

## ICA-AP NEWSLETTER

News from members, ICA-AP activities,  
ICA-EU Partnership update & more!

### 13th ICA-AP Regional Assembly, Tehran, Iran

Dear Members,

The 13th Regional Assembly and 10th Co-operative Forum, will be held in Tehran, Iran from November 26 to 30. All information related to the Assembly is available at [www.regionalassembly.coop](http://www.regionalassembly.coop). For any queries regarding the Regional Assembly, Co-operative Forum or with respect to the Assembly events, please write to [regionalassembly@icaap.coop](mailto:regionalassembly@icaap.coop). We look forward to seeing you in Iran!

### 13th ICA-Asia Pacific Regional Assembly and 10th Cooperative Forum

The biennial Regional Assembly (RA), represented by all members directly, is the highest authority of the ICA-AP. The RA is a central policy making and representative body that brings together all members and provides them a platform to discuss multiple issues concerning development and growth of co-operatives as well as the opportunity to network and form bilateral and multilateral alliances for mutual benefit. The RA plays a vital role in strengthening the democratic governance process of co-operatives by building consensus on issues and passes the agenda after discussion and to the satisfaction of all members.

The 13th ICA-AP Regional Assembly will take place from November 26 to 30, 2018 in Tehran, in partnership with the Iranian co-operative movement, headed by the Iran Chamber of Co-operatives (ICC). The theme for this year's RA is, *Co-operatives help economies become more resilient and sustainable*. According to the EU, resilience is "the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, to adapt, and to quickly recover from stresses and shocks" such as violence, conflict, drought and other natural disasters without compromising long-term development." Co-operatives develop individual participation, build resilience, and create social capital. The RA includes the Co-operative Forum and other engaging events organized by the regional sectoral and thematic committees.

#### *Cooperative Forum*

Since 2000, the Cooperative Forum has been held in conjunction with the RA to take advantage of the presence of a large number of participants from the ICA-AP membership. The Forum brings together stakeholders to assess progress, discuss challenges and arrive at decisions to strengthen co-operative enterprises as models of sustainable development. The objectives of this year's Cooperative Forum is to showcase the contribution of co-operatives in helping economies become more resilient and sustainable, review progress and gaps in performance to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), discuss creating an 'ecosystem' with focus on 'cooperation among co-operatives,' and adopt

'innovation' in cooperative business for stability and growth. The Forum will take place on November 28 and will be attended by prominent personalities like Hon. Ali Larijani, Speaker of the Parliament of Iran, Mr. Mieczyslaw Grodzki, President, National Cooperative Council, Poland, and Dr. Mohammad Shariatmadari, Minister of Co-operatives, Labor and Social Welfare, Iran.

#### *Regional Women's Forum*

The Women' Forum is organized under the aegis of the ICA-AP Committee on Women. The Women's Committee works to promote gender integration in co-operatives and encourages the participation of women at all levels in co-operatives, especially at the leadership and decision-making levels. The First Regional Women's Forum was held in 1998 in Seoul, Korea and since then has been an integral part of every RA. The theme for this year's Women's Forum is Strengthening Resilience by Empowering Women in Co-operatives, and will take place on November 27. The objectives of the Forum include understanding the situation of resilience in relation to women's co-operatives, the issues, challenges and opportunities in the region, sharing information and good practices from ICA-AP, its network of members, and international organisations on strengthening resilience, and formulating ways to assist in the strengthening of resilience of women in co-operatives. Expert speakers from co-operative movements, international agencies, and government bodies are expected to speak at the Forum.

#### *Regional Co-operative Research Conference*

The ICA-AP Committee on Co-operative Research started in 2000 and has organised 12 regional research conferences and local seminars till date. The 13th ICA-AP Regional Co-operative Research Conference will be organised on the theme, *Co-operatives contribute to more sustainable and resilient societies* on November 27. The conference comes as an opportunity for researchers, academicians, policy makers and key stakeholders to discuss and deliberate the need to research-promote-advocate for co-operatives as important contributors to a more sustainable and resilient society. The conference will play a crucial role in generating and promoting greater understanding of the co-operative model, building capacity of the co-operators, and bridging the movement with policy makers and the academic community. The conference will be attended by over 50 participants including key national and international delegations and will see presentation of 15 papers from across the Asia-Pacific region.

#### *Joint Workshop on Youth & Co-operatives in Educational Institutions*

The workshop will take place on November 26 on the theme, *Building Resilience and Sustainability through the 5th Co-operative Principle on Education, Training and information*. The workshop is expected to attract 100 national and international participants and discuss issues around Student Cooperation; Co-operatives in Curriculum; and Co-operatives as Safe Spaces for youth.

