiene
- saving of energy
- national legislation for consumer protection.

Since 1952, the Co-operative Women's Organisation has annually published a "household book", which gives valuable help so far as home economics are concerned. Besides useful tips for the whole family, this book also contains advice for a better and more meaningful management of the household budget.

In connection with this information and education work, of course, visual aids and other material are of tremendous help. One type of aid, which we find particularly helpful, are the sound track films on consumers' education. They are especially popular with young people.

Right now, we are working on a slide series entitled "hygiene in the household", which is a particularly important topic in Austria at this moment.

Test kitchens and test groups, which have recently been introduced in the Co-operative Movement and which are active in all Regions, form a very important part of the activities for consumers. With the introduction of the test kitchen, Coop Austria has made available unique and valuable facilities. The fact that it functions well and the results are good, are due not only to the excellent technical

equipment, but especially also to the willingness of our interested members and our Co-operative Women's Organisation to collaborate.

Own-production as well as other firms' products are continuously tested for quality and cost, etc., and are also made available for comparison with competitors' products. On completion of the tests the goods are marked accordingly with a special stamp. The results of such tests are evaluated from various aspects and referred to the appropriate authorities, where they are given due consideration.

All these activities are supplemented by the participation of the Co-operative Women's Organisation in the committees of the Supervisory Council, which I have already mentioned.

One important task, for which the Women's Organisation feels it must be responsible, is the very close contact with children and adolescents. In this respect, we feel our most important task is to alert the children and young people as to their future role as critical and conscious consumers. For this purpose we arrange a number of activities, such as cookery classes, handicraft courses, trips and excursions, sports events and other competitions and Christmas festivities.

We also try to reach young people, school children, adolescents and young married couples with courses, seminars and other events. At the moment, for instance, we are involved in a campaign under the title "more pleasure in leisure" which means we offer our members comprehensive leisure-time activities, which are of a cultural as well as an educational nature.

Of course, all these activities are organised with the fullest co-operation of the officers responsible for member relations and those responsible for consumer policies in Coop Austria. Here I would like to mention an other important task, which the Co-operative Women's Organisation has, i.e. it supports all of Coop Austria's activities so far as member relations are concerned. It can be said that a great number of newly recruited Coop members, every year, are due to the work of the women co-operators. This work is carried out in teams or individually, but in either case, women co-operators are particularly successful in recruiting new members. The women

co-operators also give practical assistance with the paying-in and paying out of dividends. Incidentally, Coop Austria is the only enterprise in our country, which pays a dividend on all purchases made. The women co-operators also man consumer information stands in co-operative shops.

So far as supporting Coop Austria's member relations activities are concerned, the women co-operators also lend their assistance to the preparatory work for the annual members' meetings and regional meetings of the Movement. At these, they also present reports on activities of the Co-operative Women's Organisation and this is very important so far as explaining and publicising the work of the Co-operative Women's Organisation is concerned.

Furthermore, women co-operators help to promote the co-operative savings accounts and help to publicise the Coop's special offers.

In closing may I say the following: While during the first few years of the existence of the Co-operative Women's Organisation, i.e. until 1938, the problems to be solved were mainly related to the question of emancipation - after the Second World War the main task was to rebuild the Co-operative Movement, including the Co-operative Women's Organisation, and this meant mainly to enlarge the membership and to organise consumers' education and information programmes.

As you have been able to gather from my paper, today the recruiting of new members and the relations with existing members are among the most important tasks of the Co-operative Women's Organisation.

With the Austrian Consumer Co-operative Movement becoming more and more important, being the largest retail consortium in our country, and considering that about two thirds of the members are women, it is necessary that the women, who are active in the Co-operative Women's Organisation, can exert their influence over the co-operative enterprise. Most of all, we want to keep close contacts with our 765,000 members and pass on to them information of a co-operative, economic and also social nature.

The basis for our work in the Eighties is already laid down. In this new decade, thanks to the fact that the members of our Women's Councils are always ready for action, the Women's Organisation will continue to represent the interests of Coop Austria's women members in the Movement. All this is in the interest of Coop Austria's positive development; this work is also carried out in accordance with one of the main principles of the Movement, i.e.: always to put people first in everything that is happening.

THE CO-OPERATIVE WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONDemocratic Structure

Organisational grouping into 5 Regions:

East	Styria	Carinthia/Tyrol East	Upper Austria	West
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All women active in the members' council together form the Co-operative Women's Organisation.

