

ICA-AP NEWSLETTER

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

Women and Cooperative Identity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Introduction	2
In Conversation with Ms. Anahita Eslahpazir, CEO, RCEC	2
Opinion Piece: Status of Women in Cooperatives in Myanmar	5
Consultation on Cooperative Identity with Iran	7
Consultation on Cooperative Identity with ASEAN Cooperative Organisation	11
ICA-AP Updates	14
Asia Pacific Regional Forum on Cooperative Housing	14
In Conversation with Ms. Savitri Singh, Former Program Director, ICA-AP	18
International Women’s Day 2021	22
Member Updates	25
How our Members Celebrated IWD21	25
NCUI Gets its New Chief Executive	27
ICA-EU Updates	28
ICYC shares GGC Success Story at Global Youth Forum 2021	28
Consultation for EU Roadmap for Engagement with CSOs in Vietnam and Laos PDR	30
Coops4dev Research Team Shares Insights from Global Youth Research	32
Announcements	35
Webinar on Post COVID-19: Opportunities for Cooperatives in Educational Institution	35
WDDCM Global Evidence Summit	36
ICA 33 rd World Cooperative Congress	36
Upcoming Events	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Women and Cooperative Identity

Introduction

The [33rd ICA World Cooperative Congress](#) in December 2021 with the theme, *Deepening the Cooperative Identity*, will celebrate and deepen the understanding of the [Statement on the Cooperative Identity](#) (SCI) and the profound social and economic impact of cooperatives worldwide.

The ICA-AP regional office is bringing the perspective of Asia-Pacific members into the conversation through online consultation, events, articles, and interviews. In March, as we celebrate International Women's Day, the theme for this issue is "**Women and Cooperative Identity**".

This year the UN Women announced 'Women in leadership: achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world' as the theme of the [International Women's Day \(IWD21\) \(March 8\)](#). It "celebrates the tremendous efforts by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic."

Women have always played an integral role in shaping communities and this was highlighted again in the world's fight against the pandemic. Women have been at the forefront in fighting the hardships brought by the COVID-19 pandemic to businesses, homes, and communities. In cooperatives, women across all levels have shouldered equal responsibility in fighting the pandemic. They contributed to the response actions undertaken by their cooperatives (providing donations, providing supplies, carrying out relief work, etc) and in ensuring the survival of cooperative businesses. At the same time, women faced disproportionate burden triggered by domestic violence and unequal distribution of household care and responsibility.

In this issue, we hear the perspectives of Ms. Anahita Eslahpazir, CEO of the Rah-e-Roshd Cooperative Educational Complex (RCEC), Iran. We highlight the status of women cooperators in Myanmar through an opinion piece shared by the Central Cooperative Society Limited (CCS). We also bring you updates on how we and our members celebrated the IWD21.

In Conversation with Ms. Anahita Eslahpazir, CEO, RCEC



- 1. The education sector is considered to be women-friendly sector. How has your journey been as a women CEO of a cooperative educational institution?**

Around 35 years ago, a few women came together to start a kindergarten for their children. It was in the middle of a war between Iran and Iraq and there were problems in the country. Education was important, but for children in the kindergarten age it was not a priority for the family. These women wanted to start a kindergarten and that is how Rah-e-Roshd was set up. Slowly, it created a good reputation, and many families came forward to admit their children. After five years, the parents requested to convert it into a school as they liked the culture. At that point, we did not have enough funds and that is when we thought that becoming cooperative is a solution. The idea was that this way, we could get members from the families of the students and the teachers. The subscription amount could be used to build the school and that happened! We built the middle school and the high school as well. At first, it was only for girls, after 10 years, we built a primary, middle, and high school for boys too.

I came to Rah-e-Roshd about 20 years ago and started my journey as a Mathematics teacher. Back then, I neither had any knowledge of cooperatives nor the experience of working with a cooperative school. As I joined Rah-e-Roshd, I found it to be a little different. After a few months of working, I got to know that the teachers are the members and shareholders of this cooperative, which was quite interesting to me! After a while, I too joined as a member of the cooperative. Now, we have around 2,000 students enrolled and 500 colleagues, out of which, 250 are members. Most of our members are also the employees of the cooperative and most of them are women!

When a woman is smart and begins a business, nobody cares. But when she becomes successful, has good cash flow and reputation, others too become interested in joining. They think as a woman, you cannot manage everything alone and on the pretext of helping, they want to handle everything. We also faced such situations, but we stood up to save our positions. In all these years, the board members and the CEOs of the cooperative have been women. However, we also had many supportive men in our cooperative who believed in us. We had many ups and downs but eventually, they agreed that women can manage and handle everything about education and schools better than men.

After 10 years of teaching at the high school and performing other roles, I became the CEO in 2010. When you have a change in position, you have to face many challenges irrespective of being a man or a woman; but for women, it is more challenging. I faced many challenges too. When I first accepted to the CEO position, I was expecting my first child after a wait of 15 years. So, everything came at the same time for me. There were a few other members who wanted to take the CEO position and they had a lot of shares in the cooperative, so they pulled out the money from the cooperative and that was the biggest challenge for me. It was difficult for me to handle that situation with a high-risk pregnancy. Some men who were experts and managers in other companies suggested making the school smaller and downsizing the employees. I was not sure of it and through a discussion with my women colleagues, we had a better solution. They suggested that all employees could take a 50% cut in their salaries and the rest be given as shares to the cooperative. This way we did not only pass the situation but a lot of other teachers joined the cooperative too! The money that we had lost, we could get it back. It was not very easy, but it happened and that is what is most important.

- 2. We note that 80% of Rah-e-Roshd's shareholders, mostly its employees, are women. This is exemplary! Do you think having more women in leadership contributes differently to the growth of any organisation?**

I think that depends on how society looks at it and the mission of the cooperative. Many women think that we should have extra benefits, but women or men, it does not matter for a leader, gender is not the main thing.

What is more important for a leader is that the cooperative should create more jobs, it should be more transparent and democratic. Both men and women leaders should have this point of view. Generally, I think women are more responsible for these values.

3. How can a cooperative educational institution help reduce gender inequality and empower women?

I cannot say how the education sector can empower women, but I can tell you that cooperatives can. In many societies, women generally do not have the interest or the money to start a business. Cooperatives make it possible for women to get together and put a small amount of money to start a business and support each other.

The education sector is women-friendly because children are more attached to mothers, so they find it easy to adjust with women teachers. Therefore, this sector empowers more women.

In our school and everything that we teach, there is nothing that points out the difference between a man and a woman. So, when you do not mention that difference, that is enough for not creating a point of view on gender difference. But as a woman running a boys' school, I saw that at first some of them were very surprised seeing a woman as the head of the organisation, who has authority and is respected by everyone. But they saw a new figure of management which is good for the boys to note. This is the only difference from other schools.

Working together, sharing knowledge, respecting each other, and teamwork create the meaning of equality and gender balance for all the people and students.

4. Why is gender balance and having a more diverse workforce in cooperatives important, especially in the senior management/ leadership?

I think the world and nature are better with a balance. So, having a gender balance will help. If we say that women should do everything, I do not think that the world can work like this anymore. The balance is beneficial to all.

5. In your opinion as a woman coop leader, how can coops make sure that the governance practices are inclusive and welcoming to all?

We cannot be sure but we can make them inclusive and welcoming. Women should be patient and work for it, then we can build something for ourselves. If we just say that everything should be the way we want, nowhere in the world is this possible. We as women must build it for ourselves.

Only cooperatives making efforts to be more inclusive is not the way, women must want to be in governance positions too. They should be educated during school, university, and in their families that they believe they can do it. I think the kind of values that we get through our upbringing and education play an important role in moulding women as confident beings and think that they can be leaders too.

6. Being a women leader what were some of the challenges that you faced during COVID-19 and what was your strategy to overcome those?

I think the whole world faced challenges due to the pandemic.

At Rah-e-Roshd, we believed in doing our best. It did not matter that how many days the pandemic will take or how hard we will have to work, nothing mattered but the students. It came from being a woman, a mother, being caring towards children. This was a major difference between us and other schools in that we thought we should take care of students in any possible way. Sometimes we went to their houses virtually, sometimes we sent nurses or teachers to take care of children at their homes. We kind of become part of their families and I think if we were not women, they would not have trusted us this much and we would not have cared that much.

We had a challenging situation with the salaries of employees. We tried to make sure that they got the support and their salaries from the government. We were one of the first organisations to sense that the pandemic will last long. So, we went ahead to support our employees and somehow, could do this. We did not just say that we don't need you anymore, but we supported each other in many ways. We even supported society as we made some clothes and disinfectants for the hospitals. Many women joined us in the response work.

Most of the times, Rah-e-Roshd has been the mother of the others, we have always been helping society and the people.

7. Women have been at the forefront in fighting COVID-19, going forward how do you foresee achieving a better future for your coop?

I think with the pandemic, it is very hard for the world to come back to normal. But for our cooperative, it is getting better. We did a good job this time; we now have students from other schools who want to join our school. Things are better because we did not think about the money and time that we spent, we only concentrated on the students and their education. Parents saw us, everything was at their homes, they could see the classrooms without walls and knew what was happening. So, I think we will have a better future.

We have a virtual learning management system and we created groups of 10 to 15 students as one virtual classroom. All cameras remain on throughout the classes, we even have exercise and sports classes virtually. I can say that the discipline is more than a physical school setting.

In her concluding remarks, Ms. Anahita said "In my opinion, when we divide the world as women and men or people with certain likes or dislikes, we are dividing everything and this way, the community cannot make good relationships with each other. The world is a combination of all things, there should be a good balance. The purpose should be 'being with each other and not 'being divided'."

[Opinion Piece: Status of Women in Cooperatives in Myanmar](#)

The Statement on Cooperative Identity states that a cooperative is an "autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common social and economic objective". Cooperatives are inclusive and open to all without gender, social, racial, political, or religious discrimination.

Until 2019, around 39,452 primary level cooperatives have been formed in Myanmar with 4,227,418 members, out of which 42% are women members. It shows that women' interest and participation in cooperatives is nearly equal to men. However, as compared to the total women population in

Myanmar, which was 27,887,438 in 2019, only 6.4% of women are in the cooperative sector. Therefore, there is a need to encourage women membership in cooperatives.