#### *Development Meeting & Workshop of Industrial and Service Co-operatives*

The Development Meeting and Workshop of Industrial and Service Co-operatives themed on, *Emerging Trends in Work & Ownership structures in Co-operatives* will address the following three areas: Status report on the ongoing research on the subject, Cross-sectoral synergies for resilience and sustainability, and the Role of social and solidarity economies in development. The meeting will take place on November 27.

## **NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS**

### **14th National Co-operative Summit concludes in Davao City, The Philippines**

The 14th National Co-operative Summit was held from October 3 to 5 at the SMX Convention Centre, SM Lanang Premier, Davao City, The Philippines. The conveners of the Summit were ICA members; the Philippines Co-operative Centre (PCC), Co-operative Development Authority (CDA) and the local hosts, MASS-SPEC Co-operative Development Center. The Summit attracted over 4,000 cooperators from all across the Philippines!

The Co-operative Summit takes place once every two years and brings together federations, unions, primary co-operatives and other organizations (government, development agencies, and private sector) supporting co-operatives to discuss issues and concerns affecting the movement. The theme for this year's Summit was, Overcoming Challenges, Succeeding Together Under One Apex. The theme is timely in the light of PCC's role as the Apex of co-operatives in the country and how it can harness the movement to brave greater opportunities.



Together at the National Co-operative Summit

The first day was devoted to delivery of solidarity messages and presentations on the status, trends, and direction of co-operatives in the Philippines. The keynote speaker, Sara Duterte Carpio, the Mayor of Davao City, in her address said that co-operatives were invaluable vehicles for poverty reduction and helped build a stronger community. Special invitee, Dato Abdul Fatah Abdullah, President of Angkasa and President of the ASEAN Co-operative Organization stressed on the need for co-operatives in the ASEAN to strengthen their collective identity. The day ended with the unveiling of the Philippines Coop Marquee and the Bigay Pugay Award to nine cooperators for their outstanding service to the co-operative movement.

The second day focused on perspectives on an apex and discussing issues pertaining to pillars relevant to the movement. The international perspective on apex was provided by the ICA-AP while the national was provided by the apex (PCC), Union (Northern Luzon Co-operative Education and Development Center) and primary co-operative (First Community Co-operative). The pillar

presentations and discussion were in the financial, producers and marketing, service, and education and advocacy sectors.

### **The Federation of Peoples' Sustainable Development Cooperative, The Philippines visits Japan**

On October 9, the Federation of Peoples' Sustainable Development Cooperative (FPSDC) brought together 34 delegates representing 20 co-operatives and civil society organizations from the Philippines for a learning visit to Japan. The visit was made possible through the assistance of ICA-AP as part of its mandate to boost cooperation by developing business relationships and partnerships among its members.

The FPSDC delegates made an official visit to two of the largest co-operative networks in Japan: The Japanese Consumer Co-operative Union (JCCU) and the National Federation of Agricultural Co-operative Association (ZEN-NOH). It is noteworthy that unlike in the Philippines, co-ops in Japan are regulated by different Acts, such as the Consumer Co-operative Act (1948), the Agricultural Co-operative Act (1947) and the Fishery Co-operative Act (1948), among others.



The FPSDC delegation meets with JCCU

At JCCU, the delegates were warmly welcomed by Mr. Jiro Ito, Director of Public Relations Division and Ms. Kanako Miyazawa, Senior International Officer, who introduced and discussed the profile, membership and business of JCCU. JCCU plays a vital role in value chain as developer and supplier of CO-OP Brand Products to its member co-ops, actively participates in communicating with other organizations and makes policy proposals concerning the consumers' co-operative movement. A feat that FPSDC aims to emulate and achieve in the future. After the introduction, the group moved on to their exhibition of different consumer products showcasing JCCU's CO.OP brand. Another thing

that the participants learned from JCCU is the continuous improvement/innovation of delivery of products to their consumer-members, especially to large population of aging citizens.

At the the JA Building in Chiyodaku, Tokyo, Mr. Kenki Maeda introduced the Japan Agricultural Cooperatives group and its businesses. He described how agricultural co-operatives operate in Japan. ZEN-NOH is in charge of the marketing and supply business of the JA Group. It seeks to connect producers and consumers, revitalize production centers, and preserve society and the environment. This is where the federation and co-operatives in the Philippines relate to - where co-operatives play an important role in value-chain in the agricultural sector.

