

# ICA-AP NEWSLETTER

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

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## Building a Better World: Preparations Underway for the 17th Regional Assembly in Sri Lanka



The ICA-AP 17<sup>th</sup> Regional Assembly and the elections for the new Regional Board will be held in Sri Lanka from 24 to 28 November 2025. The event is being hosted by the National Council of Cooperatives in Sri Lanka (NCCSL) in collaboration with the country's broader cooperative movement.

Delegates will have the opportunity to participate in the 12th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Forum, as well as various thematic seminars and workshops organized by our committees. The Regional Assembly will focus on the theme ***“Cooperatives Build a Better World: Strengthening Resilience, Sustaining Investment, and Smart Communication.”*** These events will also mark the culmination of activities led by the Regional Office in observance of the International Year of Cooperatives 2025.

As part of the preparations, the ICA-AP team of Mr. Balu Iyer, Regional Director and Ms. Shivali Sarna, Lead – Communication and Membership Development visited Sri Lanka in early March. The visit focused on coordinating with ICA members, government officials, and key stakeholders to ensure the successful hosting of the Assembly in Colombo this November.

The ICA-AP team visited the proposed venue, Cinnamon Lakeside, and held discussions around event logistics, including accommodation, meeting spaces, and participant arrangements. Key outcomes of the visit included:

- Discussion of the Cooperative Forum theme and event branding
- Confirmation of Sri Lanka's role in the Assembly's opening ceremony
- Formation of organizing committees for smooth coordination
- Engagement with media and communication strategies

Minister Wasantha Samarasinghe and his Senior Advisor, Dr. Shanta Jayaratne, expressed strong government support and reaffirmed Sri Lanka's commitment to promoting cooperative growth. The government is keen on expanding producer cooperatives and requested ICA's support in providing technical assistance and global visibility.

The ICA-AP team also engaged with the SANASA Federation to coordinate planning and explore collaboration for hosting the research conference.

To promote the event and create more visibility for ICA and the cooperative movement, the ICA-AP team recorded a radio show with Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (to be aired) and a [live interview](#) with Rupavahini English News (a national news channel).

The visit marks a significant step toward hosting an impactful and inclusive Regional Assembly that celebrates and advances the cooperative movement across Asia and the Pacific.

## Call for Papers: 19<sup>th</sup> ICA Asia-Pacific Research Conference



The ICA-AP Committee on Cooperative Research (CCR), in collaboration with SANASA Federation and SANASA Campus, invites researchers, scholars, and practitioners to submit papers for the 19th ICA Asia-Pacific Research Conference, taking place on 23 and 24 November 2025 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Held under the theme "*Cooperatives Build a Better World*," the conference will explore the role of cooperatives in promoting sustainability, resilience, and inclusive development.

This is a valuable opportunity to share your research, engage in dialogue with cooperative leaders, and contribute to shaping the future of the cooperative movement. For details and submission guidelines, visit <https://icaapccr2025.sanasainternational.lk/>.

## Job Announcement: Communications & Events Officer



We are looking for a dynamic and creative Communications & Events Officer to join our team in New Delhi! The role involves managing communication across digital platforms, curating content, and supporting regional events – including the upcoming Regional Assembly 2025 in Sri Lanka. If you're passionate about storytelling, community engagement, and international event coordination, submit a one-page statement of purpose and your CV at [recruitment@icaap.coop](mailto:recruitment@icaap.coop) before 21 April 2025.

For more details, [click here](#).

## ICA Meet & Greet for Government Entities



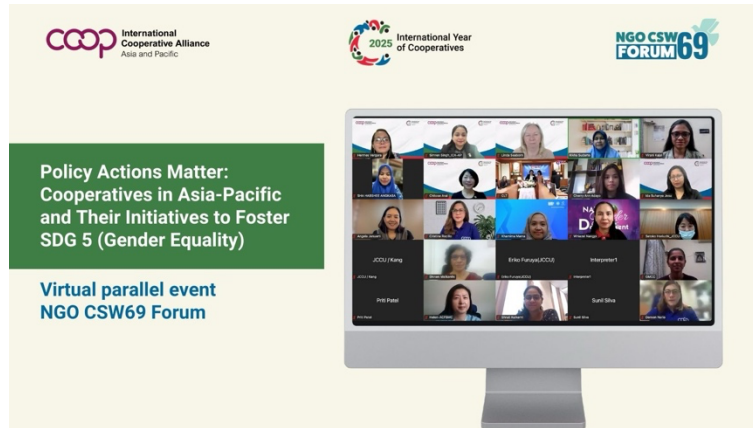
The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) is continuing its “Meet and Greet” campaign as part of the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives 2025. This initiative aims to strengthen the global voice of cooperatives by engaging directly with government agencies.

For over 200 years, cooperatives have provided practical solutions to reduce poverty, promote equality, combat climate change, and support peace. Through this campaign, ICA invites representatives from government bodies to learn more about its work with members, especially state representatives, and the impact of cooperatives at national and international policy levels. The event is an opportunity to ask questions, hear from other members, and understand the value of joining ICA and how governments can benefit from being part of the cooperative movement. The online session will take place on 7 May 2025 from 13:00 to 14:30 CEST and will be held in English and Spanish. [Register Here](#).