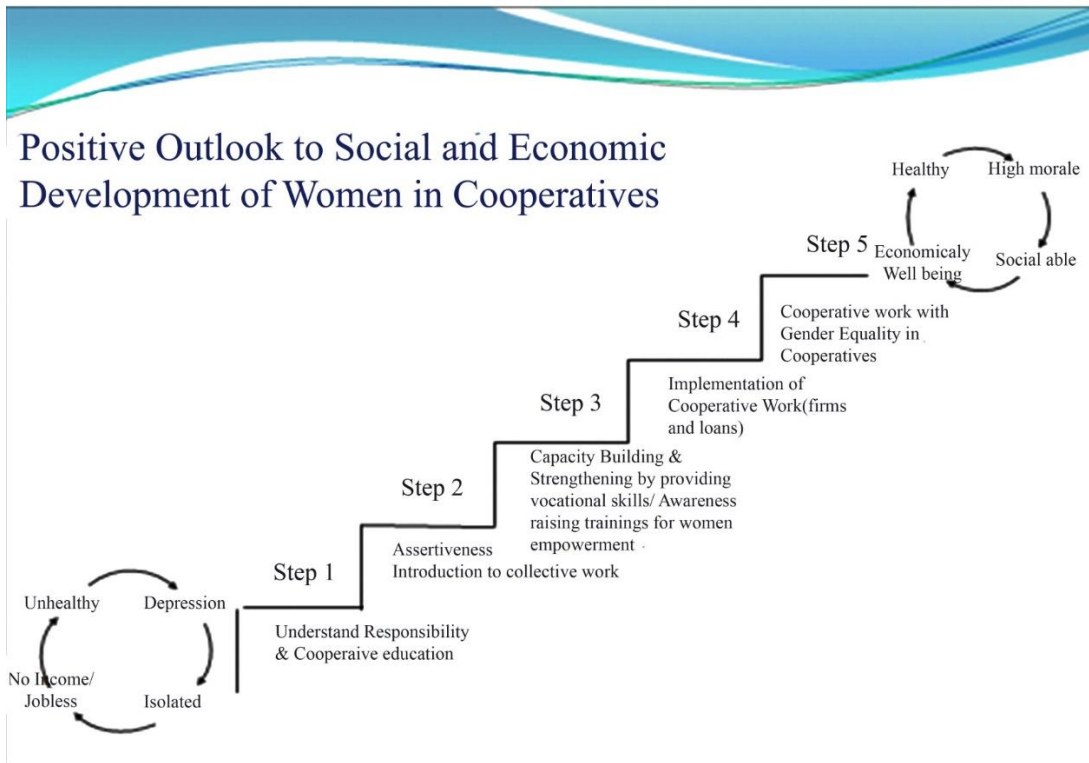
Women in cooperatives and women-only cooperatives realize that cooperatives offer opportunities to enhance family income and positively impact socio-economic development. Women in Myanmar do not wish to invest their time only in household chores anymore but actively participate in cooperatives as well.

Women are the heart and soul of a family, managing the family affairs with limited resources comes naturally to them. They are trained as managers through family management. Cooperatives are initiated collectively and with their good managerial skills, women find it easy to adjust and work with fellow people in cooperatives. Being an expert in family management, women find cooperatives suitable for them and can best utilize their abilities in the cooperative movement.

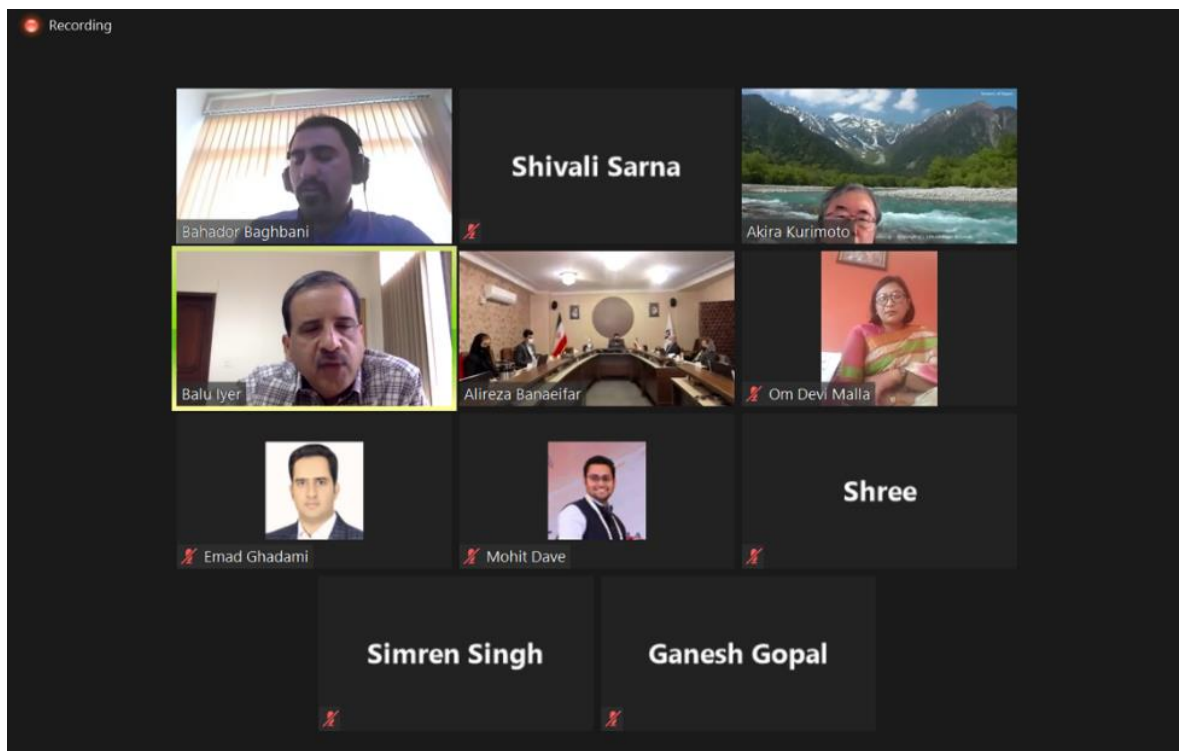
Setting up a private enterprise requires large investments and generally women do not have that much money. Cooperatives are based on the spirit of cooperation with individual share value, voluntary and open membership. It can be a viable option as multiple women can pool in a small amount of money and start a cooperative. Cooperatives are owned by all their members and can improve their socio-economic status as an added advantage.

Today, women in Myanmar are much more empowered and active in social, political, and economic fields. The concept of gender equality is familiar among people and is positively improving. Women are actively involved in cooperative movement too. Strengthening women membership and promoting women participation in cooperatives are essential for the development of the cooperative movement in the country. Government support and encouragement is vital and needed more. Existing cooperatives are required to make effective efforts towards sustainability and increase women membership and involvement in cooperatives.

To improve the socio-economic development of women in the cooperative movement in Myanmar, the following comprehensive approach is being used and will be replicated as a best practice.



Consultation on Cooperative Identity with Iran



In 2021, the ICA-AP regional office is holding a series of consultations with its members in the region to reflect on how the Statement on Cooperative Identity (SCI) guides their day-to-day operations. The second consultation was held online on 7th March with members in Iran. It was useful to understand

the extent to which the members had put the cooperative principles into practice and what progress, or the lack thereof had been achieved.

Ms. Om Devi Malla, ICA Global Board member and member of the World Cooperative Congress Advisory Committee and Prof. Akira Kurimoto, member of the ICA Principles Committee and Chair of ICA-AP Research Committee were present in the consultation to advise and guide the participants during the discussions. They discussed how SCI is used to evaluate cooperatives, how it sets cooperatives apart from other membership and value-based business enterprises, how it fosters member interest and responsibilities, how it enhances the effective 'cooperativeness' of their organisations, and how it helps relationships with government and stakeholders.

Central Union of Rural Production Cooperatives of Iran (CURPC) said that members of its cooperatives are elected voluntarily and without any discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, religion, or politics. All members have equal voting rights, and the same members choose representatives from among themselves to manage the cooperative and enjoy the economic benefits of the cooperatives in proportion to their paid-up capital. Secondly, under the subdivisions of the CURPC, the independence of each cooperative over other cooperatives, the government, and investors is fully respected. By cooperating, they strengthen the interests of their members and the cooperative movement and contribute to the sustainable development of communities.

They also highlighted that through continuous training and internship of members, they are ready to face new challenges within the cooperative movement. The equitable distribution of power and economic participation of all members with different financial resources in a democratic way will be very attractive to young people and consequently, will create new opportunities for the cooperatives. They felt that cooperatives are the link between the government and the stakeholders and operate quite efficiently given their democratic and independent identity.



Iran Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC) talked about establishing an association to supervise the elections of subsidiary cooperatives. ICC has played an active and constructive role in supporting the movement in facing natural, environmental, health, and social crises while adhering to the seventh principle of cooperatives, namely Concern for Community. In 2019, ICC facilitated the collection of non-cash and cash donations and assistance to cooperatives affected by the floods in different parts of Iran.

Some of the challenges that ICC faces include –

- i. Lack of a public monitoring mechanism to assess the adherence of Iranian cooperatives to all the principles and values of cooperatives.
- ii. Lack of institutionalized culture of cooperatives and collective work in the country
- iii. Lack of focus on promoting and teaching cooperative principles and values
- iv. Due to their structure, the indirect dependence of some cooperatives on the government and being influenced by government policies.
- v. Lack of serious determination and volition of the country's executive bodies to support, strengthen, and develop the cooperative sector.
- vi. Lack of appropriate advertising mechanism in the cooperative sector to promote the cooperative identity statement.
- vii. Lack of bilateral interaction between scientific-academic centres and economic activists in the Iranian cooperative sector.

The cooperative business model was acclaimed by ICC for its distinctive features to make creative businesses that address the needs of the economy by collecting micro-capital and various specialities. Therefore, the SCI, adherence to it, and the structure of cooperatives can be a competitive advantage for the emergence of creativity and attracting young people to the cooperative movement.

The members felt that there was a need to develop cooperation with government agencies in Iran to transfer ownership and management of government enterprises to cooperatives and to use the resources and facilities of other agencies to improve the activities of cooperatives. Appropriate legislation based on adherence to the cooperative identity and proper supervision of the parliament on the full implementation of laws by the executive bodies of the cooperative sector was also discussed.

SCI has enabled staff at Rah-e-Roshd Cooperative Educational Complex (RCEC) to deal with students and their parents transparently and democratically. It preserves their identity and values to respond to their audience. SCI is very compatible with RCEC's own identity and does not pose any challenge to their educational cooperative. One of the distinguishing features of RCEC is the cooperative nature of its education complex, which is also its competitive advantage over other organisations. They believe that the usefulness of a coop business must be examined first and then its profitability. Worker cooperatives are known to create more sustainable employment for members and are also transparent in the areas of taxation and insurance. This is a double competitive advantage that worker coops in the field of human resources have over other kinds of enterprises.