At the end of the learning visit, the realization that the Philippine co-ops are far behind their Japanese counterparts. However, all is not lost. As a country blessed with so much resources, the co-op movement can do its part in making the Philippines great. What needs to be done and a challenge at the same time is to instil discipline, temper greed and teach the Filipino people to be cooperative with their leaders. But most of all, put their faith and trust in God Almighty. The change for the better that Filipinos so desire will only be achieved if that change starts within themselves. And FPSDC hopes to be the spark that will ignite this change: First to its member co-ops, then eventually, the same change will infect other organizations and finally the Philippine society as a whole.

### **ICA-AP's ACTIVITIES MAPPING**

#### **2nd ICA-Japan Training Course on “Fostering Agricultural Co-operatives to Build Food Value Chain”**



Group photo with participants and officials from ICA-AP, IDACA, MAFF and JAZenChu

The 2nd ICA-Japan Training Course on “Fostering Agricultural Co-operatives to Build Food Value Chain” was held in Japan from September 27 to October 18, 2018. Seven co-operative professionals from the ICA-AP member network representing six countries (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, The Philippines and Vietnam), attended the 20-day training. This course has been designed with an objective to strengthen capacity of agricultural, forestry and fisheries producers by building food value chains.

The course emphasised preparation of ‘Action Plans’ by the participants based on their learning from the training and which can be implemented by them after returning to their respective countries. The topics covered during the training were historical background, organisational and business activities and distribution systems of agricultural co-operatives in Japan. Preparation and presentation of country reports were also an important component of the training and these focused on skill development, collection of information around the particular subject and analysing the problems faced by farmers, the agricultural community, co-operatives and the governments.

Ms. Savitri Singh, Program Director of ICA-AP, Mr. Koshi Sugaya, officer in-charge of ICA-Japan project in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), Japan, Mr. Yasuyuki Kobayashi, Manager of the International Department of JAZenchi and Mr. Masahiro Konno, Executive Director of IDACA attended the opening and closing ceremonies. A certificate for successful completion of the course was awarded to the participants by Mr. Konno at the closing ceremony.

#### **18th ICA Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on “Management of Consumer Co-operatives” in Vietnam**

The 18th ICA Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on “Management of Consumer Co-operatives” was held in Vietnam from October 8-10, 2018. The workshop was organized under the aegis of the ICA-AP Consumer Committee and for the first time hosted by Saigon Union of Trading Co-operatives (Saigon Co.op), Vietnam. 40 co-operators and guests from Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, The Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam attended the three-day training workshop. The objectives of the workshop were to learn effective operations of the small- medium sized stores; study the experience of two organizations - [Saigon Co.op] and [Fairprice]; and establish an international network of Consumer Co-operative leaders and managers.



The program started with a welcome address by Mr. Haruyoshi Amano, Chair of ICA-AP Consumer Committee and Manager, International Department, Japanese Consumer Co-operative Union (JCCU).

He spoke about ICA, Committees of ICA-AP and highlighted the consumer cooperative movement worldwide. Mr. Tran Lam Hong, the Deputy CEO of Saigon Co.op, in his opening remarks, said that the workshop is a continuation of the international co-operative movement's tradition of sharing retail experience among members and would help members improve the quality and efficiency of their businesses. This was followed by lectures by Mr. Le Truong Son (Director of Invest Consulting Dept.), Ms. Ngo Thi Bich Lien (Director of Concept Management Dept.), Mr. Vo Hoang Anh (Director of Private Label Dept.) and Mr. Bui Quang Vinh (Director of Logistics Dept.), on Saigon Co.op's origins, retail operations, development strategy of private label and Supply Chain Management.

The second day of the training commenced with the delivery of case studies on "Effective Operation of the Small - Medium sized store in Saigon Co.op - Chain of [Co.op Food], [Co.op Smile] and [Cheers]" presented by Ms. Nguyen Bich Ly (Director, Co.op Food); Ms. Nguyen Linh Trang (Director, Co.op Smile); and Ms. Nguyen Dau Anh Uyen (Deputy Director, Cheers). Ms. Chua Tze Lin (Manager of Fairprice Shop, Singapore) provided an external case study on "Effective Operation of the Small sized store in Fairprice - Fairprice Shop." Following the lectures, the participants were taken on a field trip to Saigon Co.op's five stores (Co.op Xtra Su Van Hanh, Co.opmart Ly Thuong Kiet, Co.op Food Bach Ma, Cheers Hoa Hao, Co.op Smile De Tham) and one distribution Centre.

