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Issue 2 - March 2000



ICA President's International Women's Day Message

At the end of the second millennium, which has been marked by huge advances in terms of human and technical sciences and technology, mankind has been able to conquer diseases, to reduce degrading work conditions, to increase food production, and even to reach the moon. In this list of progress, nothing has been more important than the gradual victory of women in affirming their inalienable rights. Subservience, prejudice, inequality of treatment, injustice--all products of a medieval mentality--have been slowly removed or reduced, thanks to the determination and the fighting spirit of countless women leaders around the world. Nevertheless, it is incredible to see that some countries are returning to medieval behaviour codes for women, especially in terms of preventing them from working.

Fortunately, in the vast majority of countries, women's rights have been increasingly recognised. In some cases this has happened quickly, in others less so due to local cultural conditions. But almost everyone today realises that women's equality of treatment is a human and legal imperative that must become a reality in the near future.

The International Co-operative Alliance calls upon all its members to seek, in their co-operatives, a favourable environment for women's involvement, and to stimulate and promote their equal participation, in view of the fact that their contribution to work, their dedication, and their intelligence will greatly strengthen the world-wide co-operative movement.

[Roberto Rodrigues, ICA President](#)

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UNCTAD Creates New Opportunities for Civil Society

The ministerial conference of UNCTAD (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), held in Bangkok in February, has been described as a "second chance" for the world community to deal with global trade issues after the World Trade Organisation's disastrous meeting in Seattle in December 1999.

ICA was represented at the meeting by Zahid Qureshi, Vice-President of Communications and Development of ICMIF, the International Co-operative and Mutual Insurance Federation. He spoke at the conference session where the keynote speaker was Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO.

According to Mr. Qureshi, there has now been a shift in UNCTAD's priorities back to its original role of a forum for governments to sort out trade and development issues, in part as a reaction to the Seattle debacle. Delegates also supported UNCTAD's "partners for development" initiative, in which the private sector and civil society play a much greater role than is possible within the WTO.

One immediate result of this decision is that UNCTAD has agreed to support a microfinance insurance project in the Philippines in collaboration with ICMIF.

[Bruce Thordarson](#)

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ICA Participates in the Discussion on Sustainable Agriculture

ICA will participate in the upcoming UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-8), which focuses on progress in implementing the Rio agreements on environment development. Each year the CSD reviews progress in four areas. This year agriculture is one the issues to be addressed.

Working with members of the International Agri-Food Network IAFN (in which ICA participates), a business sector delegation is presently being identified. Co-operative representatives will be part of the business sector (or IAFN group) in the discussions on sustainable agriculture - "the multi-stakeholder dialogue segment" of the meeting. The dialogue segment will be held on Monday 24 April and Tuesday 25 April 2000 in New York (USA) at the United Nations Headquarters.

The purpose of the multi-stakeholder segment is to generate action-oriented dialogue between governments and major groups (business, farmers, trade unions, NGOs) on sustainable agriculture and to identify future policies and actions that increase the positive impact of agriculture on sustainable development objectives.

Within the business delegation, ICA is coordinating input to topic 3 and is in the process of identifying a number of co-operators who can reply to questions from governments, farmer groups, NGOs and trade unions related to the agri-business sectors activities to promote sustainable development. Confirmed participants to date include Mr Roberto Rodrigues, ICA President, Mr Mohamed Idris, Central Agricultural Co-operative Union (Egypt) Mr. Shil Kwan Lee, ICAO Secretary-General, Mr. Hasle Nielsen, Secretary-General of Federation of Danish Co-operatives (Danske Andelsselskaber) and Ms. Martha Cashman, Vice-President of International Programmes of Land O'Lakes (USA).

A 16 page background paper has been produced by the business sector for the session. It is available in draft version on the UN web site at: <http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/cn17/2000/ecn172000-3add1.pdf>. Further information on the UN CSD-8 can be found at http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd8/csd8_2000.htm. Information on the IAFN can also be found at: <http://www.agrifood.net>.