# ICA-AP UPDATES

## Cooperatives Fostering Gender Equality: Reflections from NGO CSW69 Forum Parallel Event



On 19 March, the ICA-AP and its Committee on Women organized a virtual side event at the NGO CSW69 Forum. It was the third such event at the NGO CSW Forum organised by the office and its Women's Committee. Themed, '*Policy Actions Matter: Cooperatives in Asia-Pacific and Their Initiatives to Foster SDG 5: (Gender Equality)*', Expert speakers from cooperatives in Australia, India, and the Philippines shared insights into policy initiatives undertaken by cooperatives to promote gender equality and foster women's empowerment. The program was attended by 59 participants across Asia.

The Committee Chairperson, Ms. Chitose Arai, highlighted the theme of this year's International Women's Day, "*For All Women and Girls: Rights, Equality, and Empowerment*". The theme calls for actions to provide equal rights, power, and opportunities to achieve a feminist future where no one is left behind. She observed that 2025 is a very special year because the UN has declared this year as the second International Year of Cooperatives, and it also marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. She added that the Committee has focused on women's capacity development through various programs aligned with the BPfA since its establishment. She outlined four strategic objectives of the Committee – 1) Economic Empowerment, 2) Social Empowerment, 3) Knowledge, Education, and Training, and 4) Solidarity. She provided a brief overview of the parallel event and hoped that the Committee and the entire cooperative movement could create environments where women and girls are not left behind in their communities.

Ms. Ida Suhanya Jesu, Gender and Inclusion Specialist, International Labour Organization (ILO), Sri Lanka, in her keynote address, emphasized the role of cooperatives in advancing gender equality and fostering SDG 5 in the Asia-Pacific region. She highlighted the significance of BPfA as a global framework guiding gender-responsive policies. She shared that the ILO has actively supported cooperatives as vehicles for women's economic empowerment through initiatives like Coop 4 Decent Work and Gender Equality; and Women's Empowerment Strategy. Various countries, including India, Indonesia, and the Philippines have implemented gender-inclusive policies in the cooperative sector and the cooperative model of business

with its democratic and inclusive structure, plays a crucial role in promoting financial access, leadership, and skills development for women. However, challenges such as limited access to finance, legal barriers, societal resistance, and climate change continue to hinder progress in achieving gender equality. To address these issues, Ms. Jesu stressed the need for stronger policy support, capacity-building programs, public-private partnerships, inclusive leadership, and the use of digital tools. She concluded by calling for collective action to strengthen policies in cooperatives, ensuring that cooperatives remain a powerful force for gender equality and sustainable development in local communities.

Ms. Priti Patel, Vice Chairperson of the ICA-AP Committee on Women and Gujarat Mahila Credit Cooperative (GMCC), and member of the Women's Committee of the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) presented the role of cooperatives in India in fostering SDG 5. Her presentation highlighted the importance of eliminating discrimination, violence, and economic disparities while promoting women's leadership and equal opportunities. Cooperatives, with their democratic and inclusive structure, play a crucial role in empowering women economically and socially by ensuring equal access to resources, leadership roles, fair wages, and skill development opportunities. Her presentation showcased key examples of successful gender-sensitive cooperatives in India. GMCC provides financial assistance, organizes training seminars, and offers skill development programs to promote women's economic independence. She shared initiatives taken by NCUI, such as Kamadhenu Self-Help Group and Women SHG Cooperative Industrial Society in Goa, to empower rural women through entrepreneurship and self-reliance, contributing to economic stability. Her presentation emphasized the need for further gender-inclusive policies, financial support, and skill development programs to enhance women's empowerment through cooperatives for fostering economic resilience and gender equity.

Ms. Linda Seaborn, Senior Policy Advisor from the Business Council of Cooperatives and Mutuals (BCCM), Australia presented the case of cooperatives and gender in Australia. She highlighted the role of BCCM in fostering gender equality within the cooperatives and mutual enterprises (CME) sector. The BCCM, formed in 2013, represents over 1,800 CMEs across diverse industries, employing 89,000 people and generating \$43.2 billion in revenue (FY22-23). She added that while 8 in 10 Australians are members of a cooperative, gender disparities persist in the CME sector, particularly in leadership roles. A research, conducted by BCCM and Per Capita, on understanding gender diversity and inclusion in the Australian CME sector confirmed that while women are well-represented as employees and members in CMEs, they remain underrepresented in top leadership positions. To address these gaps, she added that their study report has provided key recommendations: embedding flexible work policies, enhancing leadership training and sponsorship for women, and fostering top-down commitment to gender inclusion. She also shared that data from BCCM's National Mutual Economy report (2016–2022) shows gradual improvement in gender diversity among cooperative leaders, yet significant disparities remain when compared to ASX (Australian Stock Exchange) listed companies. Her presentation underscored the need for structural reforms, cultural shifts, and sustained leadership efforts to ensure gender equality in Australia's CME sector.