On the third day, group discussion sessions were held on the following topics, What are the key learning points for business of Saigon Co.op?; What are the features and strategies of the Co.op Food Chain and Fairprice Shop?; and What kind of store will be suitable to meet the requirements in your community? Four groups shared their ideas and solutions. Each participating organization presented their learnings from the workshop as well as their action plan. These presentations were followed by a debriefing conducted by Mr. Nguyen Long Trung (Director, Saigon Co.op Training Centre). The participants were positive about the program and were confident that sharing their experience with other co-operators in their countries would be extremely beneficial.

### **Thoughts from the Platform Co-operative Conference held in Hong Kong (Sangmin Kim, Malaysia Business Office (ICA-AP))**

The first ever conference on Platform Co-operatives was held in Hong Kong from September 28 to 29. The "Sowing the Seeds: Platform Cooperativism for Asia" at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), was attended by more than 100 people from all over the world and including cooperators, IT professionals, academics and students. Professor Trebor Scholz introduced the concept of "Platform Cooperativism" and the discussions that followed centered around how the platforms operate, their origins and development, and efforts to start-up. The participants were also introduced to successful platform co-operatives like Fairmondo, CoopCycle, CoLab, SMart, etc.



Jack Qiu Professor at the CUHK gives a welcome speech

A platform co-operative which runs as a business using a digital platform is jointly owned and democratically controlled by its members and operates on cooperative principles. The concept stems from the idea of overcoming the limitations of conventional platform owners like Uber, which is considered an iconic company in the “sharing economy”. For instance, Uber drivers are not the employees of Uber but work for the benefit of Uber and its shareholders. They are denied workers’ rights such as minimum wage, collective bargaining rights, etc. Let’s suppose Uber is a platform co-operative. Then, the drivers own the platform and share it, running the system for their own benefit in a democratic way. They don’t have to push themselves into “independent contracts”.

A platform co-operative is, definitely, a powerful business model with innovation and efficiency that can give benefits to the vast majority of workers; and not just a small minority with capital. But the concept itself doesn’t seem to be completely established as yet. Additionally, there are some tricky issues to be addressed. For example, if platform developers or technicians are to be members of a co-operative just like the platform users who have limited knowledge about the technical parts, can it be possible to run the cooperative in a democratic and balanced way? As the digital platform, by its nature, requires constant technical improvements, can a cooperative do this effectively with lots of stakeholders?

Although the platform co-operative business hasn’t attracted much attention in the co-operative movement; now is the time to take a close look and think about the implications it can have for conventional cooperatives. ICA is trying to involve young people in the cooperative movement and a platform cooperative might be the solution. It will be able to approach young people with the image of a value-oriented but not old- fashioned business model. After all, we already live in the digital economy and the world is changing every day.

### **ICA-EU PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM ON CO-OPERATIVES IN DEVELOPMENT: PEOPLE CENTRED BUSINESSES IN ACTION**

In March 2016, the ICA and the European Union signed a Framework Partnership Agreement (Europe Aid/150-053/C/ACT/Multi) to implement a multi-year and multi-country development programme aimed at benefitting and advancing co-operatives worldwide. The Partnership is officially titled "Co-operatives in Development: People Centred Businesses in Action", translated into the social media hashtag #Coops4Dev (co-operatives for development). The Partnership has 8 Result Areas and 33



Activity Streams for delivery by 5 units, one housed in each regional office and one at the coordination level in Brussels. The AP unit has identified three strategic development priorities namely, participation of Co-operatives in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Youth Inclusion in Co-operatives, and Exploring Work and Ownership Structures in Co-operatives. The ICA-AP implements the programme in collaboration with Alliance members and in partnerships with other stakeholders such as governments, international development agencies, private sector and NGOs in the region. You may read more about the Partnership [here](#).

### **ICA-AP participates at the Urban Action School in Mumbai, India**

The Urban Action School (UAS) is a school for mid to senior level urban practitioners specialising in issues related to Urbanisation and Cities, related to India and the Global South. ICA-AP was invited to participate in the ongoing one-week residential course titled *Women Workers in the Labour Movement*. The broad objective of the ongoing course is to examine in-depth, the key issues of women workers' role and representation in the labour movement. Ms. Savitri Singh, Program Director, ICA-AP participated as a Discussant, in the session titled *Women workers in Market oriented collectives*. She was accompanied by Ms. Lakshmi Narayan and Ms. More from [SWaCH Cooperative](#), Pune and Mr. Agnelo Menezes from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. SWaCH Cooperative arose from the burning need to empower women who were working as rag pickers with minimal to non-existent rights. Before they were collectivised under the aegis of a co-operative, they had no access to a formal identity, they were regularly harassed by policemen who viewed them as 'petty thieves', and they had no claim on any of the benefits that accrue to those working in the formal sector. SWaCH is a wholly worked-owned co-operative that has significantly improved the working conditions and livelihood status of the rag pickers.