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ICA Continues work with World Bank on Commodity Risk Management

ICA has over the past year participated in the work of an International Task force on Commodity Risk Management in Developing Countries, convened by the World Bank. The ITF is working to help small-scale farmers and consumers in poor countries to insure themselves against sharp fluctuations in commodity prices. The plan advocates the creation of an international "intermediary" which would increase access to commodity price risk insurance in developing countries - offering price floor guarantees for producers and price ceiling guarantees for consumers. Co-operatives and farmers' organizations are among the organizations being examined for case studies.

Mr. Bernard Kadasia of ROECSA and Mr. Ada Kibora of ROWA have been particularly active in assisting the Bank by identifying co-operatives with which the Bank could start test cases. Mr. Kibora will also participate in the upcoming ITF meeting in Rome in mid-March which will review several potential test cases to scope out the feasibility and adaptability of the proposed market-based approach for commodity risk management in developing countries, and, discuss future institutional participation and collaboration during the test case phase of plan.

For more information on the International Task Force on Commodity Risk Management can be found at <http://www.itf-commrisk.org/>

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Progress on UN Guidelines

In late December 1999, the United Nations General Assembly examined the draft guidelines aimed at creating a supportive environment for the development of cooperatives included in the UN Secretary-General's report on co-operatives. The guidelines were drafted by the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC) of which ICA is a member and were widely distributed to the co-operative movement to ensure that it reflected the views of the movement.

The UN General Assembly fell just short of adopting the guidelines. Instead it adopted a resolution entitled "Cooperatives and Social Development" (A/RES/54/123) which welcomes the draft, but requests UN member states to submit their views on the draft and provide, if necessary, a revised version of the Guidelines for adoption at the 56th General Assembly in 2001.

The full resolution and excerpts of the discussions are found at <http://www.copacgva.org/guidelines-progress.htm>.

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ILO Issues Comprehensive Report on Co-operatives

In March 1999, at its 274th Session, the ILO Governing Body decided to include in the agenda of the 89th Session (2001) of the International Labour Conference the question of the promotion of cooperatives, with a view to adopting a revised standard in the year 2002 to replace the existing Cooperatives (Developing Countries) Recommendation, 1966 (No. 127).

In preparation for the discussions, ILO has recently published a comprehensive report on the Promotion of Cooperatives which is being sent to ILO member institutions. It includes a questionnaire to enable the collection of feedback on specific experience in promoting cooperatives. The report is available in printed format in English, French and Spanish.

It is available in electronic format (PDF files) on the ILO web site.:

English: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc89/pdf/rep-v-1.pdf>

French: <http://www.ilo.org/public/french/standards/relm/ilc/ilc89/pdf/rep-v-1.pdf>

Spanish: <http://www.ilo.org/public/spanish/standards/relm/ilc/ilc89/pdf/rep-v-1.pdf>

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Arab Co-operatives Develop Trade Opportunities

Co-operatives from Kuwait, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt have decided to establish a Commercial Office in Beirut for co-operative import and export trade in agricultural commodities and inputs.

The decision was made at a regional seminar on the role of consumer co-operatives organised by the ICA's new Office for North Africa and the Arab World, which is located in Cairo. The seminar, held in collaboration with the Arab Co-operative Union, took place in Kuwait from February 14-17, 2000, under the chairmanship of Mohamed Idris.

Human resource development and management training is another regional priority, according to ICA-NAAW Director Wagdy Azmy. A seminar on lobbying techniques is also planned to be held this year.

Mr. Azmy also reported that, as a result of the Kuwait seminar, several organisations have expressed interest in joining ICA.

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A New Insurance Co-operative is Formed

On March 24, the Federation of Cooperative Loans and Savings Organizations of Honduras (FACACH) will officially launch the insurance company *Seguros Cooperativos Equidad Ltda.*, endorsed by the National Banking and Insurance Commission of Honduras in August 1999. The launching and the official ceremony of the Regular Assembly of FACACH will take place at the Princess Hotel in Tegucigalpa.