A challenge that emerged was the lack of criteria to evaluate different cooperatives in the true sense from organisations that bear only the name of cooperatives. The members felt that there was a need for indicators that can measure and evaluate the cooperative principles. As a rule, coop indicators and measurements should be different from private companies and institutions.



The challenge for Farda coop was to make the best use of new technologies to increase productivity and improve production conditions while observing health issues and food standards. They believe cooperatives can be more effective than the Government in increasing productivity, reducing costs, and increasing profits. The movement of the public sector towards cooperatives can help achieve such a goal, leading to the growth of GDP, national income, and per capita income.

Pishgaman Cooperative Union (PCU) has entered various fields with the strength, effort, faith, and perseverance of the residents of desert areas. It is relying on the trust of over 50,000 shareholders and trying to keep this trust as a perpetual capital by identifying the best opportunities for investment and provision of distinguished and high-quality services, PCU managed to continue its activities in unstable economic conditions and expanded its services. The challenges are in the fields of legislation and human resources. PCU has launched the first accelerator in Yazd province to support startups, thereby taking a step to attract young people and explore new opportunities.

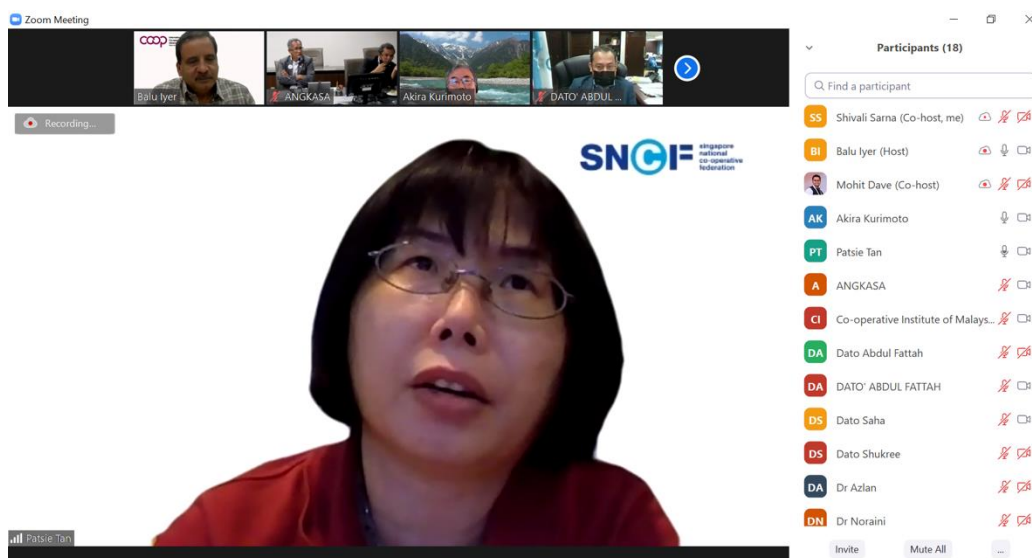
The consultation was very useful to get a perspective on the application of the SCI, the challenges seen in practice, and the directions going forward. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need for models that strengthen the real economy and has shown the relevance of the cooperative model. Most cooperatives in Iran face strong competitive conditions and tend to have successful investments using their cooperative identity. Cooperative, despite some economic obstacles, are trying to promote and expand their communities and integrate people with different culture, religion, and political opinions. One of the main concerns of the Government is civil welfare and providing high - quality services to the people, and cooperatives are accounting for the needs of members and stakeholders to bring about sustainable development.

Consultation on Cooperative Identity with ASEAN Cooperative Organisation



The third consultation on the Statement of Cooperative Identity (SCI) was held online on 25th March with members of the ASEAN Cooperative Organisation (ACO) to discuss the extent to which they had put the cooperative principles into practice and what progress, or the lack thereof had been achieved as a result.

Prof. Akira Kurimoto, member of the ICA Principles Committee and Chair of ICA-AP Research Committee joined the consultation to advise and guide the participants during the discussions. In his opening remarks, he highlighted how SCI can be used to evaluate cooperatives, how it sets cooperatives apart from other membership and value-based business enterprises, how it fosters member interest and responsibilities, how it enhances the effective ‘cooperativeness’ of their organisations, and how it helps build relationships with government and stakeholders.



In Singapore, not many in the Government are aware of cooperatives. The Government is also the regulator and hence the Singapore National Cooperative Federation (SNCF) works closely with the Government to advocate better regulation. SNCF has come up with various initiatives such as CREATON – a business competition that provides a platform for local enterprising youth to collectively come up with innovative solutions addressing socio-economic challenges facing Singapore. Community, energy conservation, education, and cooperative platforms have recently gained traction in the country.

In Malaysia, ANGKASA as the apex organisation has not engaged much in the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) environment/dialogue. They had engaged with social enterprises when they were defined as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Now, any organisation can be classified as a social enterprise as per the Malaysian Global Innovation & Creativity Centre (MaGIC). ANGKASA is trying to get cooperatives defined under MaGIC's classification to further promote cooperatives.

ANGKASA sees a role for itself to promote cooperatives as the best SSE organisation (SSEO) and bringing them in to implement SDGs. The Malaysian government, both at the national and local level, is increasing support to other SSEOs by enabling their formation (e.g., ease of registration and number of persons required to set up other SSEOs) and making it easy to raise resources (from the government and private sector). Cooperatives, therefore, need to ensure they are provided with a level playing field (to raise resources and form new age cooperatives) and also reach out to include others in their fold.



Cooperative Institute of Malaysia (CIM) as a training institution tailors the training programs to suit the government's needs. The government of Malaysia is trying to promote cooperatives and see coops as tools for socio-economic development. CIM also engages with ministries for agriculture, youth, and women to spread awareness about cooperatives. It aims for continuity in coop education from schools to universities and later in the professional work environment.

The school cooperatives play an important role in forming young entrepreneurs in Malaysia. By allowing schools to involve in business and entrepreneurial activities, members in Malaysia hoped that this will strengthen the economy and the local community, enabling it to strive for a better society. They strongly believe that developing human capital is one of the key elements of the success of the cooperative movement. An innovative Malaysian school was also featured in a documentary by

aroundtheworld.coop, that looked at how young people are taught about cooperative principles from an early age.

The consultation concluded with a discussion around the contribution of cooperatives to the GDP of a country. It is very difficult to determine how to support or aid cooperative development without reliable data on the size and impact of cooperatives. ACO Members stressed that clear, concise, and reputable data on the number of cooperatives regionally and nationally like their number of members/clients, turnover, employees, and assets did not exist. The members agreed that a comprehensive database on cooperatives needs to comply and that data should be considered a start, not the definitive count.

The consultation was very useful to get a perspective on the application of the SCI, the challenges seen in practice, and the directions going forward. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the need for models that strengthen the real economy and has shown the relevance of the cooperative model.

ICA-AP Updates

Asia Pacific Regional Forum on Cooperative Housing



ICA Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) in collaboration with Cooperative Housing International (CHI) held a Regional Forum on Cooperative Housing on 9th March 2021.

This online networking and information exchange was to introduce the participants to the work of CHI and ICA-AP, hear from cooperatives working in the area of housing and increase interest in the work of ICA. The forum featured cooperative housing organisations from Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the Philippines. It was attended by more than 70 participants from across the world.

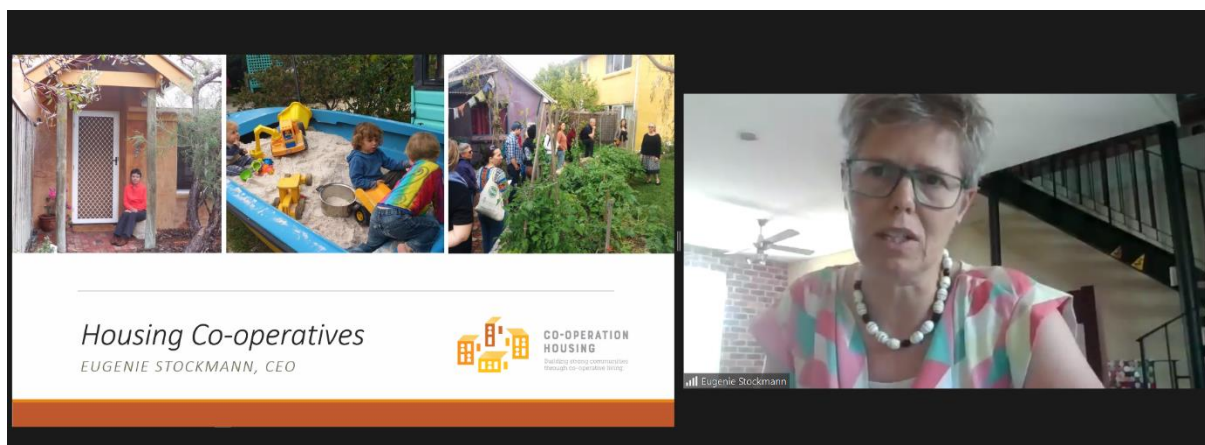


Ms. Julie LaPalme, Secretary-General, CHI introduced CHI and its work to the participants. It is one of the eight sectoral organisations of the ICA representing the housing sector with 30 members from

around the world. It promotes good practices on cooperative housing and facilitates networking, partnerships, education and training, and peer-to-peer exchanges. Explaining cooperative housing, Ms. LaPalme said that each model can be different like rental homes or owner-occupied, but they have the community as a common focus. They are designed to meet the economic, social, and cultural needs of their members. She added that CHI is a part of CoHabitat Network, which is a collaborative platform for cooperative housing organisations from around the world to have access to peer exchanges, learning and advocacy discussions, and solidarity fund. Its digital tool 'CoHabitat.io' is a Wikipedia for community-led housing with an open-source license and can be easily accessed by everyone from any part of the world.