Ms. Singh summarised the discussion about SWaCH while outlining the nitty-gritty of the co-operative model that focuses on 'earning' a profit, rather than 'making' profit. She highlighted the importance

of women-led co-operatives, as well as the need for mainstreaming women in the existing co-operative eco-system, with specific attention on parity of wages. In an exclusive session later in the day, Ms. Singh informed the audience about ICA, its member network, and the work it undertakes on advocating the co-operative model, and building capacities of its membership.

### **COMMUNICATIONS WATCH**

A tête-à-tête with Morshed Mannan on “Co-operative Law and the Platform Economy”  
Interview conducted by Mohit Dave, Research Officer, Research Officer (Asia-Pacific), ICA-EU  
Partnership on Co-operatives in Development in Athens, Greece, on September 28.



**Q1: Hello, Morshed! Thank you for speaking to us. Can you briefly introduce yourself for the readers?**

A1: I am Morshed Mannan, currently working in the Company Law Department of Leiden University, the Netherlands, where I conduct research on (workers') co-operatives, corporate governance, freedom of establishment, corporate social responsibility and international insolvency law. I was appointed as a PhD candidate by the Meijers Research Institute and the Company Law Department in 2017. The topic of my research is: "Buyout: Achieving Business Resilience by Democratizing Ownership". I first moved to Leiden to pursue an Advanced Masters in International Civil and Commercial Law, during which time I wrote a thesis assessing whether Bangladesh, India and Pakistan should adopt the UNCITRAL Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency. After my graduation, my thesis was published in the International Insolvency Review. While working at Leiden University as a Research and Teaching Staff Member, I have also written about co-operative governance and contributed to a textbook on corporate social responsibility, targeted at prospective business lawyers. Prior to moving to Leiden, I was an Associate at Juris Counsel, a Dhaka-based full-service law firm, & lectured on commercial law, administrative law and jurisprudence at the London College of Legal Studies (South), an affiliate center of the University of London International Program in Dhaka. I have written on workers' compensation in Bangladesh, the influence of literature on English trusts law and international commercial arbitration, for both peer-reviewed publications & the popular press. Previously, I completed an LLB (Hons) at the University of Warwick in 2011 and was called to the Bar of England & Wales by the Hon'ble Society of Lincoln's Inn.

**Q2: Worker buyouts have had their share of criticism. Do you think they have been rightly placed?**

A2: Well, the scientific literature on business transfers reveals that buyouts and co-operatives have the potential to recognise the contribution of a broader group of stakeholders and preserve the social value of businesses! Academic and institutional studies indicate that buyouts of such businesses and organisation as (worker) co-operatives may have the potential to prevent market exit, while preserving employment, technical know-how and community ties. Nonetheless, they have not been frequently chosen as a transfer strategy. This is particularly true of the current generation of businesses that deploy new forms of work, often through the use of digital technologies. The main apparent obstacle has been the lack of a regulatory framework that encourages buyouts and business transfers to organisations such as co-operatives!

My doctoral research builds on my earlier work investigating worker co-operatives, by analysing how workers and users have sought to privately organise business transfers to democratic business structures in lieu of facilitative legislative frameworks. This has chiefly been through the use of corporate law structures such as trusts and foundations and, increasingly, the deployment of technologies such as blockchain. I will subsequently consider the legislative options that will be best suited to promote transfers to broad-based ownership structures. I then hope to be able to better answer that question! (smiles)

**Q3: Fantastic! So, you do believe that the workers' enterprise model has a lot of promise for the future of work?**

A3: Absolutely! Looking beyond Mondragon, there are noteworthy examples of successful employee-owned and controlled businesses across the globe and across a wide variety of industries. For instance, in India, the Kerala Dinesh Beedi worker co-operative comes to my mind as a long standing example. In Bangladesh, following the Rana Plaza disaster, a garment worker co-operative, Oporajeo, was formed as a means of rehabilitation and as a more sustainable form of work. There are also the worker-owned recuperated enterprises (empresas recuperadas) that arose in Buenos Aires following Argentina's sovereign debt default in 2001 and continue to do business and the worker co-operatives that have emerged in New York City and Cincinnati in recent times. These enterprises have shown how worker-controlled and managed firms can flourish in a capitalist economy, paying wages well above industry level, catering to the heterogeneous interests of worker-members, ensuring product quality as well as high worker satisfaction.