The company has been authorized to offer insurance services to the Cooperative System of Honduras. Representatives from other local and related companies from Central America and Panama will attend this meeting. The reinsurance officers are members of the Federation of Insurance Cooperative Organizations and Mutual Benefit Societies. Support on advisory services is provided by the regional office of this Federation, the Association of Insurance Mutual Benefit Societies and Cooperative Organizations of the Americas (AAC/MIS).

The initial capital amounts to Lps. 15,000,000.00 and the latest premium to Lps. 14,041,000.00. FACACH is positioned throughout the country and, as a distribution means, they make use of 98 cooperative organizations affiliated to FACACH.

[Ronaldo Alvarez](#)

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New Co-operative Institute in Canada

Ian MacPherson, internationally recognised as the coordinator of the ICA's 1995 Co-operative Identity Statement, has been appointed Director of the new British Columbia Institute for Co-operative Studies at the University of Victoria, Canada.

The Institute, which opened in January 2000, will be devoted to research, teaching, and community activities in the interdisciplinary field of co-operative studies. It will collaborate with similar co-operative centres in Canada and in other countries.

The Institute's initial focus will be in seven areas: expanding access to co-operative studies, co-operatives among First Nations people, forestry co-operatives, fishery co-operatives, social co-operatives, training programmes for co-operative leaders, and analysing the market effectiveness of co-operative enterprise.

The Institute also plans to develop a national co-operative education network, including a national web site and a "metadatabase" for co-operatives that would include press clippings, photographs, case studies, statistics, and research reports.

The Institute's address:

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New President for the Desjardins Movement

The Mouvement Desjardins announced last week the election of Mr. Alban D'Amours to the office of President of the Mouvement des caisses Desjardins for a first term of four years. Mr. D'Amours will take over from Mr. Claude Béland, who has been President of the Mouvement since January 20, 1987. Although elected President, he will not officially take office until the organisation's AGM which is scheduled to take place in Québec City on March 25.

Mr. D'Amours has been a member of the Desjardins movement executive for 12 years. He was appointed Inspector and Auditor General for the Mouvement Desjardins in 1994 after having held the positions of Senior Vice President and Chief Development and Auditing Officer, and Senior Vice President, Planning, Communications and Marketing. Mr. D'Amours is also a member of the Board of Directors of Desjardins' security fund, the Corporation de fonds de sécurité de la Confédération Desjardins.

Before joining the Desjardins movement, Mr. D'Amours worked in the provincial public service from 1981 to 1987 as Deputy Minister of Revenue, and Associate Deputy Minister of Energy.

The Mouvement des caisses Desjardins is the largest financial institution and private employer of the Canadian province of Québec, Canada, with total assets close to \$76 billion and some 41,000 employees.

For further information contact André Chapleau, at (001) 514 281 7229.

Mary Treacy

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UK's Biggest Co-ops Head for Mega-Merger

The UK's two principal co-operative societies, CWS (Co-operative Wholesale Society) and CRS (Co-operative Retail Services), are poised on the brink of merging into what would become Europe's largest consumer co-op with combined annual sales of 4.7 billion pounds sterling.

CRS has run up heavy losses in recent years and was forced to sell its department stores and Homeworld chain of out-of-town furnishing outlets to pay off substantial bank loans. CWS is trading profitably, however, and is enjoying considerable success in many areas of its business, most notably in convenience stores, retail travel and financial services.

The merger, which has been the subject of on/off talks for more than a decade, received the overwhelming support of the CRS main board in January and was due to be put before a special general meeting of members in March.

CRS chief executive Andy Meehan admitted there would be job losses as a result of the merger, but stressed that these would be "a small number of hundreds - less than 1 per cent of the total combined workforce of 50,000". He added: "Working together as one retail force will deliver enormous benefits in respect of cost savings, buying power, operating efficiencies, marketing and promotional strategy."