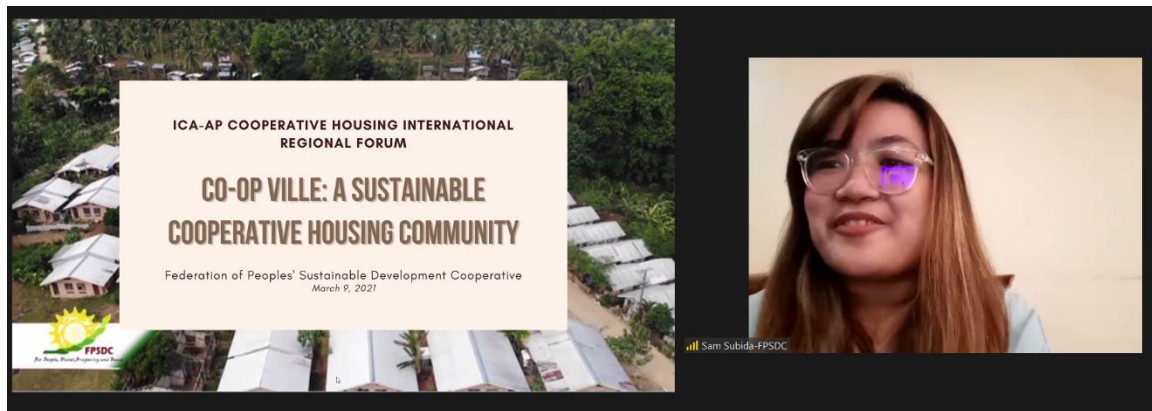
Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, Regional Director, ICA Asia-Pacific, in his address, thanked CHI for exploring the Asia and Pacific region to expand cooperative housing. He gave an overview of the ICA-AP Regional office and said the region has 109 member organisations from 31 countries which are large federations or national apexes representing cooperatives and sectors in the region. The region's vast geography spreads from the Middle East to the Pacific region with most members concentrated in South and South East Asia. Given the diversity of the countries and sectors, ICA-AP works with 10 thematic and sectoral committees - agriculture, consumer, credit and banking, education, forestry, trade and business, research, youth, human resources development, and gender committees. He said, given the growing interest in the region about housing cooperatives, it is an opportunity to come together and address the needs of the region.

Ms. Errum Sharif Bhajji from Karachi Cooperative Housing Societies Union (KCHS Union), Pakistan shared a brief history of the cooperative movement in Pakistan which began in 1912 before the Indian-Pakistan partition. There were 46 cooperative housing societies in 1947 and KCHS Union was established in 1949, while the commercial business was initiated in 1970. KCHS Union is the apex body of housing cooperatives and provides medical, educational, sports and employment facilities for the lower-income strata. Until 2019, KCHS Union had 8,372 housing coops with 9.6 million members in 7.5 million houses. She presented the example of the Taiser Town Project which is being established on 750 Acre land purchased from the government. The project comprises residential area, commercial area, public utility infrastructure, and educational spaces targets 54,000 people. She also raised concerns over the land mafia issues in Pakistan posing challenges for the cooperative housing sector.



Ms. Eugenie Stockmann from Cooperation Housing, Australia showed a short video on Cooperation Housing in Western Australia which presented the views of their members. She said that as an umbrella organisation, they support their housing coops in financial management, asset management, tenancy management, and governance. They work in alliance with other coop housing organisations from across Australia, called the Australian Cooperative Housing Alliance (ACHA). ACHA conducted a

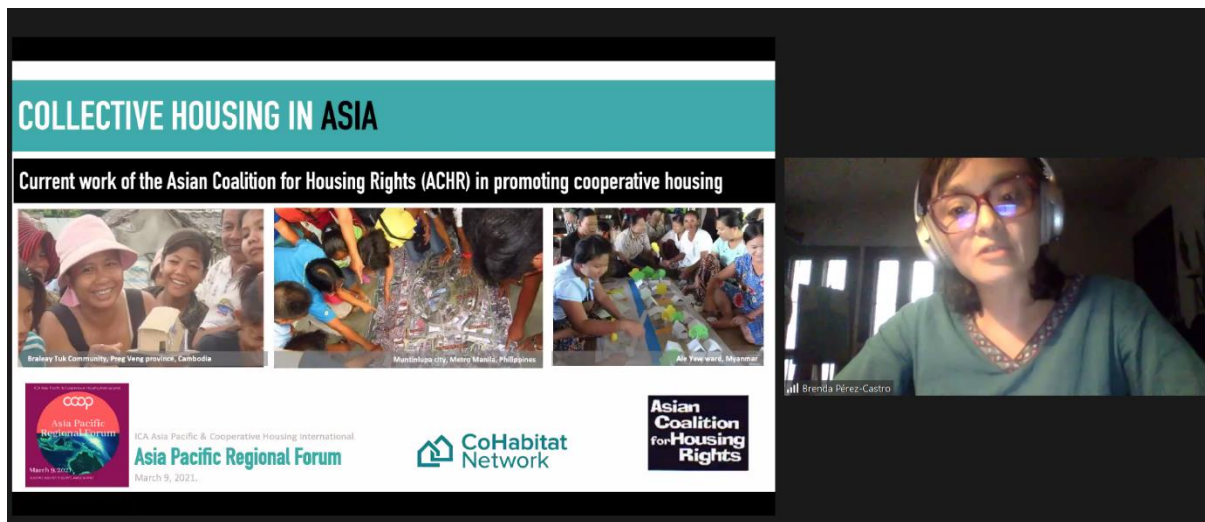
research project to study value in coop housing and it showed that coop housing results in cost savings and increasing social capital, overall health and wellbeing, and satisfaction of its residents. She believes that in the Australian context, the coop housing model is well placed to deliver community-led and affordable housing.



Ms. Sam Subida from Federation of Peoples' Sustainable Development Cooperative (FPSDC), Philippines introduced FPSDC as a secondary coop established in 1998 through the organisation of its 21 founding members. Presently, it has a membership of 170 cooperatives. FPSDC, as part of the global community, works for alternative structures and means for social justice and equity. It advocates sustainable development through 4P's – people, planet, prosperity, and peace. To deliver this, FPSDC offers services like socialised credit and investment (financial services) and institution building, development of a sustainable housing model, and distribution and marketing (non-financial services). Explaining the sustainable cooperative housing community model called Coop Ville, Ms. Subida said that it is a sustainable housing program that aims to build physical houses along with sustainable communities and addresses the 7th principle of cooperatives – concern for community. It is based in Southern Philippines on five-acre land and was initiated in 2012 as a result of the destruction caused by torrential rains and flooding in the region. Coop Ville was developed in two phases – infrastructure building and creating livelihood opportunities for the residents to help them overcome their losses. It has 176 housing units, 133 families and 600 residents. She also talked about the challenges FPSDC faced while developing Coop Ville like continuous efforts for community development, management of community with diverse backgrounds, and COVID-19 outbreak which put on hold various initiatives of the Coop Ville program.

Mr. Mohamad Ali Hassan from ANGKASA, Malaysia presented the cooperative housing model in Malaysia focusing on the present and future. He spoke about the issue of affordable housing for all which is a focus area for the Malaysian Government as well. The government's affordable housing scheme, Residensi Prihatin aims to provide adequate, comfortable, quality, and affordable housing to enhance the quality of life of the people. Malaysia had 14,668 cooperatives as of January 2020 but only 2.13% of these are housing cooperatives due unstable financial resources, high return on investment period, and dependence on consultants for technical management and monitoring of the projects. Sharing ANGKASA's perspective on housing needs, he said that ANGKASA envisions to increase housing cooperatives' contribution to the National GDP to RM15 billion by 2025. He said that like Coop Ville in the Philippines, Malaysia is developing a Coop City to be owned and managed by the cooperatives and shared examples of successful housing coops in Malaysia. He believes that shelter is a fundamental human need and with this perspective, affordable housing for all can be achieved and suggested having regional & global housing coop banks, financial & technical assistance, a special fund

for housing coops, joint ventures by advanced coop housing countries to develop such projects, and an Asia Pacific regional committee on cooperative housing.



Ms. Brenda Pérez-Castro from the Asian Coalition of Housing Rights (ACHR) spoke about the Asian Coalition of Housing Rights (ACHR). It is a network of 19 Asian countries comprising organised communities of urban poor, professionals, support groups, local and national governments to promote cooperative housing. ACHR promotes community-led housing initiatives with support from local and national networks as compared to other housing coop models which are concentrated in one region. This collective process resulting in a cooperative institutional framework has helped the communities of urban poor being recognised as cooperatives. She shared that the people's processes of developing cooperative housing, often initiated by the informal communities at a local level are entangled and complicated processes. Through the Asian Coalition for Community Action (ACCA) program, ACHR has built 146 housing projects in five years with support from 100 partner organisations. She said rehabilitation of communities is not the only solution but redeveloping the existing settlements and building collective communities is another way forward and 51% of ACHR's projects are based on this. Presently, ACHR is supporting the collective housing movement at the national level in 10 Asian countries. These countries are engaged in mapping and documenting the existing experiences, legal and policy research, webinars and e-workshops with collective housing communities, supporting pilot projects, and advocating collective housing. She concluded that ACHR has shared principles with cooperative housing like devising non-speculative solutions, promoting self-sufficiency among communities, radical participation, and thinking beyond housing for collective ways of living.

Ms. Jessica Soto from WeEffect, Philippines noted that there is a housing need in the Philippines and WeEffect follows a hybrid approach in organising slum dwellers into cooperatives. She said that WeEffect has organised 49 housing coops, out of which, 21 have their mother coops and 28 of these are slum dweller coops. They have partnered with Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) to streamline excessive paperwork and make it easy for the housing coops. They have organised a joint monitoring and evaluation committee for housing coops and forums with financial institutions to discuss housing for the poor. She said that they have resettled 280 families through this project. She also talked about the Cooperative Housing Township for which they are acquiring the 240-hectare estate, of which 66 hectares will be devoted for an economic zone. She said that at the moment 15,620 families are waiting for housing finance and the proposals are lying with the government which has a very limited national budget. There are blocks in the road to affordable housing for all and she is keen to collaborate and work on devising sustainable solutions.

Mr. Yuli Kusworo from Arkom, Indonesia introduced Arkom Indonesia, it is part of the ACHR since 2009 and is a community of architects focusing on the urban poor, homeless people, and post-disaster contexts. He presented a model of post-Tsunami collective housing in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Arkom chose to work with communities in coastal area because it is strategic to promote a community-led approach, massively impacted by Tsunami and other disasters, and is threatened by the government's new regulation for resettlement. The organisation works by involving the community in emergency response and considers them as survivors, not victims. He said that working collectively is the real trauma healing process for the survivors. Collectively working with the community, they find alternative solutions for the reconstruction of the disaster-affected areas. He shared that the project has generated interest among communities to rebuild and avoid relocation as offered by the government. The government has also accepted the model and approved its replication for 3,000 families under the centrally funded scheme, Central Sulawesi Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Project, co-funded by the World Bank.

The presentations were followed by a short Q&A session where the discussion focused on challenges in organising communities and in finding collective solutions. Ms. Soto noted that there are many similarities in the models presented in the forum; the biggest challenge is the gap between the communities and governments, and we are all trying to link government, private, and the people to work together as they are all interdependent.