I believe that recent developments in the uses and application of digital technology could bolster the co-operative economy; making coops accessible to a new generation of cooperators. This can range from digital tools that provide information and help register coops, to the creation of entirely new online business platforms that are co-operatively organised - platform co-operatives! In fact, in the recent past, coops have had an intuitive appeal for those seeking to resist, and provide alternatives to, new manifestations of capitalism such as platform capitalism. It is seen as a way of gaining control over precarious working conditions and sharing the financial rewards of enterprises more broadly and equitably. In industries where the risk of automation is high, for instance through the introduction of self-driving cars, broad-based ownership of businesses is seen as a guarantee against the future loss of wages. From my own research of the 'platform co-operative' landscape in Europe, it is evident that dozens of such initiatives are mushrooming across the Continent.

**Q4: It's heartening to hear that! Are there lessons on platform cooperativism for the cooperators in Asia-Pacific, especially at a time when they are sowing the seeds in Hong Kong, as we speak!?**

A4: As I mentioned during my presentation at the Forum (in Athens), platform cooperativism refers to a heterogeneous group of entities, that differ considerably in their preferred legal entity form, economic activities, membership base and geographical market. There is also a sharp distinction between coops that use platforms as a tool to further an existing business model and those that have an online platform at the heart of their enterprise but seek to co-operatively organise its governance structure. What these entities have in common is only a general adherence to the Co-operative Principles.

The variety of legal entity choices may stem from the fact that there are entry barriers to forming co-operatives across countries and other corporate forms may be easier to set up, in both regulatory and procedural terms, especially in the Asia-Pacific. A central issue is that platform cooperativism is only now beginning to receive attention in policy circles, such as in Jeremy Corbyn's Digital Democracy

Manifesto and in certain EU policy documents. In view of this, one lesson for cooperators in the Asia Pacific may be familiarizing legislators with platform co-operatives, work on which has already started in Australia, South Korea and elsewhere. Another is to guard against broad-based ownership or cooperativism being used as a gimmick. The abrupt cancellation of the Restricted Stock Units Plan of the Juno drivers who were promised and granted equity in the Juno ride-hailing platform has fuelled scepticism about broad-based ownership of platforms and underscores the need for caution. However, bearing this in mind, the upsurge in freelancing arrangements across the Asia-Pacific (especially in Bangladesh) as well as the use of (mobile) internet, provides many novel opportunities for platform co-operatives to grow in the region. Lessons from these early forays into platform cooperativism can be beneficial to co-operators in other parts of the world, as well as policy makers and legislators monitoring this space.

**Q5: So, what is the main challenge you face in this ecosystem?**

A5: The absence of legislative frameworks specific to platform co-operatives presents certain difficulties. In some cases, long-standing co-operative legislation may not fit the needs of cooperators seeking to structure their enterprise in a global scale. Professor Juliet Schor and her fellow researchers have also noted the difficulties in forming a common culture due to the lack of a shared physical environment. At the same time, there is a definite risk of putative platform co-operatives conflicting with other areas of law -- such as competition law. While there is a broad enthusiasm for the platform co-operative movement, practical guidance on how to form such co-operatives, either de novo or through a business transfer, is still scarce. This presents a significant obstacle for promising ideas getting off the ground. This is coupled with the fact that financing the start-up and growth of co-operatively organised technology companies presents a number of obstacles, especially if external investment is limited for governance or ideological purposes. This may inhibit efforts at scaling the co-operative and growing the number of patrons using the co-operative's services; network effects usually being a key determinant of the success of platforms. However, this also provides an opportunity of re-imagining platform growth, away from the behemoths we see today to more community-oriented structures. The fact that, in some cases, mainstream co-operative movements have begun incorporating platform co-operatives into the fold of their work is promising!

