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ICA to strengthen collaboration with development partners

ICA met over the weekend 10-11 February in Marburg (Germany) with its development partners. The aim of the workshop was generally to strengthen collaboration between ICA and its development partners. More specifically, it was to identify areas and issues -sectorial or thematic - where ICA could add value to its development partners' efforts – and vice versa.

The outcome of the workshop was very positive, says Jan-Eirik Imbsen, “The 30 participants found a lot of common ground with ICA, not least the need to strengthen co-operative identity and image and exposure of ‘best practices’ highlighting what co-operatives can achieve in practice.

Participants came from organisations including the World Council of Credit Unions, the International Co-operative and Mutual Insurance Federation, NORCOOP, Swedish Co-operative Centre, the Canadian Co-operative Association and Central Union of Consumer Societies of Russia.

[Karl-Johan Fogelström](#)

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A rewarding placement

Canadian coffee shops are often the main meeting point within a community. They allow for reflection and dialogue among friends. Planet Bean Coffee Shop, a workers co-op, has certainly been such a place for me. It was there that I first learnt about the internship opportunity with the International Co-operative Alliance offered through the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). This particular day while discussing and sharing future life and career aspirations with members of our campus co-op, a friend presented this great international and potentially life-changing opportunity to me.

As an executive member of our campus co-op for a number of years and also a university student working in leadership and community development, I was excited at the possibility of continuing my work in these areas. Unlike other career options, this internship intrigued me as it involved the unique opportunity of gaining a more in-depth knowledge of global issues through personal experience. My previous positions provided me with a good understanding of issues at the local level. This internship, on the other hand, would allow me to gain a more in-depth regional and international perspective. I jumped at the chance to work at the Regional Office of International Co-operative Alliance in Nairobi, Kenya. It has been a decision that I have not regretted. My placement at ICA has proven to be very rewarding.

Internships are designed to offer recent graduates the opportunity to gain valuable experience in the international development setting by attaining new knowledge and skill sets, enhancing understanding of global issues, and a deepened cultural experience. (For more information on the CCA internship programme, go to <http://www.coopcca.com/youth/yei.htm>)

Here, in Nairobi, at the regional office, my activities have involved three main areas. Currently, I am researching possible strategies to collect and organise relevant information on co-operatives in the region. Such data would be used to further assess the impact of specific interventions. I am also proposing that a forum be held among interested co-op stakeholders which would open up dialogue on the formation of a co-operative databank. Such a databank would allow information to be easily accessible to members and to those interested in co-operatives.

Throughout my time here, I have improved my knowledge of the ICA and its mandate. This has been achieved through discussions with regional office staff members and through extensive reading of relevant co-operative texts.

I also work on organising published materials emerging from the region. The aim of this is to increase awareness of the many substantial co-operative resources available to members and others interested in the co-operative movement. In this regard, we are focusing on the newly created Africa region web site that will contain resource material published by ICA.

While completing the tasks assigned to this placement, I have had the opportunity to work alongside very knowledgeable staff members who have provided invaluable insights and perspective on the co-operative movement.

The knowledge I have gained has given me a solid understanding of co-operatives that will be of great help in my future endeavours. I plan on attending graduate school in the following year to pursue higher studies in the field of co-operative development and participatory democracy.

I look forward to returning to the region, hopefully, to conduct graduate level research. It will be a pleasure to further my understanding of the region, to meet new and old friends and enjoy more FairTrade kahawa, and perhaps a cup or two of Kenyan chai.

[Canadian Intern](#)

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Dot coop: It's coming!

ICA and its partners the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA) and Poptel are working to make dot coop, the new global and future-oriented Internet identity for co-operatives, available as soon as possible.

Dot coop is reserved for co-operatives only and will provide them with global visibility to improve their image, market their difference, promote e-business, and attract new members.

ICA and its partners are working on both the policy and technical issues related to running and managing dot coop. However the actual date on which co-ops will be able to register their dot coop name depends on when contracts with the Internet Assigned Names and Numbers Corporation (ICANN) can be signed. Although there is no indication from ICANN of when this may happen, ICA and its partners are hoping that co-operatives will be able to register under dot coop by the second half of 2001.

In the meantime, ICA members are encouraged to prepare for this unique opportunity by identifying the name or names that they would like to register under dot coop and check the ICA web site for updated news.

The domain will be available to large and small co-operatives around the world. Do not miss the opportunity to clearly demonstrate your co-operative identity on the Internet.

Background on dot coop: <http://www.coop.org/dotcoop.html>

Latest planning meeting: <http://www.coop.org/dotcoopmeet1.html>

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Asian credit unions exploring on-line financial services

Credit union leaders in Asia are pushing forward the development of online financial services in their organisations. A priority in utilising advanced information technology to serve members better is to combine resources and establish nationwide networks.