Ms. Hermes Vergara, Chairperson, Gender and Development Committee, National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO) and Vice-Chairperson, Oro Integrated Cooperative

from the Philippines shared about the Government's CDA-MC 2013-22 Guidelines that mandate cooperatives to integrate Gender and Development (GAD) policies in their plans, budgets, and programs, ensuring gender mainstreaming in decision-making and operations. Key mechanisms under these guidelines include forming GAD Committees, appointing GAD Focal Persons, and implementing education and training programs on gender sensitivity, financial literacy, and leadership, among others. She noted that NATCCO has institutionalized gender equality by allocating a Board seat for a women's representative and dedicating 5% of the Cooperative Education and Training Fund (CETF) to GAD programs. NATCCO's capacity-building efforts have empowered women with entrepreneurial, financial, and leadership skills, leading to increased participation in cooperative governance. Additionally, NATCCO is developing a Gender Mainstreaming Manual to guide member cooperatives in sustaining gender equality initiatives. She emphasized that gender equality is a human issue, not just a women's issue, urging continuous policy actions to drive inclusive cooperative development.

During the open discussion, the participants focused on the critical question of why gender-based policies matter in cooperatives. Some of the key points that accrued from the discussion are:

1. Formal gender-based policy instruments in cooperatives matter because they can be incorporated as guidelines to guide primary cooperatives on how to integrate gender inclusion and equality. Formal policy instruments are required because leaders change but good policies remain and they provide a valuable framework for governance, accountability, and transparency.
2. It is important to have women in gender-based policy-making decisions because their voices and perspectives are critical to making informed and inclusive policies.
3. Good gender-based policies become successful when cooperatives develop guidelines for implementation and train cooperatives on how to implement them. The success of good gender-based policies is guaranteed when they are aimed at the growth and development of women cooperators - members and employees.
4. Good policies should be well-aligned with government policies or national laws. People who are involved in gender-based policy-making should be aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it because this impacts the final policy product and its implementation success rate.
5. Speakers and participants highlighted the need and importance of having women-friendly policies in cooperatives in terms of work flexibility and work-life balance so that they are encouraged to assume leadership roles.

Fare wages, paternal leaves, child-care facilities, loan facilities, flexible working hours, education, training, and mentorship give women the required confidence and adequate skills to take up leadership roles. Otherwise, they are burdened with dual responsibilities of career development and family care and do not have sufficient time to contribute any longer or take up leadership roles.

Ms. Arai thanked the speakers and noted this event highlighted the current state and challenges of gender equality in Asian cooperatives that still prevail after 30 years of the BPfA. The presentations and discussions during the open forum have deepened our insights on the role that cooperatives should play in the future to expedite their commitment and actions to

SDG 5. She encouraged the participants to create an environment within the cooperatives where women can fully utilize their abilities and strengthen the collective efforts towards gender equality.

#### ICA-MAFF (Government of Japan) Women's Training Course



The ICA-MAFF (Government of Japan) Training Course on *Capacity Building of Rural Women on Their Roles for Vitalization of Rural Economy in FY-2024* was held in Thailand and Japan from 17 February – 12 March. Part I of the training course was organized in collaboration with the Cooperative League of Thailand (CLT) in Bangkok, Thailand from 17 to 26 February, and Part II was in collaboration with the Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Asia (IDACA) in Tokyo, Japan from 27 February to 12 March. The training course was funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), Government of Japan, and implemented by the ICA. Seven trainees from seven countries Cambodia, Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Nepal, Thailand, and Vietnam participated in the course.

Before the start of the course, the participants were given Home Country Assignments where they watched learning videos made by IDACA and prepared their job reports.

The opening ceremony of the training program was held at CLT in a hybrid format and was attended by the representatives of MAFF (Government of Japan), IDACA, CLT, and ICA-AP. Part I covered learning visits to cooperative enterprises run by women and observation of activities to promote rural women's empowerment. The participants also learned about the cooperative sector in Thailand from CLT; Government programs to promote and support the development of cooperatives implemented by the Cooperative Promotion Department; and the auditing process for cooperatives undertaken by the Cooperative Auditing Department.

Learning visits were organized to small-scale cooperative enterprises run by rural women involved in the production of consumer products such as rice crackers, rice granola bars, rice-based ice cream, mango sticky rice, chilli paste, ceramic pottery, batik-based clothes and accessories, hand-woven fabrics and fruit juices. These enterprises have mostly women members and workers from rural and semi-rural areas. Some of them are elderly women, single women, and farmers who are looking for additional livelihood support. Local agricultural cooperatives, CPD, and CLT provide them with technical support and assistance related to finance opportunities, market knowledge, and trainings to improve their production quality and operational efficiency.