DISTRICT ORGANISATION

Each district organisation elects a delegate and a deputy to the Regional Women's Council for one year.

REGIONAL WOMEN'S COUNCIL

All district representatives of a Region together form the Regional Women's Council. This Council elects from among its members a President, Vice-President and a Secretary.

Twice a year, it draws up a regional working plan and has meetings at least twice a year. It also elects delegates to the National Women's Council. Each Region is entitled to one representative on the National Council, per every 15,000 members (or part thereof).

NATIONAL WOMEN'S COUNCIL

This Council proposes from among the five Regional Presidents, the National President and Vice-President, for election at the National Women's Conference. The National Women's Council meets twice a year. It makes proposals for the central working plans.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S PRESIDIUUM

This is made up from the Presidents of the five Regional Women's Councils. The Secretary of the Women's Organisation attends the meetings of the National Women's Presidium, which meets at least four times a year.

ENLARGED NATIONAL WOMEN'S PRESIDIUUM

This is made up of the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the five Regional Women's Councils; the Secretary of the Co-operative Women's Organisation attends all the meetings. These meetings are called by the National Women's Presidium whenever deemed necessary.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

The National Women's Conference is the highest authority of the Co-operative Women's Organisation. The Women's Conference takes place every two years, immediately before the General Meeting of Coop Austria; the National Women's Conference is attended by all female delegates to the General Meeting as well as the members of the Regional Women's Councils. The National Women's Conference elects the National President and Vice-President, who have been proposed by the National Women's Council.



## The Objectives of the Co-operative Women's Organisation

More than two thirds of the National income in Austria is administered by women. Therefore, women should also be given special attention within the Consumer Co-operative Movement; the role of the Co-operative Women's Organisation in representing the women's interest in the Movement is therefore very important.

## Objectives and duties of the Co-operative Women's Organisation

1. Collaboration in the implementation of the objectives of the Austrian Consumer Co-operative Movement;
2. Collaboration with regards to the democratic decision-making process of the Consumer Co-operative Movement;
3. Collaboration with regards to the co-operative marketing policies and production policies, according to the members' needs;
4. Regular training and information events for women who are active in the Co-operative Women's Organisation;
5. Collaboration in any co-operative consumer activities;
6. Keeping contact with children and adolescents (education and consumers' education and information)
7. Organising educational and leisure time activities for members of Coop Austria;
8. Keeping contact with friendly organisations and institutions;
9. Membership with the Women's Committee of the International Co-operative Alliance;
10. Membership with the associations and institutions which promote home economics.

## Duties of the Regional Women's Councils

1. Collaboration with regards to drawing up working plans and with regards to implementing the aims and duties of the Co-operative Women's Organisation;
2. Collaboration with regards to the democratic decision-making process in the Regions
3. Support for the realisation of the regional duties;
4. Gathering information on members' needs within the Region and relate them to the appropriate authorities and organs.
5. Participation in the drawing up of regional working plans and their implementation in collaboration with the members of the Women's Organisation in the Region and other appropriate co-operative authorities;
6. Intensive collaboration with the full-time co-operative employees of the Region;
7. Recruiting members who are prepared to work in a voluntary capacity in the Region, especially so far as the Regional Women's Council is concerned;
8. Assistance with regards to giving reports at consumer co-operative members' meetings;
9. Intensifying all measures with regards to members' relations and information. Special attention to be given to the activities for children and adolescents as well as leisure time activities.
10. Keeping contact with friendly organisations

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THE FUTURE FOR WOMEN IN CONSUMER CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENTS

Paper presented by

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## THE FUTURE FOR WOMEN IN CONSUMER CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENTS

I was originally asked to discuss women's activities in consumer co-operatives, giving special emphasis to elected and voluntary functions. I have reversed the sequence and taken the voluntary aspects first. You will soon see that I feel that without concern for the voluntary nature of co-operative development, there is no future; true democracy, the only ground on which it can work will be but a relic of the past and consumer co-operation will be words in history books.

No-one can deny that in the last 25 years life in industrialised countries, including the industrialised areas of East Europe, has changed. Following the post-war years of full employment, the "affluent" society brought to the average family easy transport, transistor radios, television, mass media, telephones, more educational facilities, better health services, holidays and a greater selection of consumer goods. In distribution came new methods of shopping which in turn created competition hitherto unprecedented.