**Q6. Indeed! What has been your motivation, then? What gets you out of bed in the morning?!**

A6: In terms of my research, I find speaking to cooperators and attending conferences where developments in the co-operative economy are discussed to be very inspiring. I leave each meeting buzzing with new ideas. On a more personal level, I find democratic business ownership to be one of the most pressing political issues of our time, especially in countries where the shareholder wealth maximization model has held sway for several years and has been found to be detrimental to both corporate governance and wider society. A passage from Pankaj Mishra's *Age of Anger* (2016) particularly resonated with me. He charted the growth of individualism globally and observed that now "individuals with very different pasts find themselves herded by capitalism and technology into a common present, where grossly unequal distributions of wealth and power have created humiliating new hierarchies" (p. 13). In a world that, according to some, doesn't have a 'society' (to paraphrase Margaret Thatcher), can cooperativism contribute to (re)forging bonds of solidarity? The role of co-operatives is as important now as it has ever been, particularly in view of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Keeping an eye on this bigger picture spurs me on! (smiles)

**Q7: Finally, what do you think young cooperators need to know about the platform economy?**

A7: When discussing the platform economy, it is easy to focus on a few key actors: Uber, Facebook, Amazon and so on. By doing so, the platform economy is framed as a marginal phenomenon, shaped

by certain major actors, but of limited interest to the activities of co-operators. However, the platform economy is far larger and more diverse than it may first appear. Even 'gig' platforms involve a heterogeneous group of stakeholders, from those who use them intermittently for supplementary income to those who are regular workers, depending on the platform for their survival. Going beyond how platforms mediate user groups, their algorithms and corporate governance practices also have a significant influence on society at large. In general, there is a need to build awareness about the complexity of the platform economy and the myriad effects they have.

Of course, platform co-operatives strive to re-orient the ownership and practices of online platforms. They seek to make use of platforms, but with ownership held by user-owners and with guaranteed work and data protections. Through transparency, they hope to counteract algorithmic biases. If interested in forming platform co-operatives, as with earlier generations of co-operators, networking with other co-operators and co-operatives will be key for the youth. Along with developing a viable business model and critically reflecting on the technological apparatus used by the co-operative, it is essential for platform co-ops to be well-integrated into the wider co-operative movement. Not only will this provide potential commercial opportunities, but will help in capacity building, developing supportive and complementary institutional structures and bonds of solidarity among co-operative enterprises.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **New Members**

With the addition of two new members, the Union of Housing Cooperatives in Palestine (PUHC) and the Central Union of State Rural Production Cooperatives of Iran (CURPC), the total number of members in ICA-AP currently stands at 104 from 32 countries.

#### ***Union of Housing Cooperatives in Palestine (PUHC)***

PUHC seeks to support the collective efforts of individuals and/or groups from the middle to low-income strata to obtain decent housing. Its members are voluntarily linked as co-operative housing associations. The Federation aspires to contribute to guaranteeing the right of Palestinians to live decently and to strengthen the ability of Palestinians to maintain their land by enabling them to build on all Palestinian territories.

#### ***Central Union of State Rural Production Cooperatives of Iran (CURPC)***

CURPC aims to empower the rural production cooperatives in terms of autonomy and independence nationwide. The philosophy behind establishment of rural production cooperative societies is to overcome limiting features of Iran agriculture system which are: small farm size, scattered parcels and small holder farmers and legal system. The goal of CURPC is to support members of rural production cooperatives to modify the structure of the farming system increase productivity in production, optimal allocation and usage of resources, promoting quality and quantity of agricultural crops, development of agro-processing industries (cropping, horticulture, livestock, forestry, fisheries), creation of a sustainable agriculture system, protect the environment, enhance member welfare and economic capacity, marketing and development of business for members

### **Launch of COOP YES in Sri Lanka**

The Sri Lankan co-operative movement recently celebrated the launch of COOP YES - the Co-operative Youth Empowerment Society. The main goal is the upliftment of youth in Sri Lanka in terms of their

knowledge, skills and living standards. Mr. S L Naseer, Commissioner of Cooperative Development and Registrar of Co-operative Societies has supported the development of COOP YES. It currently has 23 founding members, including along the Hon. Minister of Co-operatives. In order to develop a three-year action plan, a one-day workshop was held at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, which was attended by cooperators and expert consultants. 23 members were elected as Board of Directors and responsibilities assigned to them to look in to different disciplines of development.

### **Indian Institute of Infrastructure and Construction (IIIC) launches skill development courses**

The classes for the first batch of students began at the Indian Institute of Infrastructure & Construction at Kollam, Kerala in India on October 1, 2018. The IIIC is an initiative of the Kerala Academy for Skills Excellence (KASE), under Department of Labour, Government of Kerala and the Uralungal Labour Contract Co-operative Society Limited (ULCCS Ltd). During the 1st phase there are three technician level courses, one supervisory level course and three managerial courses. The courses include Diploma in Painting, steel fixing & bar bending, housekeeping, plumbing engineering and Post graduate diploma programme in Advanced Construction Management, Urban Planning and Architecture and a Graduate Programme for Civil engineering graduates. According to Mr. Rameshan Paleri, Chairman of ULCCS Ltd, the Institute will facilitate appropriate placement opportunities to the students.