CWS chief executive Graham Melmouth, former president of the ICA, commented: "The proposal which the CRS board is now presenting to its members has my whole-hearted support and indeed that of the CWS management and board. The business case is overwhelmingly in favour of a merger and the proposal would bring together the commercial strengths of both organisations while respecting the democratic traditions of each party and - importantly - offering a long term viable co-operative future for members and employees of our two societies."

Welcoming the proposals, the independent weekly Co-operative News commented: "CRS members should take a leap of faith and grasp the opportunity with both hands. A Yes vote is the way ahead."

(Source: Iain Williamson, Communications Consultant)

[Gabriella Sozánski](#)

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First Asia-Pacific Co-operative Forum

The highlight for this year will be **the Fourth Regional Assembly** that will be held in Singapore on June 29, 2000. A two-day FORUM, called the **First Asia Pacific Co-operative Forum**, will be held prior to the Regional Assembly on June 27 and 28, 2000. The idea of the Forum is to try to address and debate the most current social and economic issues facing co-operatives in the region, with the view of seeking new directions that the Regional Assembly can consider and which will ultimately bring benefit to co-operative members. This Forum will be somewhat patterned after the Economic Forum for East Asia (the regional "DAVOS forum"), inviting well-known speakers and co-operative leaders-cum-practitioners to present the issues, and for co-operative leaders to respond to it. This is the first time ever that ICA ROAP will also be inviting co-operative leaders from primary and secondary co-operatives to participate at their own cost, not just co-operative policy makers and governments like in the past. The theme will be "*Co-operatives in the 21st Century: Are we changing?*", a new innovation for bringing co-operative people together as we enter the New Millennium.

With the support of the Singapore National Co-operative Federation (SNCF), ICA's strong and dedicated member in the region, we can look forward to an enriching and colorful event.

[Robby Tulus](#)

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Progress in Iran

The massive turnout (more than 80% of eligible voters) for the Parliamentary Elections and the overwhelming support for reform (more than 70% of the 290 parliamentary seats) are clear indications that Iran is moving towards greater democracy. In July 1999, and more recently in Beijing, co-operative leaders and a number of government officials from Iran have shown their active involvement in various ICA ROAP activities. No less than the Honorable Minister of Co-operatives himself has requested the ICA ROAP to play a greater role in helping the movement in Iran to advance their co-operative growth and development. ICA ROAP's Director of South, West and Central Asia (SOWECA), B.D. Sharma, visited with co-operative leaders, as well as the government of Iran in December 1999. Mr. Sharma confirmed the commitment and willingness of the co-operative movement and the Government in Iran to promote and enhance co-operative development in the country, for which they are seeking the close co-operation of ICA ROAP.

The co-operative movement has great potential in helping to build socio-economic strength of urban and rural communities in Iran, as reflected from the following facts and figures.

There are 52,125 cooperatives with a membership of more than 15 millions. Of these, 46,948 are under the administrative control of the Ministry of Cooperatives; Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Jihad respectively.

These cooperatives have made significant contribution to the national economy. Important highlights of their contribution are as follows:

- Provide employment to 8.43% of population
- Produce 34% of fish and 23.52% of poultry
- Control 85% of urban passenger travel and command 48.55% of road transport
- Distribute 25% of consumer goods
- Control 26.5% of urban construction activity

Worth noting is also the fact that there are strong *Rural Women's Cooperatives* in operation. According to current statistics, there exist 83 rural women's cooperatives with more than 14,620 members. They have been registered after a series of training activities were held, and are now fully operational throughout the country. One of the main requirements for the registration and establishment of a rural women's cooperative is that its key staff, i.e. the chairperson, managing director and controllers must be the female local residents of the village where the cooperative is located.