Ms. LaPalme informed that the regional forum has been planned as a biannual event and the next event will be organised by the end of 2021. She thanked all the speakers and participants for attending the forum and hoped it had initiated a conversation.

[In Conversation with Ms. Savitri Singh, Former Program Director, ICA-AP](#)



Ms. Savitri Singh rejoins her parent organisation the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) on 1st April 2021. Ms. Savitri joined ICA-AP on deputation in 2002 and has worked with us continually for 18 years! During this time, she worked in the areas of gender, communication, and policy. She helped develop the Women Committee and initiated data collection, produced Resource Guide on Entrepreneurship and Gender Equality, managed the Cooperative Forum during the Regional Assemblies, represented the region at the Policy Forum on Development and worked on the #coops4dev project, and coordinated one of the ICA-MAFF, Government of Japan training course.

We took the opportunity to speak with her on her experience at ICA-AP and her view on having gender balance in cooperatives.

1. When did you start your journey with ICA-AP?

I joined ICA-AP in 2002 as a Gender Advisor for the women empowerment and gender mainstreaming projects. I was deputed by the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI). My journey had been interesting, and I have worked diligently to strengthen the women cooperators in the Asia and Pacific region through various programs of ICA-AP.

Since I was working with women cooperators at NCUI and had attended several training programs, it did not take much time for me to get familiarised with ICA-AP's work on gender.

2. Tell us about some of the assignments that you enjoyed working on.

Over these 18 years, I have worked on a range of projects on Gender, HIV AIDS, Cooperative Ministers' Conference, Cooperative Registrar's Forum, ICA-EU Partnership on people-centred Businesses (#coops4dev), and some administrative work as well.

The very first assignment that I undertook was **restructuring the gender division** of the ICA-AP office. We published a tailor-made training manual for women in cooperatives in six Indian languages, in collaboration with the ILO, India. Based on the manual, we initiated capacity building programs for women cooperators. These programs started at a regional level and we covered all the member countries through seven training programs. Later, we initiated a networking program for women cooperators who showed interest in the cooperative business. I was able to spread ICA-AP projects beyond certain countries and reached out to countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Laos, Iran, Mongolia, and Myanmar. I also coordinated the **TAGAYTAY+10 and TAGATAY+20 Regional Conferences on the Status of Women** in 2006 and 2016, respectively.

I presented the situation of cooperatives in the Asia and Pacific region on HIV AIDS in a seminar organised by the ICA Global in Washington D.C. in 2004. Post that, we further developed the project with support and funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and organised the first workshop in 2006 on **'Creating Awareness for HIV AIDS'** for the cooperative members in India. Later, we collaborated with National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India; Department for International Development (DFID); United Nations Development Program (UNDP); a local NGO, Resource Centre for Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS (RCSHA); NCUI; and National Council for Cooperative Training (NCCT). We covered 12 states with three programs targeting leaders, managers, stakeholders, and primary cooperative members in each state. The biggest achievement of this project was that the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives issued a directive to integrate HIV AIDS training with the training of the cooperatives. NCCT also included HIV AIDS awareness in their existing training curriculum for cooperatives. Later, the program was expanded to other countries as well.

Collecting Sex-Disaggregated Data in cooperatives was one of the innovative projects that I initiated in 2005. While working on gender-related projects, I realised that there were hardly any women in the mainstream, and I became curious to know how many women are a part of

the cooperatives. I proposed this idea to the then Regional Director, it was approved, and was supported by ICA Domus trust. I actively participated in each activity from designing the proforma to sending it out and following up with all member organisations. It was a humongous task as members had not maintained women-specific data and it took a lot of time for us to convince and guide them to get the relevant data. The report was published in 2006 and for the first time, we got to know that women participation in the cooperative movement of Asia and Pacific was around 30% and women leadership around 10%.

I was made the in-charge to organise the **Regional Cooperative Ministers' Conference** in 2012 and I coordinated a Critical Study on Cooperative Law in the member countries to be presented at the 9th conference. While doing this, I realised that Cooperative Registrars are the key people whom we should address, so, we organised the first **Regional Cooperative Registrar's Conference** in Kuala Lumpur in 2013.

In 2013, I started representing the Asia and Pacific region in the **Policy for Development (PFD) Forums** to prepare for the funding proposal to European Commission. I was the Asia and Pacific representative in the proposal development team along with three regional Directors from the Americas, Europe, and Africa regions. That was a very proud moment for me. The **#coops4dev project** was sanctioned in 2016, and I undertook the policy segment of this project, where I mobilised members and facilitated their discussions with European Union Delegations (EUDs). We established good relations with EUDs in India, Kyrgyzstan, and Nepal.

In 2014, we started a **National Conference for Cooperatives Development** to advocate for policies and enabling environment for cooperatives in the countries where the cooperative movement was not developed like in Laos, Fiji, and Vanuatu.

Very recently, I focused on the SDG 13: **Climate Action** and we organised a Capacity Building Program on the theme "Save the Environment to Sustain Future Generations" in 2019. The biggest achievement of this program was that the Asian Confederation of Credit Unions (ACCU) made a policy change. Adding the 6th C of Credit – Climate Compliance in loan assessments for their members was a foresighted decision by ACCU.

3. In your opinion, how has the environment for cooperatives changed in Asia and Pacific over the last two decades?

I think not much has changed in terms of laws and policies of cooperatives, but we have started seeing more women representation across all levels and in national and international forums. ICA Global also has had two women presidents in the recent past and a few of our member organisations have women CEOs.

Our work towards the inclusion of youth has also paid off and now I see many young people joining our programs, there is a lot of interest in platform cooperatives among the youth.

4. Why is gender balance and having a more diverse workforce in cooperatives important, especially in senior management/ leadership?

I believe that having a diverse workforce is important and I say this based on my experience as a working woman. In NCUI, I used to head the Women Empowerment Division and Women

in Cooperative Education Division. I have travelled the length and breadth of the country and saw that women are a rare sight. The ratio in Tribal Co-operative Marketing Federation of India (TRIFED) was seven women managers among 300 men managers. In NCUI, there were three women directors in a 100+ employee organisation, and in ICA-AP, I was the only woman Director. Through my experience, I can say that a diverse workforce is crucial for cooperatives because women's involvement and contribution in cooperatives is tremendous, but they are not recognised. Most of the food production work is undertaken by women but they are not part of cooperatives, as a result, women are deprived of the benefit like credit, skill development, etc. These experiences have firmed up my belief that gender balance is crucial for taking cooperative institution forward. I also advocate for youth involvement in cooperatives, as, if we say women that means women of all ages. Women should not be part of only the senior management but across all levels.

Presently, women are only at the primary level, they are excluded from the mainstream, their capabilities are not fully utilised, and they are denied opportunities. Women are equally capable and if they are denied, it means the cooperative institutions are deprived of a different set of skills and ideas. It is a universal phenomenon that women are scarcely present in leadership positions. If women can contribute at the bottom level, why can they not get the opportunity to climb the ladder and be at the top? That is why gender balance is very important and it will automatically bring diversity in decision making and work culture, especially at the management and leadership levels.

5. Would you like to share with us your plans about how you would take the cooperative movement forward?

I think we should start quantifying the contribution of cooperatives to the nations GDP and motivate our member cooperatives in the Asia and Pacific region to conduct this study. This study is very important for cooperatives to show their work and approach the governments for their due recognition. Cooperatives work a lot but what they lack in consolidating their work, documenting it for the government and do not get recognised as active contributors to the economy. This is one of my plans.

I would also like to keep our advocacy and lobbying in momentum to keep the interest of all stakeholders intact.

We wish Savitri the very best in the next chapter of her professional career!



The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) celebrated IWD21 with a month-long campaign **#coops4women** on social media led by the ICA Gender Equality Committee (GEC) to showcase the important role of cooperatives regarding women in leadership for a just recovery.

ICA GEC released a short **publication** showcasing the **regional best practices** around the theme, "Women in leadership and COVID-19". The publication featured the case of Working Women's Forum (India) (WWF) – Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW) and The Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union (JCCU) from the Asia and Pacific region. The publication can be accessed [here](#).

On 8th March, ICA GEC shared a Declaration highlighting the important role played by women on the frontline in responding to the COVID19 pandemic. The GEC called upon the cooperators to work together and double the efforts to shape a strong, just, and equitable society in the post-COVID19 world. The declaration can be read [here](#).

On 18th March 2021, the ICA Gender Equality Committee (GEC), in collaboration with the [ICA-EU Partnership \(#coops4dev\)](#), organised a webinar on 'Women in Leadership for a Just Recovery'. The webinar was presided by Ms. Maria Eugenia Perez Zea (ICE GEC President). In her opening address, she noted that the webinar was one of the first activities of the ICA GEC in 2021 to show the various activities undertaken by women in cooperatives around the world. She added that having women in leadership positions is important for transitioning to a fair and just recovery post COVID-19. Women were the first in line to get affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as health care workers, caregivers, and community organisers. The pandemic has thrown a spotlight on women who at times have to face disproportionate burdens.



Through the webinar, women cooperative leaders from different parts of the world showcased various examples and best practices adopted by them to face the pandemic. The webinar was attended by over 180 participants from across the world. The first session, ‘Views and Updates by GEC Executive Committee members from the four ICA regions’, had Ms. Perez Zea; Ms. Esther N. Gicheru (GEC Executive Committee member and Chair of the Gender and Research Committee of ICA Africa); Ms. Xiomara Nunez de Cespedes (GEC Executive Committee member, Vice-Chair of the ICA GEC and Chair of the regional ICA GEC for the Americas); Dr. Nandini Azad (GEC Executive Committee member and Chair of the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women); and Ms. Stefania Marcone (GEC Executive Committee member, Vice-President of Cooperatives Europe and Chair of Gender Equality Working Group at Cooperatives Europe) as the key speakers.

Ms. Perez Zea presented an overview of Coomeva, a cooperative group from Columbia, comprising of 17 cooperatives that provide a vast range of services including, wellbeing, financial health, housing, and entrepreneurship development. Coomeva has developed a gender equality and equity policy that applies uniformly to all 17 cooperatives. This policy is among the many initiatives undertaken by Coomeva for women, such as education and training, recognition of women entrepreneurs through awards, etc.