For a time, it was wonderful and in the Sixties as a World we were reasonably contented. But competition eventually generates greed and the individual is no longer the concern of the tycoons, except as recipient of their advertising promotions, another great industry they sponsor but leave to the consumer to finance. In the Seventies came the oil crisis; no country, irrespective of its political ideology or its economic situation escaped. The crest of prosperity passed and in the Eighties we face World recession which threatens the lives of all.

Against this background, Co-operative Movements were not immune; in order to defend themselves against the effects they set about rationalising the stocks and services and new capital investment, to replace small units with large ones. Retail margins narrowed, shrinking dividends followed and even the principle of dividend, shared only by members, was changed. Co-operative democracy suffered badly through drastic amalgamations of societies. Hundreds of small societies were submerged by bigger ones which in turn found themselves absorbed into larger and larger societies. The arguments in favour sounded valid, but the practical result left co-operators

with many doubts and fears. The national market share has now decreased as indeed has the number of members in many countries. The members scarcely know the difference between themselves and non-members, who also share a part of the surplus which their societies can ill afford to distribute. There are areas quite barren of co-operative service now, where it flourished in former times and those members who remain are practically disenfranchised by living long distances from co-operative shops and, therefore, from co-operative polling stations.

So what is the prospect for women co-operators entering the Eighties and wanting to ensure that there is a Co-operative Movement in the year 2000?

The most savage wound to women has been the effect on their organisations within the Co-operative Movement. The Co-operative Women's Guild of England and Wales, the oldest and one of the most respected women's organisations in these lands, coming up to its centenary in 1983 has had branches closed not because the programmes were unattractive, but simply because the closure of co-operative shopping facilities has denied local communities of women the incentive even to be members of co-operative societies. In some districts of the Federal Republic of Germany a similar situation has arisen and in the Netherlands women were the first to be disbanded prior to the Movement's collapse.

At the same time, educational provisions have been cut. Co-operative youth organisations, catering for both young men and young women, have been allowed to disintegrate and this in itself has mitigated ~~them~~ against the growth of a new breed of co-operators, ready to take over where their immediate predecessors leave off. Our own co-operative society is, in fact, a legacy to be kept in trust by us during our life time and handed on through generation to generation as a better entity than we receive.

Therefore, I believe that our first and most important task is the re-establishment of the co-operative member and in that women have a major part to play.

This does not mean the promotion of a new feminist campaign, but rather a shoulder-to-shoulder infiltration of men and women, determined to claim back their rightful status in the co-operative. It is not only women who have been squeezed out of activities by the pressures of economics and professionalism but the men also, i.e. workers in various walks of life who, down the years, offered their services in a voluntary capacity to their own co-operative societies.

We ought not to be side-tracked by our endeavours to assist new emerging co-operatives. These will certainly survive if the initiators of these present-day projects maintain the same sense of purpose that our pioneers did. It has already been pointed out that we in consumer co-operatives have been forced to create large associations to meet the requirements of time; now members have to claim back their Co-operative Movements. I repeat, women, who constitute at least half the membership and certainly three quarters of the customers in co-operative shops, have to examine their strategy.

There has to be a new militancy - not a physical form but a very vocal form; a confrontation with boards, executive personnel, education committees, regional, sectional and national representatives. Perhaps we have become too respectable! Women should plan some straight talking from the floor of the members' meetings and, maybe, some knocking on the boardroom doors could send a breath of fresh air through Co-operative Movements.

Dr. Laidlaw, in his ICA Congress paper entitled "Co-operatives in the Year 2000" says this: "There must be a great body of lay leaders, women as well as men, not just to make a success of co-operatives but also to work towards building a new society ..... without lay leaders, the business leaders and technocrats will tend to judge and direct co-operatives largely as business directs. The urgent contemporary problems of co-operatives must cease to be the exclusive preserves of experts and technicians and become the concern of the rank and file people as well."

Such words provide the bridge between the task of revitalising the voluntary action of membership and a concern women must feel for the changing emphasis in the internal control of our Movement.

In the United Kingdom, in 1960, there were 1,000 societies with an average of 10 elected board members in each, i.e. approximately 10,000 opportunities for men and women to serve their societies. Today, there are 200 societies with somewhat less than 2,000 board members. It is true that the national membership is about 1/5 less but it also means that there are 4/5 less members on boards throughout the country. On the other hand, the trade union which caters for co-operative employees with professional and expert status, has about the same membership. For women this has a further significance because all but a very small percentage of these expert employees are ~~women~~ <sup>women</sup> and of those with senior professional status ~~they~~ can be counted, probably, on the fingers of one hand.