Part II was a combination of onsite lectures and learning visits to JA Echigo Chuetsu (primary agriculture cooperative), agricultural processing facilities, direct-sales shops, women farmers and women's groups, and a milk farm in Nagaoka city in Niigata prefecture and Machida city in Tokyo metropolis in Japan. During the visits, the participants learned about new concepts such as the 6th industrialization process in the agriculture sector of Japan, as part of which, farmers grow their crops, process them into a variety of products, and directly sell the final products on their own. The other concepts that they found useful were – NoWA – a voluntary group of women farmers; and Japan Good Agricultural Practices (JGAP) certification. With this certification, the farmers can sell their products at a premium price. The participants got an opportunity to observe the operations of the seedling facility, country elevator (rice processing facility) and direct sales shops in Nagaoka City. They met members of the Women's Association of JA Echigo Chuetsu and learned about their functioning, management, and activities for women's empowerment and community development. They got an opportunity to interact with elderly women who run small-scale community businesses selling traditional delicacies such as "sake manju" or fluffy buns and sweet dumplings wrapped in Sasa bamboo leaves. The businesses run by these women are non-profit in nature and are being carried out to pass on delicacies made with traditional recipes to the younger generation.

During Part II, participants also received guidance from IDACA and ICA-AP on their action plans. The participants prepared their draft action plans with the primary objective of developing the capacity of rural women farmers and improving their incomes. They are expected to submit their final action plans after internal consultations with their cooperatives in April.

The closing ceremony was attended by representatives from MAFF (Government of Japan), IDACA, and ICA-AP. The participants were awarded certificates at the end of each part of the training course.

#### [ICA-MAFF \(Government of Japan\) Training Follow-up in Fiji](#)



The training courses funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) of the Government of Japan, have a significant component of follow-up with ex-participants through visits and surveys. It provides an overview of the participants' progress in

implementing their action plans, highlights the challenges they have faced, and offers insights to plan future activities.

For FY 2024 follow-up, Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, Regional Director, ICA-AP along with the team from the Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Asia (IDACA) visited Fiji in March 2025.

Cooperatives were formally introduced in Fiji in 1947 under British colonial rule through the Cooperative Societies Ordinance. From the outset, the principles and values of cooperatives—self-help, mutual responsibility, and equity—resonated strongly with Fijian cultural values, particularly the traditional emphasis on community, solidarity, and collective work.

The cooperative movement flourished through the decades, especially during the post-independence period, with strong participation in agriculture and rural economies. However, by the 1980s, a combination of weak governance, limited political will, and lack of institutional support led to the decline and collapse of many cooperatives.

Today, cooperatives in Fiji are experiencing a renewed focus, driven by the government's recognition of their potential in rural development and inclusive economic growth. The Department of Cooperative Business (DCB), situated within the Ministry of Trade, Cooperatives, SMEs and Communications (MTCsME), is leading efforts to rebuild and expand the cooperative sector.

As of 2024, Fiji has 715 registered cooperatives, approximately 40,000 members with total assets of FJD 151 million and a presence in all geographical regions. Predominantly agriculture-based, with a growing presence in sectors such as wholesale, banking, real estate, industry, and tourism.

The action plans developed by the participants showed that they are acutely aware of the country's fragile ecosystem and the unique challenges it faces as a Pacific Island nation—geographically isolated, with a small population, limited production capacity, and a high reliance on imports. Agricultural activity sees minimal value addition, which constrains both economic growth and food security. In response to these challenges, there is a growing national emphasis on decarbonization and building resilience through innovation and sustainable practices.

The DCB is committed to aligning its agricultural development strategies with these national priorities. As it supports cooperative-led agricultural initiatives, it aims to promote environmentally conscious practices, encourage local value addition, and enhance self-reliance.

In a meeting, with the MAFF, IDACA, ICA-AP team, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister for MCTsMEs, Hon. Manoa Kamikamica, emphasized the critical role cooperatives play in Fiji's economic development, especially in rural and underserved communities. He reiterated the government's commitment to:



- Updating legislation
- Developing a new cooperative policy
- Strengthening institutional mechanisms
- Supporting capacity building, funding, and advisory services

During the visit to Fiji, Mr. Iyer and the IDACA team engaged with the four participants and visited several sites where their action plans have been put into practice. Each participant has made progress in implementing their plans, which are currently at varying stages of development. While some were able to roll out their initiatives in the originally identified locations, others had to implement them in new areas due to local dynamics or logistical considerations.

A key focus across the implemented plans has been the formation and expansion of cooperatives. The primary motivation behind this push was to enable cooperative members to access funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, which offers a support scheme consisting of a two-thirds grant and one-third capital contribution. This funding is typically used for the acquisition of agricultural machinery such as tractors or diggers.

Members of the cooperatives pooled their financial and land resources—either leasing land or utilizing freehold property—to initiate farming projects. These machines were used to prepare land for cultivating crops like taro, cassava, and rice.

The DCB's plan is to further strengthen and develop these cooperatives by offering financial assistance through the Cooperative Development Fund (CDF). Once the cooperatives are operating efficiently and sustainably, DCB aims to support them in scaling up by focusing on areas such as market access, aggregation of production, and the broader development of a resilient cooperative ecosystem.