Ms. Gicheru presented the best examples of women cooperators in leadership from Africa from both mixed and all-women cooperatives, namely Awach SACCOS Ltd. (Ethiopia), Elgon Community Health Cooperative (Uganda), Moroccan Women’s Sewing Cooperative (Morocco), Ahikhomeni Va Vhassati Cooperative (Mozambique), and KUSSCO Cooperative (Kenya). The examples showed the initiatives and the contribution of women cooperators in fighting the pandemic. This included the production of masks by women cooperators from Morocco and the promotion of the Women Leadership Network by KUSSCO Cooperative in Kenya.

Ms. Cespedes presented the case of the Cooperative of Multiple Services of Nursing Professionals (COOPROENF, Dominican Republic) from the healthcare sector. It comprises of 18,000 medical professionals, 98% of whom are women. The women medical professionals were at the frontline battling the pandemic by not only caring for the patients but also ensuring that the members of the cooperative are supported and cared for. One of their initiatives was to develop a financial

contingency plan that allowed members to take loans or advance salaries/payments during the lockdown and restricted cash flow.



Dr. Azad shared an overview of the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women and activities undertaken by the Committee during the pandemic. These included, 1) a virtual regional webinar to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on women in cooperatives in Asia and Pacific, and 2) the training of trainers' program on Digital Financial Inclusion of Women Cooperators at the grassroots in India, organised in partnership with the Working Women's Forum (WWF), Indian Co-operative Network for Women (ICNW) and with the support of Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union (JCCU). Nandini added that for a just recovery post COVID-19, there is a need to address the patriarchal mindset in cooperatives, promote women-based cooperatives, and promote women's voice and participation in decision-making at all levels of cooperatives.

Ms. Marcone, who is also the former President of the ICA GEC, provided an overview of the work pursued by the Gender Equality Working Group at Cooperatives Europe, including the public advocacy on gender with the European Union representatives. She presented examples of women-led cooperatives in Europe such as the Rika Community Cooperative (Italy), FAI Cooperative (Italy), and school cooperatives (Spain) which have undertaken community service during the pandemic and are helping those in need, especially the elderly.

In the second session, 'Perspectives on Empowering Women through the Implementation of Policies and Programs', Ms. Simel Esim (Head Cooperatives Unit, International Labour Organisation), Ms. Camilla Lundberg Ney (Advocacy Coordinator, We Effect), Dr. Judith Hermanson (Director, International Cooperative Research Group), and Ms. Wenyan Yang (Chief of Global Dialogue for Development Branch in the Division for Inclusive Social Development of UNDESA) were the key speakers.

Ms. Esim shared four priority areas identified by the ILO where gender equality needs to be promoted for a just recovery after the pandemic. These included, 1) Measures for occupational safety and health for essential/frontline workers in the health sector 2) Protection of the informal economy workers 3) Protection of caregivers/workers 4) Measures to address gender-based violence. She said that there

is an urgent need to implement policy and programs on gender equality and shared an example of the Violence and Harassment Convention passed by the ILO in 2019 which only four countries (Argentina, Fiji, Namibia, and Uruguay) have ratified to date.

Ms. Ney noted that the crisis accruing from the pandemic has to be addressed jointly for a just recovery. In her response to the question on challenges that women face in leadership, she noted that women in leadership can often be a lonely experience as women face both open and silent resistance.

Dr. Hermanson noted that cooperatives are leading the way to change the picture of women in leadership roles. She said that women leaders face complicated challenges and being on the decision-making table is not enough. It is also important that they are heard.

Ms. Yang opined that cooperatives are promoting women in leadership positions and allowing them to be part of decision-making processes. Sharing her views on the challenges faced by women leaders, she said that it varies from culture to culture and depends on their social-cultural identity. Therefore, gender equality must be addressed not just at an institutional level but also at the cultural level.

The webinar showcased many examples from all ICA regions on the work done by cooperatives and women cooperators before and during the pandemic. The speakers advocated for a stronger role and visibility of women leaders in the cooperative movement. They also emphasised the need for gender-disaggregated data in cooperatives for future policymaking.

Ms. Perez Zea concluded the webinar by thanking all the speakers for presenting their perspective and insightful examples of women's contribution to the cooperative movement and towards a fair and just recovery post COVID-19. She congratulated all for their work during the difficult times caused by the pandemic.

Member Updates

How our Members Celebrated IWD21

ICA Asia and Pacific office had announced an open call to members to share how they celebrated IWD21 with the theme 'Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world'.

Some of our members shared the activities undertaken by them to celebrate IWD21.

#	Member Organisation	Country	Activities Undertaken
	Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Unions (ACCU)	Thailand	ACCU organised a webinar on "Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 World" to uphold women's achievements, recognize challenges, and focus greater attention on women's rights and gender equality in the credit union movement. The webinar was attended by 157 credit union leaders and employees from Australia, India, Indonesia, Korea, Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and United States. More details can be accessed here .

	Business Council of Cooperatives and Mutuals (BCCM)	Australia	BCCM participated in the global IWD21 social media campaign #ChooseToChallenge and called upon their members to challenge inequality, call out gender bias, question stereotypes, and foster inclusivity. They asked their members to share their #ChooseToChallenge images on social media as well. Watch the video here .
	Economic & Social Development Center of Palestine (ESDC)	Palestine	ESDC released a short film on a woman-led cooperative – Bezzaria Coop. Winner of the "World Cooperative of the year 2020 Global Development Award", these women in Palestine formed are empowering fellow women. Watch the film here .
	ICA-AP Committee on Women		Lok Sabha TV released a documentary on the inspiring journey of Dr. Nandini Azad, Chairperson of the ICA-AP Committee on Women and President of WWF-ICNW. Watch the video here .
	Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Ltd. (IFFCO)	India	IFFCO release a short video on “DaughtersOfSoil” appreciating the work done by women farmers. It also organised a training program for women farmers and cooperators at the Krishi Vigyan Bhawan in Bhilwara, Rajasthan.
	MASS-SPECC Coop Development Center (MASS-SPECC)	Philippines	Participating in the #coops4women social media campaign, MASS-SPEC tweeted “Despite the challenging times, women rise to be the image of hope and strength — not only in their families — but also in their communities. With the challenge, comes an opportunity to make things way better”.
	National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI)	India	Participating in the #coops4women campaign, Mr. Dileep Sanghani, NCUI President issued a message on IWD21 urging women-led coops to pursue with the government, a ‘Cooperative policy’ with an exclusive chapter on Gender equality and Women Participation in Decision Making. His complete message can be read here . NCUI also organised a conference with 100 women representatives of various cooperatives organisations on 8 th March in New Delhi, India. Addressing the women leaders, Mr. Sanghani underlined the importance assured his full support for their economic activities.
	Philippine Cooperative Center (PCC)	Philippines	PCC organised an online discussion forum on “Women in Cooperative During Pandemic” and invited women leaders from various cooperatives to share their insights on the situation and crucial contributions of women within the coop sector. The recording of the webinar can be accessed here .

NCUI Gets its New Chief Executive



Dr. Sudhir Mahajan, IAS (Retired) has replaced Mr. N. Satyanarayana as the new Chief Executive of the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI). Dr. Mahajan assumed the charge on 1st March 2021.

Dr. Mahajan, an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of 2005 Batch of AGMUT Cadre, retired as the Secretary, General Administration Department, Delhi Government. In this position (2002-2010), Dr. Mahajan aided, advised, and guided the Honorable Minister in various portfolios like Education, Cooperatives, Urban Development, Environment etc. and formed an important bridge between the Department and the Minister. In his illustrious career, Dr. Mahajan has held multiple responsibilities successfully.

More details about Dr. Mahajan's profile can be read [here](#).

ICA-EU Updates

ICYC shares GGC Success Story at Global Youth Forum 2021

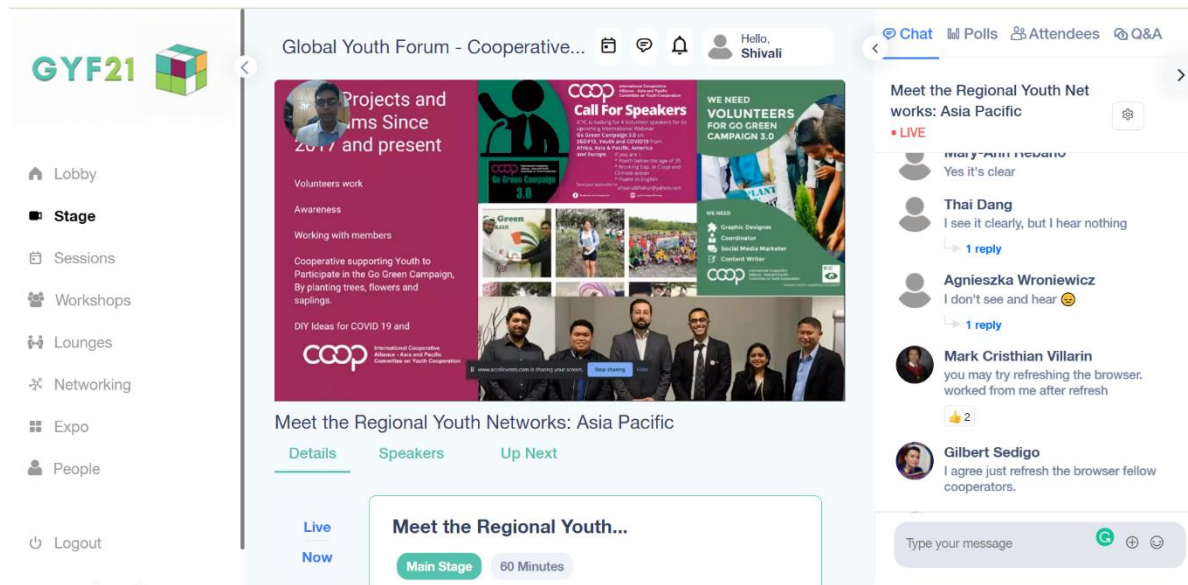
The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting interface for the 'Global Youth Forum - Cooperative Entrepreneurship 2021'. The main content area displays a presentation slide titled 'ICYC and the Go Green Campaign' with the subtitle 'WORLD GOES GREEN WITH AFRICA, AMERICA, ASIA & PACIFIC'. The slide text reads: 'Being the brainchild of the GGC, ICYC plays a very important role especially in ensuring its sustainability and implementation. ICYC strictly monitors all youth cooperatives taking part in this action from all over the globe, and provides a hundred percent support to their successful implementation. Additionally, publication materials and other information are all provided by the technical group to aid the youth cooperatives in the implementation of their GGC programs.' The interface includes a sidebar with navigation options like Lobby, Stage, Sessions, Workshops, Lounges, Networking, Expo, and People. A bottom toolbar shows icons for chat, mute, video, settings, and close. A participant list on the right includes names like Ganesh Gopal, Sharmila Thakuri, Jeffrey Moxom, Georgia Papoutsis, Ahsan Ali Thakur, Rico Renze Regala, Gelizabeth Cabuhat, Shree AP, Andreea Teodora, Cecile Jay Masanegra, Pamela Jude Gonzales, and Dulce Bustamante.