It is useless to energise the membership unless we intend to resume our stewardship and vigilance at all levels of the constitutional structure. Those technicians and experts to whom Dr. Laidlaw refers, have been allowed to <sup>assume</sup> ~~assume~~ powers of policy-making far in excess of their mandate to manage and advise. I doubt if there is a woman present who is unaware that our highest elected offices in consumer movements are now mainly occupied by executive officials whose salaries are, in the main, paid by retail societies to manage their affairs. Some have been brought up in the Movement and their feelings for it are quite genuine, but many of them pay lip service to co-operative democracy and membership participation; by the very nature of their training, they concentrate only on business tactics, heedless of the advantages the Movement could obtain from a return to first principles.

Most informed co-operators are acutely conscious of the problems of trade and modern commercial repercussions, but our financial results of the last 10 years have not proved that economic strategy alone is the answer to co-operative problems. If we want to maintain a Co-operative Movement and not a capitalist business then we as women have to keep our nerve and have to think seriously about the contribution we can make, particularly during the years immediately ahead.

Soon, the effect of the micro-chip, various forms of automation and the adjustments to counteract unemployment will force shorter working hours. The people will then look for ways in which to occupy themselves and to protect their interests against computerised industries and government pressures. Consumer co-operatives will not be the only area which people will want to control themselves. There will be other forms of co-operatives, self-help groups and community associations. The co-operative Movements' task will be to lead the way, strengthened by its own long and wide experience.

Women, of course, will not want to go back into the home. They will want to have a say in their own affairs. An interesting, though minute statistic, has recently come my way. Of 50 directors under the age of 40, serving on co-operative boards in the U.K., 30% were women. Perhaps this is only a glimmer of light, but it is not one to be ignored. As women, we need to nurse this kind of interest wherever it appears. It will not be easy, nor will the potential board members be easily identifiable. There is no need to introduce artificial barriers of ~~age~~<sup>age</sup> because the crucial time factor will be the next five to ten years when we will have to fill in almost a vacuum created in the Sixties.

When we demand educational facilities, we should be clear what we mean. The need is for courses and the necessary back-up services, e.g. convenient meeting hours, child care facilities and adequate out-of-pocket expenses, to allow both young men and young women to assimilate knowledge which will equip them to cope with the successful development of their co-operative in collaboration with the full-time personnel and not sub-ordinate to it. The understanding of the balance sheet and the financial accounts of the society is vitally important to any board member.

My compatriot, the late Mrs. Eva Dodds, addressing the Women's Conference in Warsaw in 1972, said "There is little noticeable difference between the work style of any conscientious director - male or female. Initiatives and equality of leadership knows no sex barriers." Her statement is still valid today.

One last word, if we intend to be serious in promoting the participation of women, we have to adjust our thinking on numbers. In the future, if women wish to make an impact, it must be in reasonable numbers. One or two women sitting round a board table with ten, twenty or even 30 males, will not achieve the effective participation women envisage as good for the stability of the Movement. I do not favour quotas, but unless there is a substantial representation of women, the burden on the very few can be heavy and in some places unfair.

I look forward to the day, as all democrats do, when the question of whether men or women should serve is regarded as unnecessary or even impertinent, but the need for realism in 1980 demands that we still have to work dilligently towards that goal.



INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE

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SOCIAL & VOCATIONAL PROMOTION OF WOMEN

WITHIN THE WORKERS' PRODUCTIVE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN POLAND,

INCLUDING CO-OPERATIVES FOR THE DISABLED

Paper presented by

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SOCIAL AND VOCATIONAL PROMOTION OF WOMEN IN THE WORKERS' PRODUCTIVE  
CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN POLAND, INCLUDING CO-OPERATIVES FOR THE  
DISABLED

There are numerous and varied forms of co-operative activities in Poland. Among various co-operative organisations, the workers' productive co-operative movement includes mainly the small industry sector and service enterprises. In 1979, the workers' productive co-operative movement had 1,678 co-operatives with 750,000 members, 391,000 (52%) were women. The workers' productive co-operative movement contributes about 5.5% of the country's industrial output.

The workers' productive co-operative movement can boast of considerable achievements as a social and vocational promoter of women. Women produce more than 55% of the gross production and services value of the co-operatives. Their contribution towards carrying the work was considerable already in the early post-war years.