These steps are being taken following a workshop on “Exploring Technology for Online Financial Services in Credit Unions” which the ICA Regional Office for Asia & the Pacific and the Asian Confederation of Credit Unions (ACCU) jointly organised in Bangkok.

The workshop established that technology appropriate for credit unions, given their level of development, already exists in the market. This includes software and systems specifically developed for credit unions. Highlighted in the workshop were banking applications, network solutions and web based applications that will allow members to access credit union services through the Internet. Inputs were provided by the System Works Pty. Ltd. of Australia, Decentralized Banking Solutions of South Africa, and Fern Computer Services Ltd. of Ireland.

Access to online financial services has been a regular feature of credit union service to members in many parts of the world, particularly in North America and Europe says Romulo Villamin of ICA ROAP. “But for most of Asia, this is still a dream for credit union members. This is in spite of the fact that big credit unions can be found nowadays in many Asian countries. The purpose of the workshop was to improve on this situation.”

[Romulo Villamin](#)

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New Database on Co-operative Law

The Co-operative Branch of the International Labour Office (ILO) has recently launched a new database on co-operative legislation within the framework of their COOPREFORM an ILO-DANIDA programme on co-operative development in rural areas. The database contains the full text of the most updated co-operative legislation from a geographically diverse group of countries.

The laws included can be considered as "model laws" and are made available in English, French, or Spanish. The ICA Secretariat is collaborating with the ILO to increase the number of laws included in this new database. Links to the texts will also be included from a variety of existing co-operative legislative resources on the Internet including that of the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Co-operatives (COPAC).

Currently, the database holds co-operative laws from the following countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, CIS, Colombia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, India, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Madagascar, Morocco, Mongolia, Namibia, Nigeria, Philippines, Spain, and Vietnam.

Information on the database can be found on the ILO Co-operative Branch web site at:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/ent/coop/laws/index.htm>

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ILO begins its revision of its recommendation on co-operatives

The International Labour Office (ILO) will begin discussions in June 2001 on the revision of its Recommendation 127 on co-operatives in view of adopting a new universally applicable international standard. ICA has working with the ILO to ensure that new standard enable co-operatives to develop more fully their self-help potential, enhance their ability to address a number of current socio-economic problems and enable them to more effectively compete in the global marketplace. ILO has prepared two report to serve as a basis for the June discussions during the 89th Session of the International Labour Conference. The preliminary report - Promotion of Co-operatives - was accompanied by a questionnaire to which governments and ILO stakeholders including co-operative organizations were asked to reply. The second report includes a summary of the replies and indicates the main points that the Conference may wish to consider.

ICA encourages co-operative organizations to contact their Ministries of Labour to determine if a co-operative representative can be included in the governmental delegation to the ILO Conference to participate in the discussions on the new standard on co-operatives.

The ILO reports on co-operatives can be found on the ILO web site in English, French and Spanish at:

English - Promotion of Cooperatives:

Volume 1 (2000)

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

Volume 2 (2001)

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc89/pdf/rep-v-2.pdf>

Français - Promotion des coopératives:

Volume 1 (2000)

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

Volume 2 (2001)

<http://www.ilo.org/public/french/standards/relm/ilc/ilc89/pdf/rep-v-2.pdf>

Español - Promoción de cooperativas

Volume 1 (2000)

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

Volume 2 (2001)

<http://www.ilo.org/public/spanish/standards/relm/ilc/ilc89/pdf/rep-v-2.pdf>

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NCUI asks for aid in quake relief for Gujarat

The National Co-operative Union of India (NCUI) has called on the world co-operative movement to play a lead role in relief work for the recent earthquake in the western province of Gujarat in India which wreaked havoc, killing thousands of people, maiming several hundred thousands, devastating the entire region and leaving the poor people of the province shelterless, hungry and desolate. Several thousand co-operative members are among the hapless victims.

Small co-operative societies affiliated to the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Gujarat were also affected. Plants of the Indian Farmers' Fertilizer Co-operative (IFFCO), the fertilizer co-operative giant, were also damaged.

People in the quake-hit regions are facing numerous problems due to lack of basic amenities.

In this hour of crisis, it is the duty of the entire co-operative movement to come to the aid of our brethren in Gujarat and other quake-hit areas says Dr. S.S. Sisodia, president of NCUI. "I earnestly appeal to the co-operative community to take immediate initiatives to direct its efforts to support the needs of all those who have been affected by this tragedy."