The International Cooperative Alliance in collaboration with the [ICA Youth Network](#) organised the second edition of the Global Youth Forum- Cooperative Entrepreneurship (GYF21) from 25th to 26th March 2021, within the framework of ICA-EU Partnership ([#coops4dev](#)) to bring together young entrepreneurs and professionals from across the world.

The two-day event featured a range of training sessions on topics such as cooperative identity, gender equality, digital tools for coop entrepreneurship, policy, etc. The event started with an introductory session by the Global Youth Network (GYN). Mr. Sebastien Chaillou, President, GYN talked about the network's importance and how it helps youth to learn about the cooperative movement and how youth can contribute at the regional, national, and global levels.

This was followed by the session - "Meet the Youth Network from Asia-Pacific region". Mr. Ahsan Ali Thakur, Chairperson and Mr. Shree Padmanabhan, Secretary, represented the International Cooperative Alliance Asia and Pacific Committee on Youth Cooperation (ICYC). Mr. Thakur introduced ICYC to the participants and shared its brief history and mission, which is to promote the cooperative business model for the youth in the Asia-Pacific region through education, training, entrepreneurs, and leaders in the community. He highlighted a few key activities of the committee:

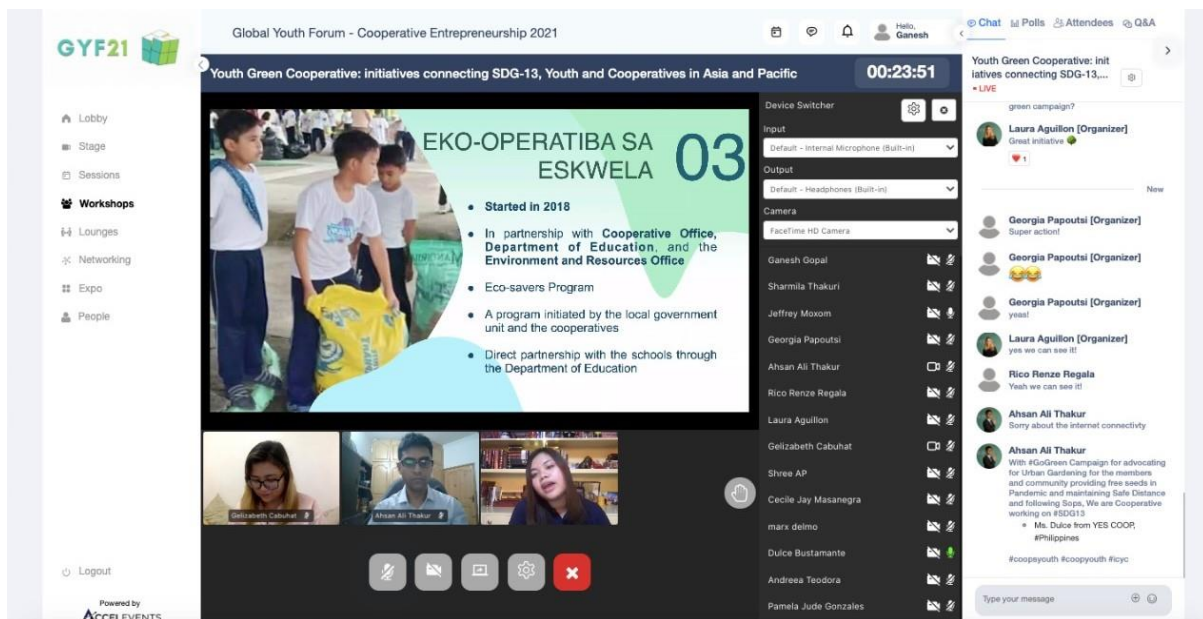
1. Regional Workshop on Role of Youth and University Cooperatives in Moving Towards Sustainable Growth and Development in the Cooperative Decade
2. Asia Pacific Cooperative Youth Summit - Youth, Cooperatives and the Power of Entrepreneurship and Innovation
3. Nepal Youth Report on Financial Literacy Program
4. Asia Pacific Cooperative Youth Summit 2.0 - Creative Skills, Cooperative Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development
5. Go Green Campaign (GGC)



Mr. Padmanabhan spoke about the future activities of the committee. He said that ICYC, in coming years, will stress upon the **Cooperative Principle 5- Education, Training and Information** that will help create awareness about cooperative business model among youth in the Asia and Pacific region. He said that in 2020, the ICYC held its first capacity building webinar on Cooperative Education. The session was attended by more than 100 participants.

On the second day of the GYF21, ICYC held an interactive workshop with the participants to share the success stories from the GGC 3.0. The GGC is a multi-year initiative of ICYC to create awareness on climate action and engage youth in reducing carbon footprint through cooperatives. It is a platform that connects youth with the SDGs. As part of GGC 3.0, more than 17,000 trees were planted in the Asia and Pacific region.

The session titled, “Youth Green Cooperative: Initiatives Connecting SDG-13, Youth and Cooperatives in Asia and Pacific” had three speakers - Ms. Youhana Tamara Yunsia from Credit Union Keling Kumang, Indonesia; Mr. Cecile Jay L. Masanegra from AIMCoop, Philippines; and Ms. Dulce S. Bustamante from Yes Coop, Philippines who shared success stories from GGC in their respective countries.



Ms. Bustamante spoke about how the Young Entrepreneurs Service Cooperative (Yes Coop) undertook a tree plantation in Imus, Philippines. The “Eco-Savers Program” was initiated by the local government along with cooperatives and schools under the Department of Education in Imus, Philippines. The program involved setting up a laboratory (student) cooperative. Which now has over 40,000 members. It was initiated as part of a drive started in 2018 to help resolve growing environmental challenges like waste segregation and management. Students from 20 schools of the city are participating in the program to promote a model where students collect waste to reuse and recycle and invest the money earned from this activity into their laboratory cooperative. Mr. Masanegra spoke about AIMCoop’s campaign in the Philippines and their efforts to develop and nurture the mindset of children in their formative years to care for the environment. Ms. Tamara shared milestones of the youth’s growing interest in GGC and enthusiastically adopting it in Indonesia.

The ICYC members and the speakers urged the participants to join this timely campaign and contribute towards the SDG-13: Climate Action.

Consultation for EU Roadmap for Engagement with CSOs in Vietnam and Laos PDR

The EU Delegation to Vietnam is consulting with stakeholders for the revision of its EU Roadmap for engagement with CSOs for the period 2021-2025 and its Gender Action Plan. The consultations are conducted in close coordination with the current programming exercise, which will lead to the identification of the EU’s new priorities of cooperation with Vietnam, under the framework of the new Neighborhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The NDICI will be the EU’s main financial tool to contribute to poverty eradication and to promote sustainable development, prosperity, peace, and stability.

The ICA-AP and Vietnam Cooperative Alliance (VCA) spoke with Ms. Beatriz Sanz Corella, Team Leader, Support Facility Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society, Economic Policy and Regional Development, who is helping the EU Delegation to Vietnam in their consultation, on 12th March 2021.



ICA-AP representatives briefed Ms. Corella on the ongoing ICA-EU Partnership, ICA-AP priorities in the region, and VCA’s role. Given the focus on climate and digitalization, they spoke about VCA’s work in the area, the need to build capacity for digitization in coops, and the climate action training undertaken in Bangkok, Thailand. The Government of Vietnam has been pursuing the formation and development of cooperatives and farmer groups to help farming become more efficient, profitable, and market-oriented, which an eye to enhance members’ income and standard of living. The Hanoi Resolution (2017) called on the participants of the ICA-AP Minister’s Conference in Vietnam to encourage and support women members’ participation (ranging from 30-50% representation) in committees, bodies, councils, and other high-level cooperative structures.

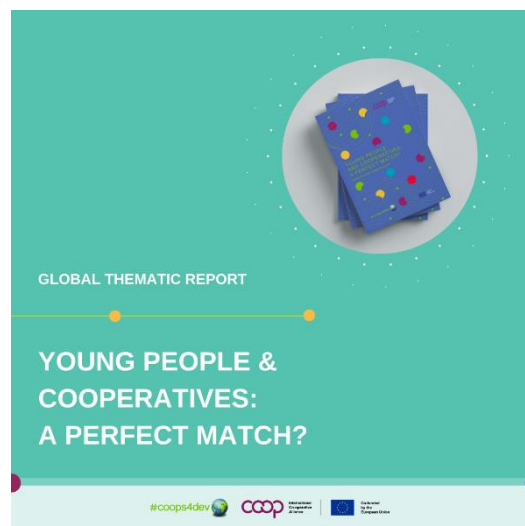


The second virtual consultation in this series was with Ms. Francesca Arato, Attaché, Governance and Rule of Law, Delegation of the European Union to the Laos PDR, on 24th March 2021. The ICA-AP

regional office briefed Ms. Arato about the capacity building project for the development of cooperatives with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), under the Government of Japan's Overseas Development Assistance Program. Each project over three years has had three training courses each year to foster leaders for the management and development of farmers' organisations/agricultural cooperatives; promote women's participation in business and management of agricultural cooperatives; and foster coordinators (leaders) of agricultural cooperatives in business development. Several participants from Laos PDR have attended the training course, including the Bolaven Plateau Coffee Producers Cooperative (CPC). The cooperative is a good example that shows what is possible when small-scale farmers join forces. The government awarded CPC the "Laos Best coffee exporter 2012" for best price and quality.

The enabling environment for cooperatives in Lao PDR is improving each year. There is a change in the organisational structure in MAFF, the former DAEC (Department of Agricultural Extension and Cooperatives) has split up into two new departments. Since 2017, the new department responsible for cooperatives is the Department of Rural Development and Cooperatives (DRDC). The new structure will give impetus to promote agriculture in rural areas by integrating infrastructure, creating value chains, and providing access to credit.

Coops4dev Research Team Shares Insights from Global Youth Research



On 3rd March 2021, the #coops4dev team launched the global thematic research report on 'Young People and Cooperatives: A Perfect Match?'. The report presents the results of a research study on cooperatives and youth, undertaken by the ICA and its four regional offices under the ICA-EU Partnership on Cooperatives in Development. The report was completed with external support from the Co-operative College (UK) and inputs from the ICA Youth Network.