The number of women employees has increased in parallel with the quantitative and organisational development of co-operatives. This was undoubtedly related to the fact that the co-operatives were in need of services that had been long provided by women, such as sewing, hairdressing, embroidering, lace-making, knitting, ceramics and weaving. Women possibly also felt attracted by the fact that the jobs they were doing met some immediate everyday human needs and supplied a variety of services and small products for everyday use. The rapid integration of teams in the conditions offered by workers' productive co-operatives was also important, as was the atmosphere, which was conducive to shaping the attitudes of activists committed to the economic, social and educational development of co-operatives, which were both work places and associations of people.

Yet the main reasons which decided women to take jobs in co-operatives was that they were qualified to work in trades that had been traditionally female and the financial significance of the work for their family budgets. Seeing that they were useful and at the same time strengthening their personal status, the women were fully satisfied when they went to work in co-operatives and did what they were familiar with.

The co-operatives too were interested in employing women and increasing their participation since this could solve the then complicated problems of acquiring new workers. In the early post-war period, marked by a basic shortage of labour, men fit for work were absorbed by industry. The co-operatives offered work to women; not only to those who had the required qualifications, but also to those who had no vocational training at all. At the same time the co-operatives dispatched their qualified employees to work as instructors in shop-floor training projects for the newly employed unqualified women. The women were trained in a variety of trades. A system of cottage industry was developed for those women who could not leave their homes because of their family duties or for health reasons. This convenient form of wage-earning allowed women to combine work with family duties. Particularly meritorious in this respect is the "Cepelia" Union of Folk and Artistic Handicraft Co-operatives, which organises cottage industries chiefly among village craftswomen. Vocational promotion also included disabled women. They were offered jobs in trades in which they could safely work after they had acquired the necessary skills. For disabled women, especially those with impaired movement capacity, jobs as home workers were the most convenient they could get. More part-time jobs were created in order to boost employment of women in workers' productive co-operatives.

Finding employment for women who were the sole providers for the family was a considerable problem in the post-war years. The co-operative movement created jobs by developing various forms and systems of employment. This was of particular importance in underdeveloped areas with a surplus of labour as well as in big industrial centres which offered employment chiefly to men. At that time women were reluctant to take jobs in trades which were traditionally male.

The status of women was strengthened and the number of employed grew in the workers' productive movement; in 1979, women accounted for 52% of the total workforce. They have acquired skills in new trades, frequently in those which require considerable precision work. In a number of cases they have set an example of a high degree of specialisation, both technical and conceptually creative.

In most cases they have become qualified workers, foremen and technicians. Thanks to their good qualifications many of them hold managerial posts in the production, services, product quality control and supervision departments. The number of employed women depends to a large extent on the profile of member co-operatives of a given union and on the needs of a given region. The largest numbers of women are employed in co-operatives belonging to "Cepelia", toy industry, printing services and textile and garment producing unions. Women account for nearly 80% of their employees.

Now women do not limit themselves to the traditionally female occupations. An increasing number of them work as chemists, electronics specialists, jewellers, opticians, mechanics, leather industry workers etc.

In general, women do all kinds of work in the production and services sectors, excluding strenuous and hazardous ones which they are barred from doing for health reasons according to the government regulations. An increasing number of women hold posts in administration and book-keeping departments. Both in co-operatives and unions of co-operatives women predominate as accountants and book-keepers and particularly so in welfare and culture/education departments. There are many women board chairmen and members. Currently, 812 women are board members and 8,995 are members of supervisory councils. It is worth mentioning that the post of the Chairman of the Council of the Central Union of Work Co-operatives is held by a woman, Mrs. Maria Soltyszewska, present here and participating in this conference.

The high level of vocational promotion of women and the growing female employment rates in the traditional and new occupations demonstrate the irreversible changes in the status of women and their social and vocational advancement. The process of vocational promotion of women has not been completed yet in the workers' productive co-operative movement. The constant improvement in the education of women and girls and their vocational ambitions will contribute to a planned employment policy for them. Apart from the planned employment policy there will always be urgent immediate tasks to be solved by the workers' productive co-operative movement

as part of the in-job promotion of women.

The system of cottage industry has a long tradition though the forms and functions have changed with the social and economic transformations. It also plays an important social role by promoting economically underdeveloped areas and offering employment to certain groups of the population.

In Poland, the cottage industry is organised by a number of socialised enterprises of the small industry sector. The workers' productive co-operative movement is the main organiser of this sort of work; it employs 130,000 persons in various trades.