### Session on “Fostering Entrepreneurial Cooperatives: Pathways for Sustainable and Scalable Models”



The Cooperative Development Board (CDB) of the Institute of Cost Accountants of India (ICMAI) hosted an event on the theme “Building a Cooperative Mindset: Encouraging Cooperative Start-Ups” on 19 March 2025 at SCOPE Auditorium, New Delhi. The event convened policymakers, cooperative leaders, and young cost accounting students and

entrepreneurs to deliberate on the potential of cooperative enterprises in India's evolving economic landscape.

Mr. Ganesh Gopal, Lead - Environment & Agriculture at ICA-AP, delivered an insightful session on *"Fostering Entrepreneurial Cooperatives: Pathways for Sustainable and Scalable Models."* His presentation highlighted key trends in cooperative entrepreneurship, focusing on how digital transformation, policy frameworks, and innovative governance models can enhance the sustainability of cooperative enterprises. He emphasized the role of cooperatives in bridging economic inequalities and fostering youth engagement in sectors such as agriculture, platform-based gig work, and emerging industries. The session also explored successful case studies of cooperative start-ups in Asia-Pacific, offering actionable recommendations for aspiring cooperative entrepreneurs in the context of India's cooperative ecosystem.

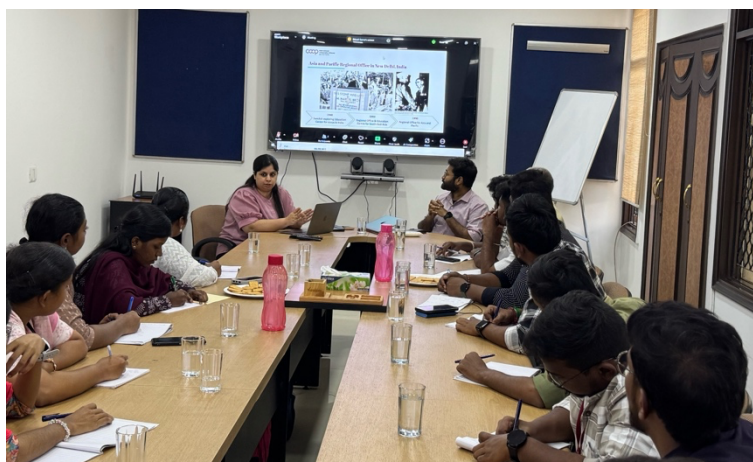
The inaugural session was addressed by senior functionaries from the cost accounting fraternity in India, including CMA Mr. Navneet Kumar Jain, (Chairman, CDB), followed by special addresses from CMA Mr. Neeraj Joshi, (Chairman of the Committee on Artificial Intelligence), CMA Mr. Santosh Pant, (Chairman of NIRC of ICMAI), CMA Dr. D.P. Nandy, Secretary, ICMAI and former ICMAI President CMA Mr. Sanjay Gupta.

The Guest of Honour, Mr. Kapil Meena, IAS, Director, Ministry of Cooperation, provided valuable insights on government initiatives supporting cooperative enterprises. The dignitaries and expert speakers together released the *'Guidance Note on Cooperative Societies'*.

Another key session was led by CMA Dr. S.K. Gupta, Managing Director of ICMAI Registered Valuers Organization, on *"Leveraging Cooperative Start-Ups for Building Viksit Bharat."* The discussions reinforced the significance of strengthening cooperative governance, financial management, and strategic planning for emerging cooperative enterprises.

A key takeaway from the event was the exploration of future collaborations for cooperatives within the CDB at ICMAI, including potential joint research studies, capacity-building programs for ICMAI students as well as cooperators, and greater promotion of the International Year of Cooperatives (IYC 2025).

### [GRI Students Visit ICA-AP for an Immersive Learning Experience](#)



On 11 March, a delegation from the Department of Cooperation, Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI), visited the ICA-AP office in New Delhi. The delegation, led by senior faculty member & former Head of the Department (HoD) Dr. C. Pitchai, comprised 15 M. Com. (Cooperative Management) students and a research scholar. The visit was part of the students' institutional exposure program aimed at deepening their understanding of cooperative structures and governance at the national and international levels.

GRI, established in 1956, is a renowned institution dedicated to rural higher education and operates under the Ministry of Education, Government of India as a deemed university. It has expanded over the years to include eight schools, 19 departments, and nine centers, offering over 60 academic programs. The Department of Cooperation at GRI, one of the oldest in India, has been instrumental in fostering cooperative education, offering undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs in cooperative management.

The visiting delegation engaged in a stimulating session with Ms. Shivali Sarna, Lead - Communication and Membership Development, Mr. Ganesh Gopal, Lead - Agriculture & Environment, and Mr. Naveen Kumar Singh, Program Officer - Research engaged. The ICA-AP team delivered a presentation on ICA-AP's structure, functions, and key initiatives in promoting cooperative development across the Asia-Pacific region. The session facilitated an interactive dialogue, allowing students to explore cooperative trends, governance models, and the role of international organizations in strengthening the cooperative movement. Several of the GRI student delegates had been part of previous ICA-AP events including the Youth Summits, Coop Pitch competitions, and the research conferences.