The Honorable Minister of Co-operatives has indicated the Iranian Government's willingness to host the next ICA Regional Consultation on Government-Movement relations in Teheran in the year 2001, as key precursor to the Sixth Asia Pacific Co-operative Ministers' Conference, scheduled for 2002 in Kathmandu, Nepal.

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New Forum for Co-operatives in the New Millennium

A new on-line community called "Cooperatives in the New Millennium" has recently been created. To access the site please go to the following URL: <http://www.delphi.com/cooperation>. Then scroll down and click on message board to join the on-line discussion in this forum. Or you can access the site at <http://www.coop.org/forum.html>.

This initiative is coming from a request from the ICA President to look into technology to help improve communications within the ICA and the movement in general and so it is intended as a pilot for things to come. However, it will only work with your help.

Please feel free to contribute to on-going discussions, start discussions on the issues which are of interest to you, and use this site to get opinions, information and advice from fellow co-operators. And please spread the message by sending the URL of this site to your fellow cooperators.

This forum is simple to use. With the message board, you can view discussion folders quickly in the left-hand column and read up to 20 messages at a time. You can even attach files (such as pictures and programs) directly to messages -- just like e-mail. It's fast, easy, and efficient.

The other options include real-time Chat, voice chat, and polls.

If this forum works it could be a model which we could use to increase communications within the ICA and the coop movement worldwide. Future forums can be private if that is what is required but this Forum is public so anyone can participate, so feel free to tell your colleagues, friends and other cooperators who might be looking for a place where they can

- join in round table discussions
- converse about shared interests and passions
- get expert opinion and advice
- keep in touch with other co-operators and friends around the world
- debate current events and trends
- plan projects and events

You'll need to go through a quick registration to participate but it only takes a minute and it's free! I'm eager to hear comments and suggestions. Let's get the conversation started!

Mary Treacy

Last updated: 4 April 2002



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Youth Co-operators Make Things Move...

Youth is one of the issues that the international community is facing nowadays. How shall we insure the take over of our activities?

Fortunately, young people see for themselves that co-operative ideals are the way to build sustainable development.

Asia and the Pacific region is very active in promoting youth co-operators through supporting student co-ops and organising youth camps to promote co-operatives.

While youth co-ops' activities are mainly held at a national level, a youth co-operators list serve has been established in Asia for exchange of information and good practices on a regional level. You can join as a member by subscribing to youthnet@univcoop.or.jp

The student co-ops in the Philippines is organising a National Youth Camp which will be held on May 5 to 7, 2000.. It aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. to develop a deeper awareness and appreciation of cooperatives;
2. to share, evaluate and monitor existing youth co-op programmes implemented such as: Vision 2000 and the National Youth Development Plan;
3. to attract the participants on the National Youth Savings Mobilization (NYSM);
4. to serve as a training on co-op education and the NYSM.

During the event, the following topics will be addressed

- Coop Basic Values, Translation and Adaptation of the New Coop Identity
- Cooperatives and Why they are Important
- Youth Involvement in Cooperatives, Why They are Important and exciting new developments
- The National Youth Savings Mobilization (NYSM) and its Possibilities
- How to be an Effective Coop and NYSM Trainor

For further information, please contact: [Saidee Singson](#), the coordinator.

In addition, the Regional Office of the Americas (ROAM) will be hosting a global e-conference, "Co-operative Youth and the Environment", to be held from March 1-3, 2000. This conference aims to bring together youth from around the world to discuss the important environmental issues confronting the international community at the dawn of the 21st Century and to consider what role the co-operative movement may play in this increasingly critical area. This conference will include video presentations from a number of contributors, including Dr. Roberto Rodrigues, President of ICA Global, and Oscar Arias,

1987 Nobel Peace Prize recipient and former President of the Republic of Costa Rica.

For further information, please contact [ICA Regional Office of the Americas](#)

(Sources: Youth Co-operators in Asia and The Pacific list serve and News from ROAM)

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