The workers' productive co-operative movement develops cottage industry chiefly through separate production departments in industrial co-operatives. In recent years, this system has been extended to the services and handicrafts sectors.

A variety of products are made under the cottage industry system. The goods supplement the production of regular work establishments; some are components of goods produced by the co-operatives. The jobs include also finishing work and manufacture of folk art objects.

The assistance extended by the co-operatives to home workers in many-sided. The co-operatives provide technical and organisational training, organise guidance projects, prepare patterns, organise supplies, sales and transportation. They also offer preliminary training in order to prepare the workers for performing particular operations or making particular goods and providing further skills, training for workers already employed.

Women account for 80% of those employed in this system. There are varied reasons for women taking up work at home. The system creates more convenient conditions for carrying out family duties, while supplementing family budgets. This is a very important factor in many families, and in situations when a woman takes care of a seriously ill family member. This system of work is the main source of income for single women who are the sole providers for their families and for the disabled whose impaired mobility does not allow them to work outside their homes.

Most frequently, women follow traditional occupations such as dress-making, shirt-making, embroidery, weaving, knitting, etc. Each year the workers' productive co-operative movement increases the number of jobs available to women by employing them in leatherware and shoe-top manufacture, electronics, printing etc. The co-operatives try to place orders with home workers for operations which require a considerable amount of manual labour and are not complicated. Women employed to perform these operations develop the necessary skills in a relatively short period of time, which is essential for their wages.

Both the work establishments and women employed in the system are interested in the development of cottage industry. The system allows the co-operatives to create a number of new jobs at a relatively low cost and for a small investment.

The co-operatives supply home workers with appropriate equipment, simple tools and machines. Frequently, the employees use their own machines while the co-operatives supply only some auxiliary equipment and appropriate materials, e.g. raw materials.

Cottage work is organised in different ways, depending on the type of production and the number of employees. In general, the co-operatives take care of the transportation of raw materials and finished products, particularly when the weight of the goods makes it impossible for the home workers to deliver them to the enterprises.

Unskilled women have to go through a period of shop-floor training; the length depends on how complicated operations included in the training programme are. Training usually lasts from several to a dozen or so weeks. The main emphasis is put on practical methods, i.e. demonstration and instruction. All women employed as home workers receive general industrial safety training; where strenuous jobs, requiring caution are involved, such training is more thorough.

Home workers in Poland have acquired the same rights as full-time workers, including holidays with pay, health and maternity leave with pay.

The period of employment in the cottage work system is used to calculate old age pension rates.

The unique activities of the co-operatives for the disabled play a very significant role in the activities of the workers' productive co-operative movement in general.

Vocational rehabilitation of the disabled has become one of the most important goals of the social and economic policy in our socialist state after the Second World War.

The co-operative movement for the disabled was asked to resolve the difficult problems of vocational rehabilitation. The first statute granted membership rights to disabled soldiers and victims of job-related accidents, as well as to the widows and orphans of the disabled. From the very beginning of the co-operative movement for the disabled, women were employees and members of co-operatives, since the percentage of disabled women was considerable in all disability groups.

In 1979, 50% of the employees in co-operatives for the disabled were women. They worked in the production, services and sales departments. Each year, more and more women take jobs that have previously been all-male.

Employing women with impaired capacity for work was and still is a difficult matter; their training requires much attention and numerous joint activities by physicians, psychologists and instructor foremen, running vocational training. If the work performed is supposed to give most satisfaction, one has to observe the rule of making use of the preserved skills and capacities which allow for individual instrumentation, even though the latter will never be a substitute for natural capacities. Selecting occupations which are appropriate to the physical and mental capacities of the disabled persons is a matter of utmost importance to successful rehabilitation. The women are offered jobs in regular enterprises; depending on the outcome of the rehabilitation process and the women's ability to work. In cases of grave disability, within the cottage industry, they work in protected workshops.

The co-operative movement for the disabled, being concerned about the health of its employees, conducts wide-ranging prevention, treatment and rehabilitation programmes. It involves physicians in

individual enterprises and over 300 outpatient rehabilitation clinics in the co-operatives for the disabled. The co-operative movement for the disabled has created a wide-range of facilities to help the vocational rehabilitation and participation in the social life of the co-operatives for women. Vocational training and skill upgrading projects are of particular importance as most of the women affected acquire their qualifications during vocational rehabilitation.