The students also discussed various activities of the ICA-AP office and its committees, particularly relating to youth and education. The visit to cooperative institutions in New Delhi provided an opportunity for students to witness the application of cooperative principles beyond their academic curriculum. Discussions revolved around cooperative innovations, youth engagement in the sector, and ICA-AP's initiatives supporting sustainable cooperative enterprises. Reflecting on the interaction, the ICA-AP team shared the enthusiasm and curiosity of the students from GRI to explore more about the world of cooperatives, underscoring the importance of bridging academic learning with practical exposure.

ICA-AP looks forward to continued engagement with academic institutions like GRI to nurture cooperative thought leadership and capacity-building among students.

### Furthering Education on Global Cooperatives and Sustainable Rural Development



The National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) hosted a thought-provoking session on *“The Role of Global Cooperatives in Sustainable Rural Development”* as part of its five-day Certificate Course on *“Coops4SRD: Cooperatives for Sustainable Rural Development”* held from 3 – 7 March in New Delhi. During the session, Mr. Ganesh Gopal, Lead – Environment & Agriculture at ICA-AP, in his keynote presentation, provided insights into the impact of global cooperatives in fostering sustainable rural economies.

The course, organized by NCUI’s Cooperative Extension and Advisory Services (CEAS) Division, aims to equip students, cooperative leaders, and development professionals with the knowledge and skills necessary to leverage cooperatives as drivers of inclusive and sustainable rural growth. With 32 students from Ramachandran International Institute of Management (RIIM), Pune participating, the program was designed to offer both theoretical and practical exposure to cooperative principles, governance structures, and innovative business models.

Mr. Gopal’s presentation delved into the role of the international cooperative movement in enhancing rural livelihoods, promoting inclusive economic models, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Drawing from global best practices, he emphasized the resilience of cooperative enterprises in times of crisis, highlighting examples from agriculture, finance, and worker-owned cooperatives and how cooperatives align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and particularly in addressing pressing issues such as poverty (SDG 1), food security (SDG 2), gender equality (SDG 5), and climate action (SDG 13).

The presentation also included case studies of successful cooperative models across Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Europe that have transformed rural economies through participatory governance and member-driven decision-making. Mr. Gopal highlighted the importance of youth and digital transformation in cooperatives, stressing how innovations in agri-tech, fintech, and cooperative start-ups are redefining the rural economy.

The session saw active engagement from students and faculty, with discussions focusing on practical challenges and opportunities for scaling cooperative models in India. Participants raised questions about the feasibility of adapting global cooperative models to the Indian rural context, the role of digital technology in enhancing cooperative efficiency, employment potential in this sector in India, and outreach strategies for integrating cooperative principles into India’s rural entrepreneurship landscape.

Mr. Ritesh Dey, Executive Director, NCUI-NCRC and CEAS Division, emphasized the importance of cooperatives in reviving India’s rural economy and Dr. Sagar K. Wadkar, Adviser, NCUI and Course Director, highlighted the course’s pragmatic approach, designed to deepen participants’ understanding of cooperative governance, sustainability, and economic empowerment.

# ICA-EU Updates

## Country Snapshot – Fiji



The Fiji snapshot, originally developed in 2020 under the ICA-EU FFPA 1, offers an overview of the cooperative landscape, policy developments, and cooperatives' contributions to the economy. In Phase 2, the snapshot has been updated with new insights and recent developments, including:

**Latest Data:** Overview of 715 registered cooperatives in Fiji, including 62 women-led cooperatives, their contribution to economic growth, and sectoral presence across all regions.

**Policy Initiatives:** The National Development Plan 2025–2029 and Vision 2050 recognize cooperatives as vital to community development, supported by a new national cooperative database and a dedicated Cooperative Development Fund.

### Case Studies:

- Expanding Fiji's Fresh Produce Exports: The Success of Nature's Way Cooperative
- Balancing growth and conservation: Drawa Block Forest Communities Cooperative (DBFCC)
- Ecotourism and Community Growth: Tavoro Forest Park Co-operative Limited
- Financial Security for Fijian Educators: Fijian Teachers Association Co-operative Thrift Ltd

**International Engagement:** Fiji continues to actively engage in regional and global cooperative platforms, including UNDESA capacity-building workshops, and the Asia-Pacific Ministers' Conference, highlighting its commitment to cooperative growth.

Read the full snapshot [here](#).



## Member Updates

### Fiji Launches IYC 2025



*Picture credits: Department of Cooperatives, Fiji*

On 27 March, the Prime Minister of Fiji, Mr. Sitiveni Rabuka officially launched the UN International Year of Cooperatives (IYC) 2025 in the country. Reaffirming Fiji's strong commitment to cooperative-led development, he highlighted Fiji's tradition of *solesolevaki* (community collaboration) and underscored the alignment between local values and cooperative principles. He praised the impact of Fiji's 700+ registered cooperatives, which support over 40,000 members, manage 151 million dollars in assets, and contribute significantly to rural development, environmental sustainability, and economic empowerment.