On 24th March 2021, an international webinar on 'Digging into the Global Research on Youth and Co-ops' was hosted by the International Centre for Co-operative Management, St Mary's University, Canada. The #coops4dev research team - Mr. Jeffrey Moxom (ICA Global), Mr. Melvin Khabenje (ICA Africa), and Ms. Simren Singh (ICA Asia and Pacific) presented the key findings from the research study. It was moderated by Ms. Erin Hancock (Program Manager, Co-operative Management Education, International Centre for Co-operative Management, Sobey School of Business, Saint Mary's University) The webinar had 50% participation from the age group of 18-35 years. The full recording of the webinar can be accessed [here](#).

Recommendations

It is already clear that existing youth engagement and support from the cooperative movement is far from adequate in its current form!

Where do we take action?

Knowledge	Improving knowledge of cooperatives amongst young people
Image	Boosting the cooperative image and communicating it effectively
Structure	Developing genuine youth orientated structures within cooperatives
Culture	Building genuine democratic and inclusive cultures of cooperation
Opportunity	Providing decent work opportunities to young people through cooperatives
Entrepreneurship	Facilitating cooperative entrepreneurship through adequate enabling environments
Partnerships	Strengthening constructive partnerships to achieve common objectives

14



Based on 420 responses from young people in 20 countries, the report provides a global snapshot of young people’s views and opinions from within and outside the cooperative movement. In Asia and Pacific, responses were collected from youth in India, Indonesia, Iran, the Philippines, and South Korea.

The report is structured into five chapters, referred to as the five ‘E’s - Employment, Education, (In)Equalities, Engagement, and Entrepreneurship. Each chapter was developed based on the direct inputs of youth and highlights interesting examples and insights from youth cooperation. Priorities for young people include the pursuit of decent work opportunities, quality and accessible education, economic and social inclusion, as well as inclusive participation in civic and political life. Young people note that much of this is currently jeopardised by multi-dimensional forms of poverty, inequities, and pressures of the current global economic system, as well as unsustainable practices that lead to unprecedented levels of environmental destruction and degradation. Cooperatives, as people-centred and democratic enterprises, can and should play a greater role in a transition towards a more sustainable way of life. It is evident that existing youth engagement and support from the cooperative movement needs to be improved. Potential action can be taken in several areas, which are further developed within the report.

The main areas identified include but are not limited to:

- Improving knowledge of cooperatives amongst young people
- Boosting the image of cooperatives and communicating it effectively
- Developing genuine youth-orientated structures within cooperatives
- Building genuine democratic and inclusive cultures of cooperation
- Promoting decent work opportunities for young people through cooperatives
- Facilitating cooperative entrepreneurship through adequate enabling environments
- Building and strengthening constructive partnerships to achieve common objectives.

The five chapters, which can be read together or as stand-alone pieces, assess the survey results to establish how the cooperative movement, often in collaborative partnerships with other organisations, can do more to help young people address the challenges affecting them. The work has the overarching goal of improving engagement between young people and cooperatives and providing actionable conclusions and recommendations, which are shared in the latter sections of the report.

The full report can be accessed [here](#).



On 26th March 2021, the key findings of the research were discussed by the #coops4dev team in the global workshop on ‘Report Lab: Young People and Cooperatives: A perfect Match?’ conducted during the GYF21. Dr. Sarah Alldred (Co-operative College, UK), Ms. Celina Butali (Regional Gender, Children, and Youth Advisor, Vi Agroforestry, Kenya), and Ms. Angélica Soberanes (President of the Regional Youth Committee for the Americas and Vice President of the ICA Global Youth Network) were the guest speakers of the workshop. Mr. Khabenje presented the findings and Ms. Singh facilitated discussions on youth engagement in cooperatives, the role of education and training, youth advocacy, and an enabling environment to promote youth integration in the cooperative movement with the guest speakers.

Announcements

Webinar on Post COVID-19: Opportunities for Cooperatives in Educational Institution

The banner features logos for the International Co-operative Alliance Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP), the 50th Anniversary of the Cooperative Education Complex (CEC), and ANGKASA. The main title is "ICEI WEBINAR 'POST COVID-19: OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATIVES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS'". The date is "15 April 2021 (Thursday)". The time is listed as "14:00 HRS (MYT & PHST) / 11:30 HRS (IST) / 15:00 HRS (JST) / 11:45 HRS (NPT)". The meeting is via Zoom. A QR code is provided for registration. The speakers are: DR. C. PITCHAI (Prof. & Head, Dept of Cooperation, The Gandhigram Rural Institute, India); MS. ANAHITA ESLAHPAZIR (CEO, Rah - E - Roshd, Cooperative Education Complex, Iran); MR. ICHIRO NAKAMORI (MD & CEO, NFUCA, Japan); and PROF. DR. WAN MOHTAR WAN YUSOFF (Chair, Koperasi UNIKEB Berhad, Malaysia). Social media handles for @AngkasaCoop are also listed.

coop International Co-operative Alliance Asia and Pacific

50 Anniversary of the Cooperative Education Complex

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ICEI WEBINAR "POST COVID-19: OPPORTUNITIES FOR COOPERATIVES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS"

15 April 2021 (Thursday)

TIME: 14:00 HRS (MYT & PHST) / 11:30 HRS (IST) / 15:00 HRS (JST) / 11:45 HRS (NPT)

VIA: ZOOM MEETING

DR. C. PITCHAI
Prof. & Head, Dept of Cooperation
The Gandhigram Rural Institute
India

MS. ANAHITA ESLAHPAZIR
CEO, Rah - E - Roshd
Cooperative Education Complex
Iran

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Japan

**PROF. DR. WAN MOHTAR
WAN YUSOFF**
Chair, Koperasi UNIKEB Berhad
Malaysia

SCAN ME

Please scan QR code to register and receive zoom link to the webinar

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ICA-AP Committee on Cooperatives in Educational Institutions (ICEI) is jointly organising an open webinar with ANGKASA to discuss Post COVID-19 Opportunities for Cooperatives in Educational Institutions on 15th April 2021 at 11:30 HRS IST.

To register for the webinar, scan the QR Code given below.



The winners of the Regional Cooperative Short Film Competition on cooperatives held by the committee from 1st September 2020 to 28th February 2021 will also be facilitated during the webinar.

The competition had received 10 entries and the first prize of US\$500 was awarded to Yudai Yazama and team from the National Federation of University Cooperatives (NFUCA), Japan for their "Survey

with students affected by COVID-19.” The second prize of US\$ 300 was awarded to Ellysaa Ezyanee and team from Mara Junior Science College Batu Pahat School Cooperative, Batu Pahat, Johor Darul Takzim, Malaysia for their video, “Cooperative charity during COVID-19.” The third prize of \$150 was awarded to Ellysaa Ezyanee and team, Mara Junior Science College Batu Pahat School Cooperative, Batu Pahat, Johor Darul Takzim, Malaysia for their video, “Cooperative charity during COVID-19.” Special recognition certificates will be awarded to the other five best entries and participation certificates to all participants.

WDDCM Global Evidence Summit



The International Cooperative Research Group of U.S. Overseas Cooperative Development Council (OCDC) has undertaken a research on “What Difference Do Cooperatives Make (WDDCM)?” focused on countries like the Philippines, Kenya, Peru, and Poland. It is organising an online event – WDDCM Global Evidence Summit, to share the research outcomes on 26th May 2021 from 9 AM to 11 AM EST. If you are interested in this summit and want to receive more updates, keep following [OCDC](#) or sign up for their communication [here](#).

ICA 33rd World Cooperative Congress

The ICA 33rd World Cooperative Congress will be held in Seoul, the Republic of Korea and online from 1st to 3rd December 2021.

The theme for the Congress is, “**Deepening our Cooperative Identity**” to strengthen the cooperative movement’s role in addressing global challenges and explore avenues to improve lives at the local and global levels. Within this, four themes will explore how cooperatives examine, strengthen, commit to, and live the cooperative identity. [Read more on these themes in future ‘Destination Congress’ newsletters!](#)

The Congress will be an opportunity to look back and validate the cooperative movement’s resilience, leadership, and solidarity during times of crisis. This event will serve as an important forum to:

- Discuss why the cooperative identity, including definition, principles and values, is needed now more than ever
- Show cooperative resilience by sharing experiences and testimonies

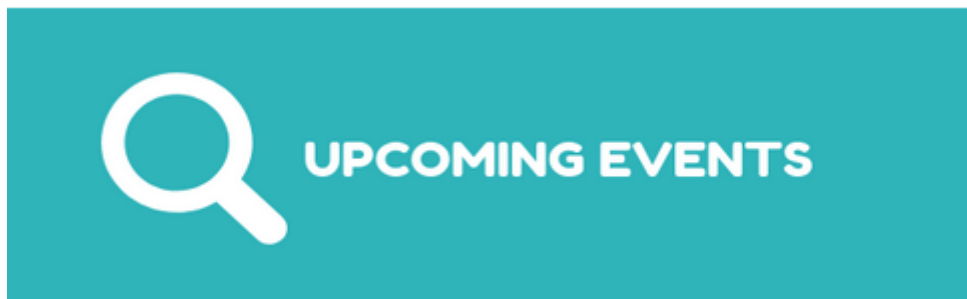
- Discuss how cooperatives can significantly contribute to the global economic, social, and environmental reconstruction.

The Congress will consist of pre-events from 28th to 30th November, followed by the conference itself from 1st to 3rd December. Details of the Congress will be available at <https://ICAWorldCoopCongress.coop>.

The World Cooperative Congress will be held at the Grand Walkerhill Hotel, in Seoul: <https://www.walkerhill.com/grandwalkerhillseoul/en/>.

Find out more about the ICA World Cooperative Congress – and register your interest – [HERE](#).

The dates for the Congress are subject to be further rescheduled should the pandemic make it necessary for force majeure.



- ICEI Webinar on Post COVID-19: Opportunities for Cooperatives in Educational Institution – 15th April 2021
- ICA-MAFF follow-up with Bhutan and Nepal participants – 9th April 2021 and 12th April 2021
- Consultation on Cooperative Identity with members in Nepal – 13th April 2021 (TBC)
- Consultation on Cooperative Identity for countries in the Middle East – 25th May 2021 (TBC)
- Online ICA-AP Youth Summit 3.0 – 22nd to 24th June 2021 (TBC)
- ICA-AP Regional Board Meeting, Seoul, Korea – 29th November 2021 (TBC)
- ICA-AP Regional Assembly and Board Elections, Seoul, Korea – 30th November 2021 (TBC)
- ICA 33rd World Cooperative Congress, Seoul, Korea – 1st to 3rd December 2021