Much attention is also being paid to cultural and educational activities. They create opportunities for fulfilling artistic needs and interests and contribute to the development of the individual and to an active social attitude.

Health recovery and restoration of stamina of the disabled employees assume particular importance in the process of vocational rehabilitation. Valuable help is rendered by social workers whose job is to investigate the living conditions of disabled persons, file applications and explain the scope of benefits. All forms of social assistance are available to the disabled women and to their families - especially to their children.

Thanks to these policies the vocational promotion of women increases; at the same time more and more women join the governing bodies of co-operatives. Particular emphasis is being put in the Union of Co-operatives for the Disabled on expanding and diversifying social assistance, creating new jobs, appropriate choice of occupations, adding new vocational lines and specialisations to match various degrees of disability and introducing machines in jobs that are still manual.

The clubs for women members in the co-operatives for the disabled are very efficient in notifying their Boards about their members' needs, helping to reach solutions and implementing them.

The help offered to a woman when she loses her mental or physical capacities and is unable to hold her present job is very important. It seems that the example of the Polish co-operative movement which creates conditions for the full return to active live of disabled persons deserves to be widely popularised. This is of particular importance now that the United Nations has proclaimed 1981 the Year of the Disabled.



In conclusion I should like to make a few remarks on the participation of women in the self-government bodies of workers' productive co-operatives.

The workers' productive co-operative movement is characterised by the integration of economic, self-government and socio-educational activities with a system of self-management, which promotes initiatives and control.

From the very beginning of its existence, the workers' productive co-operative movement recognised the rights of women to full employment and membership. This was expressed in the statutes, resolutions and other documents of the co-operatives as well as in practice. Winning over women for membership in the co-operatives was in the interests both of the co-operatives - as an influx of women promoted growth - and of the women themselves, as they were given an opportunity to get a job and develop skills. By removing barriers that blocked women's access to a number of occupations, the workers' productive co-operative movement creates conditions for social promotion of women and their active participation in the co-operatives, which are both associations of people and work establishments.

Women are very active in the workers' productive co-operative movement; they account for 28% of Board members and for 30% of Council members.

Since more and more women in socialist Poland complete university-level studies we are convinced that an increasing number of them will be appointed to managerial posts. We believe that the workers' productive co-operative movement has made a very important contribution to the social and vocational promotion of women in Poland.

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE

ICA Women's Conference on  
"Women and Work in Co-operatives"

10th and 11th October 1980

Hotel Cosmos, Moscow, USSR

WOMEN IN THE HUNGARIAN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

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## WOMEN IN THE HUNGARIAN AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

### I.

We consider that the situation of women working in agricultural co-operatives cannot be truly understood and estimated without a concise summary of women's life and work in the past.

Before the Second World War, Hungary was counted among the most underdeveloped countries of Europe and characterised by the feudal system, the low level of production mostly based on manual work, the inhuman exploitation and humiliation of human dignity of the poor peasantry.

While approximately half of the territory of our country belonged to almost one percent of the population, one third of the people were very poor farmhands, day-labourers and season workers without possessions. During that time, our country, with good reason, was named "the country of three million beggars".

Before the liberation, more than half of the population worked in agriculture. If the life of the peasantry was miserable, this was even more true in the case of peasant women. Due to their social position they had no particular legal rights and therefore were defenceless in Society and even in their own family. The overwhelming majority of domestic workers, who represented one fifth of employed women, also came from the peasantry. Their number was extremely high also among the illiterate people.

Women were denied access to universities, colleges and even secondary schools. The majority of peasants were illiterate. So far as formal education of peasant girls was concerned, even their own parents considered that women should remain in the kitchen, and it was enough for them to know that when it was raining they had to take shelter under the eaves.

Women did, of course have no equality so far as salaries were concerned; usually their salaries amounted to half of that which men received. There were no nurseries or day-care centres, nor

any other services to ease the life and work of country people. Only a few villages had a kindergarten. Health services and medical care were at the lowest level possible.

In our people's history, a new era opened with the liberation of the country by the Soviet Union, and the political, social and economic conditions for the building of a socialist society were assured. According to this programme, one of the main targets to be realised was the socialist transformation of agriculture; agricultural co-operatives were created on the basis of the peasantry's voluntary decision, with the comprehensive help of the State. The transformation of agriculture was brought about by 1961.