He announced the launch of a National Cooperative Database and presented Cooperative Development Fund certificates to six cooperatives to further strengthen the sector. Calling on Fijian youth to lead with innovation and sustainability, the Prime Minister positioned the IYC 2025 as a global platform for Fiji to share its cooperative success story and champion resilience, sustainability, and inclusive growth.

Read the original news [here](#).

### BBSSL and ICRISAT Sign MoU to Boost India's Agricultural Sector through Mutual Cooperation





*Picture Credits: Indian cooperative*

Bharatiya Beej Sahakari Samiti (BBSSL), an ICA member from India has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) to support farmers with climate-resilient, high-quality seeds. The agreement, signed in the presence of BBSSL Chairman Mr. Yogendra Kumar, aims to boost sustainable agriculture and crop productivity. BBSSL, supported by the Indian Farmer Fertilizer Cooperative (IFFCO), plans to use this partnership to introduce advanced seed technologies that help farmers tackle climate challenges. This follows recent agreements BBSSL signed with top agricultural research institutions like IARI, PAU, and others to develop high-yield, disease-resistant seeds under the 'Bharat Beej' brand. The initiative also aligns with government schemes to ensure timely seed availability through various marketing channels. Read the original news [here](#).

### Indo-Sri Lanka Cooperation Summit 2025



The Indo-Sri Lanka Cooperation Summit 2025, organized by the Indo-Sri Lanka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ISCCI), took place on 10 March at KRIBHCO Bhawan in Noida, marking a significant milestone in strengthening ties between India and Sri Lanka. The event was sponsored by ICA member, Krishak Bharti Cooperative Ltd. (KRIBHCO) in celebration of the International Year of Cooperatives 2025.

The summit was graced by the Hon'ble Governor of Mizoram, Dr. V. K. Singh, General (Retd.), who attended as the Chief Guest. Several other dignitaries attended the Summit including Mr. M. R. Sharma, Managing Director of KRIBHCO, Lt. Gen. Rakesh Kumar Loomba (Retd.), Chairman of ISCCI, Dr. Naresh Bana, Vice Chairman of ISCCI, and Mr. B. N. Bankapur, Distinguished Advisor to ISCCI, alongside other eminent speakers.

Mr. S. S. Yadav, Director (HR), Mr. Manish Kumar, Director (Finance), and Dr. C. S. Azad, Executive Director (Tech) from KRIBHCO were also present during the summit alongside other senior officials.

The summit featured three well-structured sessions, each with a panel of four speakers who shared their expertise and engaged in interactive discussions with the audience on the focus sectors like Infrastructure, Power, Hydrocarbon, Sustainability, Tourism, etc. KRIBHCO highlighted its significant contributions to the cooperative movement, as well as various avenues for enhancing collaboration between India and Sri Lanka.

*Note: The article was contributed by the Public Relations division of KRIBHCO.*

## NCUI Organizes the First National Youth Cooperative Research Conference in India



The National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) successfully hosted the first Youth Cooperative Research Conference to mark the International Year of Cooperatives 2025 (IYC 2025). Organized by NCUI's Public Relations and Publications Division, the conference provided a platform for young scholars under the age of 40 to present papers on the theme *"Cooperatives: Key for Achieving SDGs."*

The conference was inaugurated by Dr. Sudhir Mahajan, Chief Executive of NCUI, in the presence of dignitaries like Prof. C. Pitchai (Gandhigram Rural Institute, Tamil Nadu), and Mr. Ved Prakash Setia (Executive Director, NCUI). Dr. Mahajan emphasized the pivotal role of cooperatives in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), citing NCUI's initiatives such as NCUI Haat, Coop Kitchen, and the NCUI Incubation Centre. He encouraged young researchers to focus on the practical applications of their findings to enhance cooperative impact.

Dr. Yashwant Dongre, Vice-Chancellor of Chanakya University and Chair of the ICA-AP Research Committee, in his inspirational keynote speech, underscored the need for research that not only addresses local challenges but also contributes to the global cooperative movement.

A stimulating panel discussion on *"Cooperatives, Youth, and the SDGs"* featured Prof. C. Pitchai, Mr. Sanjay Verma, Adviser, NCUI as key speakers and was moderated by Dr. Shrija Sinha from NCUI. The discussion delved into the importance of youth engagement in cooperatives and their role in advancing sustainable development.