A vibrant Industry academia interface, cutting edge technology, placement opportunities, collaboration with institutions of repute within the country and abroad, residential programme, etc. are some of the major advantages of the Institute's academic programme. Students will have the opportunity to improve their learning process with an advanced computer laboratory and digital and physical libraries. All faculty members have more than five years of experience in various industries and teaching. The National Academy of Construction, Hyderabad, India is providing technical collaboration for the academic programme including an orientation programme for the technical staff. The Institute will work with government departments and public sector undertakings to offer up skilling programme for technical staff, appropriate courses for engineering drop out students, continuous training programme for workers along with appropriate skilling initiatives under the Skill India programme.

### **Guidelines for Statistics on Co-operatives adopted at the International Conference on Labour Statisticians**

On October 18<sup>th</sup> 2018, the Guidelines concerning Statistics of Cooperatives were adopted at the 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians. According to [ILO](#), 'the delegates (of the Conference) underlined the importance of developing reliable and globally comparable statistics of co-operatives. A number of country representatives also echoed their support for conducting pilot-testing of the guidelines and expressed their willingness to participate in the process.' An important point to be noted is that the guidelines will only be officially finalized with the approval by the Governing Body at the ILO in 2019.

### **Social Co-operative International School 2018**

The 2018 edition of the Social Co-operative International School was held at Naples, Italy from 25th to the 28th October 2018. This was attended by 49 delegates from 14 countries. From the Asia-Pacific Region, India, Korea and Sri Lanka participated and actively contributed to the discussion on the related issues. The Korean delegation was lead by Mr. Sung Suyong, Chairman of the Busan Economic Federation of Social Co-operatives, who made a detailed presentation on their activities and programmes. He introduced the history, mission, goal and activities of the Social Co-operatives in Busan. He spoke about community projects and creating job opportunities.

The Indian delegation consisted of Mr. T.T. Adhikari and Mr. Surender Kumar Garg Managing Director and Secretary respectively of Delhi State Consumers' Co-operative Federation Ltd. In his presentation, Mr. Adhikari, while highlighting the important aspects of the Indian economy, size and status of Indian co-operative movement, presented an over view of the social sector development in India. He stated that the Government of India has various planned schemes & activities like Skill India, and Digital India, for improvement of human resources and developmental activities for disadvantaged and marginalised classes, children, people with disabilities, minority community, senior citizens, tribal and women population, and health care services, some of which are handled by the co-operative societies. In the co-operative sector in India, some of the specialized societies are working for fishermen community, dairy farmers, agriculture credit in the rural areas in the country aiming at facilitating their livelihood, and improving social status.

The labour co-operatives are associated with contract labour, and those engaged in construction & forest areas for their employment & skill development. The Tribal Development Societies work for the socio economic development of tribal people, by marketing of tribal products in the urban markets. The fishers' co-operatives thrive to educate, guide, and assist their members in their efforts to build up and expand their activities. The segmented societies work for social development of their members and communities. In the 3-day workshop, presentations were made by various experts on social sector development in Africa, Asia, Europe, South America and other places.

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**UPCOMING EVENTS**

November 2018

- 13th ICA-AP Regional Assembly and 10th Co-operative Forum, Tehran, Iran; November 26-30. Theme: Co-operatives Help Economies Become More Resilient and Sustainable. More information at <http://www.regionalassembly.coop/tehran2018/>

#### December 2018

- Meeting of the ICA Committee on Consumer Cooperation for Asia and the Pacific, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, December 6, 2018
- Plenary Meeting and Workshop on Data Collection and Monitoring by the ICA-AP Committee on Women, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, December 7, 2018.
- Workshop on Future of Cooperative Business in the Digital World by ICA-AP, All-China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives (ACFSMC), Malaysian National Cooperative Movement (ANGKASA). Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, December 9 to 12, 2018

#### January 2019

- Young Development Professional's Meet on SDGs, New Delhi, Dates (tbd)
- Workshop on Strengthening Women's Co-operatives, New Delhi, January 31- February 1

#### February 2019

- Co-operative Development Meeting for Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Countries, Morocco, February 5-6
- ICA-Japan Training Course on Fostering and Improving Management of Agricultural Co-operatives, Japan, February 12 – March 29