The experiences of the following years proved in a very convincing way the necessity of the socialist transformation of agriculture, and its superiority over smallholders' farming. It was seen that the only feasible way towards the social and economic betterment of the peasantry would be large-scale co-operative farming based on Lenin's co-operative principle, considering the special characteristics of a given country, and using the experiences acquired in other socialist countries.

By means of the socialist transformation of agriculture, far-reaching changes took place in the life of co-operative peasants and consequently also in the women's lives. The socialist system and the realisation of co-operative farming ensure the total liberation of women and therefore a better quality of life for them. By joining co-operatives and engaging in work, women became self-supporting wage-earners and economically independent persons for the first time in history. The economic and social basis of their rights to equality and the opportunities for success were contained within the framework of co-operative farming.

During the period of transformation of agriculture, the Co-operative Movement could count upon the peasant women's readiness for new initiatives and could also count on their conscientious work, when consolidating the co-operatives and creating the professional production farms.

During that time, in many places, women were the first and the only persons in the family who chose the common way. They rendered undying service, especially in creating a collective spirit, strengthening the labour discipline and defending the common property, but also in activating other people.

Working in the co-operative and the household farms, as well as taking an active part in self-government, they greatly helped the successful establishment of co-operatives. With their contribution women helped to create the right economic conditions for a sweeping change in living conditions, beyond all expectations, as well as a change in their social position. It also led to a change of attitude of the peasants, especially with regards to women.

## II.

As a result of the vast concentration realised during the Seventies there are at present 1,350 agricultural co-operatives with almost 1 million members in our country, the women accounting for 40 per cent. So far as the Agricultural Co-operative Movement's present farming and its future development are concerned, the work of about 62,000 active labourers plays a vital role; the proportion of women amounts to 34%. This proportion in itself shows the position and the role of women in co-operative farming and in the shaping of co-operative life. For this reason, the economic management of a co-operative gives the utmost attention to the women's position and to the solving of their problems of particular character. Decisions of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Working People's Party on women also oblige the co-operative managers to act in this spirit. According to these decisions the co-operatives pay special attention to the following questions:

### Employment of Women

The development achieved in the field of co-operative farming influenced the possibilities of women's employment in a positive way. Today it is generally resolved that women can perform the 1,000 obligatory working hours (1,500 hours for men), laid down by the Co-operative Law.

This is one of the greatest results the Co-operative Movement has achieved, as women's pension rights and the different social allowances depend on it.

It is a general phenomenon that women are employed in unskilled labour or administrative jobs in work places demanding a lower level of professional knowledge. Considering the composition of manual workers we can see that the proportion of women is the highest in unskilled labour (43%) and almost three quarters work in agriculture.

The results obtained so far in respect of women's employment show different particularities within certain counties and even among individual co-operatives. They depend on the geographical and economic fundamentals of the given farm and the established structure of production.

#### Women's Pay

The principle of socialist distribution - equal pay for equal work - is generally accepted and implemented in co-operatives. The worker's pay, including that of a woman, is based on the quantity and the quality of the work performed. Some deviation from this principle can be observed in the pay for female agricultural experts, women employed in professional management and in subordinate executive jobs.

The annual employment level, its character and the lack of required qualifications continue to have a disadvantageous effect on women's pay.

#### General Culture, Professional Qualifications and Political Education of Women

The Constitution of our country assures the right to formal education for everyone, without distinction as to sex. The Co-operative Law makes it obligatory for co-operative members to assure these rights.

Women working agricultural co-operatives have come a long way in reaching a certain level of general culture and professional knowledge. The number of women - mothers of several children among

them - who had originally ended their schooling with 8 years' formal education but have gone on, in recent years, to acquire professional qualifications, besides being engaged in their workplace and in household chores, amounts to thousands. Women represent 9% of the 160,000 skilled and 43% of the 320,000 trained labourers working in co-operatives. The different series of lectures and study circles organised in conjunction with the country's cultural centres contribute also to women's education.

During the last few years, women working in co-operatives have shown an ever-growing interest in general topics and political events. In relation to this increasing interest they have realised more and more that loyalty in their everyday work is inseparable from the question of peace and solidarity among people.

#### Women in Leadership

The trend of women's participation in co-operative self-governing organs and in the economic leadership is an important indicative of the realisation of women's emancipation. The most significant result has been achieved in the field of women's initiation into the elected public bodies on the county level as well as on the national level. 24% of National Council members and 23% of territorial associations' delegates are women. In the elected functions of co-operatives, i.e. management and other committees - the proportion of women is about 30%.