The generous support of co-operators in cash and kind will not only provide a strong healing touch to the affected people, but will also go a long way in strengthening the bonds of co-operation, he adds. "We, at the ICA, solicit your support and request you to kindly send your valuable donation through bank draft/bank remittance in favour of the NCUI Gujarat Earthquake Relief Fund to the following address:

NCUI Gujarat Earthquake Relief Fund
National Co-operative Union of India
3, Siri Institutional Area
New Delhi 110 016, India

Or direct remittance to:

Syndicate Bank
Current Account No.523
2, Kaushalya Park, Hauz Khas
New Delhi 110 016, India"

All contributions will be consolidated at the National Co-operative Union of India and remitted to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund, says Dr. Sisodia. If desired, he adds, the donations can be sent directly to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund (for the address and other particulars, please send an e-mail to NCUI): root@ncuidel.ren.nic.in

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Representative of Singapore university studies Japanese co-operative Internet business

Professor Poo Gee Swee of The National University of Singapore, along with the chairperson of the University Co-op, visited Shutoken Co-op (Metropolitan Consumer Co-op Union) and Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union (JCCU), on December 8, to gather information about co-operative Internet businesses in Japan. The purpose was to explore the establishment of Internet business at university co-ops in Singapore.

The Japanese system of non-store sales through joint buying home delivery and individual home delivery was explained. "In order to understand co-op's Internet business, one must first have an understanding of the existing co-op merchandise distribution, payment, and overall business transactions system", says Professor Poo Gee Swee.

The home pages for Miyagi Co-op and Shutoken Co-op were visualised, followed by a demonstration of how the ordering system works. Professor Poo Gee Swee raised questions about the profitability of the Internet business and the percentage of homes in Japan that use personal computers and cell phones. Professor Poo Gee Swee noted that Japanese co-operatives can already provide important data and information for the future development of Internet business in Singapore, despite the fact that they have only just begun.

A relative paper: "Innovating joint buying system through IT" by Akira Kurimoto (JCCU) will be published in the Review of International Co-operation Vol 94 No 1 2001

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Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union and its members lobby for "Food Safety"

The Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union (JCCU) is organising study groups to discuss food safety by appealing to major political parties and has announced its basic policy on food safety.

Four such study groups on topics such as additives, residual pesticides, animal medicines and labeling have been held with the Liberal Democratic party since December. This is the first time JCCU has held sessions with the Liberal Democratic Party, the most powerful among political parties in Japan. Average attendance at these study sessions has been 20 parliamentary deputies.

With the Komeito Party, JCCU has organised one study group in which ten members participated. Through such exchanges with political parties, JCCU aims to pass a fundamental revision of the food safety law in the regular Diet session in 2001.

Meanwhile, a Committee for Policy and Decision Making for Food Safety, established in December 1997 has reported that the improvement of hygiene management standards is the most urgent task.

The committee notes that trust and confidence members place in co-op food safety standards have been the greatest contributing factor for the growth of co-ops.

It says that new products have been created through advances in science and technology for which current standards are not sufficient. Chemicals previously thought to be safe are now known to have an impact on the human body. There is also concern over contamination from E. Coli O-157 and the use of endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDC) and genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

In terms of the use of synthetic chemical substances in food production, co-ops plan to continue to restrict usage based on gross weight. However, the committee has made it clear that a new risk assessment system designed to measure and balance the degree of risks and benefits is an essential part of the process of setting standards. The task for the future is to strengthen co-ops' activities to better disseminate information and build social consensus in the process of formulating co-op policies so that these policies are addressed and reflect the demands of members and consumers alike.

The committee will now take its report to member co-ops for discussion, and JCCU's Merchandise Policy and other related regulations will be reassessed.

In a supporting move, co-ops throughout Japan are getting involved in a signature campaign for food safety to ask for amendments to the Food Sanitation Law. JCCU plans to present the petition to the session of the Diet scheduled for this coming spring. The targeted number of signatures was 10 million, reached on November 7. Signatures now exceed 12 million .

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Legacoop begins implementing ICA Gender Strategy

Taking the first step towards implementing ICA's Gender Strategy, Legacoop has undertaken a study with the support of Italy's Ministry of Labour and surveyed its more than 3,200 member societies.

The study shows that women in Italy are increasingly choosing co-operatives for entrepreneurial activities. It also shows that 51% of Legacoop's membership and 48% of jobs are held by women.

The study also showed that women are especially active in the new sectors of co-operative activity - social services, tourism, cultural activities (restoration) while continuing to hold nearly 50% of both membership and employment in the more traditional sectors of economic activity. However this increasing participation of women at the membership and employee levels has not been replicated at the decision-making levels. On average, women make up only 32% of the board of directors and hold the presidency of the board in only 23% of the organizations surveyed.

On a more positive note, the study shows that women are the majority of those involved in professional training, leading to the conclusion that the future looks bright in terms of gender balance at management levels. The collection and analysis of gender disaggregate data is only the first step. More in depth research will be needed to identify specific actions that will enable women entrepreneurs to participate more effectively in co-operatives and incorporate these elements into a larger Legacoop Gender Strategy.

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