The conference hosted four technical sessions featuring 16 research presentations. Selected case studies showcased interesting cooperative perspectives, including:

- SEWA's Srujan Cooperative – Empowering Women Artisans
- VYBECOS Ponnurunni Model – An urban waste management cooperative
- Health Cooperatives – focusing on their role in advancing SDGs
- Cooperatives in India's Gig and Platform Economy
- Use of Digital Platforms & AI in Cooperatives

Mr. Ganesh Gopal, Lead - Environment & Agriculture at ICA-AP presented a paper exploring the potential of cooperatives in strengthening sustainable and inclusive digital economies. His study examined successful digital cooperative models and their applicability in the Asia-Pacific region. Mr. Gopal emphasized the transformational potential of digital platforms in enabling cooperative growth, bridging gaps in financial inclusion, and strengthening supply chain sustainability. His presentation provided an approach to integrating technology and cooperative governance for long-term impact, particularly in the context of the gig and platform economy in India.

During the valedictory function, Mr. Santosh Shukla, General Manager of IFFCO was the Chief Guest. He highlighted the importance of youth participation in IYC 2025 and commended NCUI's Coop Connect initiative for effectively engaging young people in cooperative enterprises.

The conference concluded with the distribution of participation certificates to research scholars, recognizing their contributions to cooperative research. With a strong focus on innovation and sustainability, the first Youth Cooperative Research Conference set the stage for future academic collaborations and cooperative advancements.

## Policy and Legal Watch

ICA Highlights the Power of Cooperatives in Transforming Care at UN CSW



*Picture credits: ICA*

On 11 March, the Committee on the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC), the Government Offices of Sweden, and We Effect, in collaboration with Cooperatives Europe and the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) hosted a side event at the 69th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69). Held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 10 to 21 March, CSW69 focused on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly.

The event highlighted cooperatives as an innovative pathway to empower communities and transform care systems. The session, titled *“Collectively Transforming Care Systems with a Multi-Sectoral Approach,”* centered the discussion on recognizing, reducing, redistributing, and rewarding care work—especially the burden carried by women. Participants called for decent working conditions, fair wages, and greater investment in cooperative care solutions as a pathway to sustainable development. Read the original news [here](#).

### Cooperatives’ Contribution to SDG 5: Policy Brief by COPAC and ICA

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#### **Building a Better World Together: Cooperative Contributions to the SDGs**

**Achieve gender equality and  
empower all women and girls**

As part of the *Building a Better World Together* policy brief series for the 2025 UN International Year of Cooperatives, a new brief on SDG 5 – Gender Equality, released in March 2025, highlights how cooperatives are driving meaningful change.

Developed by the Committee on the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) and the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), to mark International Women’s Day, the brief showcases real-world examples from women-led cooperatives in Ladakh (India) to inclusive models in Ukraine, demonstrating how cooperatives empower women, foster equity, and challenge systemic barriers.

The brief is available in [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#).

The Ministry of Cooperation is Set to Establish the National Cooperative University in India





*Picture credits: Indian Cooperative*

In a landmark move for India's cooperative movement, the Tribhuvan Sahkari University Bill 2025, has been passed in both houses of the Parliament, paving the way for the establishment of India's first National Cooperative University. Spearheaded by Union Minister for Home and Cooperation Mr. Amit Shah, the bill marked a historic step toward strengthening cooperative education and skill development across the country.

The university, named after Mr. Tribhuvan Das Patel, a pioneer of India's cooperative movement, will evolve from the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA), transforming it into a world-class institution dedicated to cooperative studies. It aims to offer diploma, degree, PhD, and short-term certificate courses tailored to the cooperative sector's unique needs.

Passed by voice vote in Parliament, the bill reflects the government's commitment to the vision of "Sahkar Se Samridhi" (Prosperity through Cooperation). Recognized as an institution of national importance, the university will focus on cooperative governance, management, innovation, and rural entrepreneurship, aligning with Central Government reservation and inclusion policies.

Minister Shah emphasized that the university will empower rural communities, promote self-employment, and help cooperatives compete with corporates. With a shared curriculum and structured training programs, it is poised to energize India's 8 lakh cooperative societies and their 30 crore members.

With the bill now passed, there is growing optimism as it marks a transformative step forward for both India's cooperative sector and education system.

Read the official press releases here – [26 March](#) and [01 April](#).



## UPCOMING EVENTS

- COOP Colloquium 13 by ICA-AP Research Committee on *“Focus on Research methods. Using comparative case studies in cooperative research”* – 29 April 2025. [Register here](#).
- International Day of Cooperatives – 5 July 2025
- ICA General Assembly in Manchester, UK – 2 to 5 July 2025
- ToT on climate change and action for women cooperators by ICA-AP Committee on Women in Indonesia – 7 to 11 July 2025
- ICA-AP Regional Board Meeting in China – 23 July 2025
- Cooperative Entrepreneurship: Shaping a Sustainable Future in PNG – 19 to 21 August 2025
- Expo and Cooperative Forum on Trade and Development in Shanghai, China – 5 to 10 November 2025
- Asia-Pacific Research Conference in Sri Lanka – 23 to 25 November 2025
- ICA-AP Regional Board Meeting in Sri Lanka – 24 November 2025
- 17th ICA-AP Regional Assembly and Board Elections in Sri Lanka – 24 to 28 November 2025