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**Issue 5 - June 2000**



Co-operatives and Employment Promotion: Message from the ICA on the Occasion of the 78th ICA International Co-operative Day and 6th UN International Day of Co-operatives (1 July 2000)

Employment promotion is the theme of this year's 78th ICA International Co-operative Day, and the 6th UN International Co-operative Day. It was chosen in recognition of the Special Session of the UN General Assembly which will be held in Geneva from 26-30 June to discuss follow-up to the 1995 World Summit for Social Development.

The expansion of productive employment and the reduction of unemployment were among the top priorities in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. Both documents recognised the current and potential contribution of co-operatives for generating and maintaining quality employment in both rural and urban areas.

The United Nations estimated in 1994 that the livelihood of nearly 3 billion people, or half the world's population, was made secure by co-operative enterprises. More than 800 million individuals are members of co-operatives, which provide an estimated 100 million jobs. In a number of countries in Africa, the cooperative movement has become the second largest employer, surpassed only by the State. In this region, the majority of jobs have been created through the activities of agricultural cooperatives - production, marketing, and processing. In Europe alone, co-operatives provide employment to more than 5 million individuals. Five million is also the size of the staff in the All-China Federation of Supply and Marketing Co-operatives!

Worker-owned co-operatives are increasing in number all over the world. They already provide self-employment to millions of worker-owners in sectors as diverse as health and social services, public services, education, transport, and tourism. They are increasingly formed by professionals whose previous private or public employment has ended.

Co-operatives are not only major sources of employment in large-scale enterprises providing food stuffs, services to consumers, and financial services. They are also an important source of new job creation by providing enhanced employment opportunities. Financial cooperatives mobilize capital for productive investment and provide people with secure institutions for the deposit of savings which also encourage the formation of new enterprises and thus new jobs.

Co-operatives are also increasingly providing quality job opportunities for specific groups, such as youth, women, indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and the informal sector. Some are consumer-owned, some are worker-owned, and an increasing number are "multi-stakeholder" in nature. The ability of co-operatives to integrate women and youth into the workforce is

particularly important, as these vital human resources are badly under-utilised in many countries.

However, it is important to stress that co-operatives are business enterprises, not instruments of public policy. They create jobs by providing a mechanism that responds to market needs in an efficient way.

The goal of full employment requires that the State, the social partners, and civil society create conditions that enable everyone to participate in and benefit from productive and decent work. Co-operatives are making their contribution as business enterprises with a concern for the communities and environment in which they operate. In doing so, they also contribute to the protection of democratic governments, and even peace, which are increasingly threatened by the forces of economic and social exclusion.

This is why co-operatives also require and deserve a favourable policy environment in which to work. When co-operatives request changes to their national legislation, the adoption of UN guidelines, or the amendment of ILO's Recommendation 127, governments should understand that a supportive policy towards co-operatives will bring economic and social progress, not least in the key area of employment promotion.

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## The ICA World is getting bigger !

As was mentioned in the last E-news report from the ICA Board meeting in Tel Aviv in April, ICA now has seven new members from countries we did not have before, South Africa, Ghana, The Gambia, Australia, the Netherlands, Croatia, and Yugoslavia.

Several of those countries have had ICA members before, but South Africa had never been a member. The new member NCASA is an umbrella organisation for all types of co-ops - with both black and white members! - started with the help of the ICA regional office for East, Central and Southern Africa. Our Regional Director, Vincent Lubasi, could be considered as the "midwife"...

Another very encouraging new membership comes from Netherlands where the Nationale Co-operative Council for Agriculture and Horticulture (NCR) has joined. That is our first member for nearly 30 years in the Netherlands. The fact that ICA gets more and more agricultural members is very much depending on the contact work done by the two ICA Agricultural Advisors, seconded by NACF in Korea and by the Regional Director for Europe, Gabriella Sozánski.

Worth also mentioning is that we are back in Australia with two new members. The national Australian apex body left the ICA some five years ago after financial trouble, but now we see a new interest from Australian co-ops, this time at the state level.

The slow but steady net increases of ICA members make us now approaching some 250 members. That is the result of hard working staff both in the Head Office and the Regions, as well as an extensive travelling from several board members, with the ICA President Roberto Rodrigues spending more than a third of his time visiting not only the ICA membership but also the potential members.

[Mats Ahnlund](#)

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## ICA Communications Committee to Strengthen Role and Membership

The executive committee of the ICA Communications Committee has decided that the Committee should undertake a major drive to increase its membership, which has stagnated during recent years. During its meeting in Geneva on 25 May, under the chairmanship of Poul Dines of FDB Denmark, it decided to ask the ICA President to write to all ICA member organisations with a request to appoint a senior-level member--preferably a Director of Communications or Deputy Director--to the Committee.

The Committee will also reorient its activities in order to focus on helping the ICA to implement the communications-oriented parts of its new five-year action plan, as approved by the General Assembly last year in Quebec City. These include issues such as using information technology to develop new programmes for management training and trade, developing analytical criteria to measure the quality of co-operative performance, using the Internet, and developing a strategy to reach decision-makers, educators, young people, and the general public.

The Committee will hold its next meeting in Bratislava on 3 October, when it will discuss its new work programme. All ICA member organisations are invited to attend and to contribute their ideas.

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## Increased Collaboration with ICA Development

ICA's development programme is currently enjoying increased collaboration with some of its more recent partners. We welcome this opportunity to expand our network of partners, especially in view of the growing demand for our services.

### The Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Finland

The Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has since 1994 financed the highly successful ICA-FOPROPE project in Bolivia. The main objective of the project is to provide sustainable financial services to the rural population of the region. The project is now being evaluated by a team of experts. If the evaluation is positive, the Ministry will be asked to help finance a national project.

The Ministry has also recently approved a project in Tierra del Fuego in Argentina. This project will be implemented by ICA's Project Office in Buenos Aires in collaboration with the Institute of Co-operative Studies of the University of Helsinki.

In a recent visit to Finland, the ICA had constructive discussions with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. We appreciated the opportunity to learn more about Finland's policy on development co-operation, and were pleased to be given the opportunity to inform Ministry staff about the ICA in general and its development programme in particular. We hope that we will be able to continue our constructive collaboration in Bolivia and elsewhere, and look forward to working with them in the future.

A number of meetings were also held with University staff, and we foresee a closer collaboration, in particular with the Institute of Co-operative Studies. Before he left Helsinki, where he also made a presentation on ICA's programmes in Latin America at an exhibition organised by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the University of Helsinki, the Head of Development was given the opportunity to brief the President of Finland on ICA's project in Bolivia.

### New project agreement with DFID

The Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK, has agreed to finance a project in Kyrgyzstan. The project, entitled Managing Change - Supporting Co-operatives in Transition in Central Asia, will be implemented by ICA's Regional Office in New Delhi in partnership with the Kyrgyz Academy of Co-operation. The ICA has already an ongoing collaboration with DFID in East Africa.

### Development collaboration with ICMIF

Development collaboration with the ICMIF is nothing new. For years, the two organisations ran an insurance programme in East, Central and South Africa. There has also been collaboration in Asia and the Americas. The collaboration

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## ICA Specialised Bodies Hold Annual Consultation Meeting

The chairmen and/or secretaries of 11 of the 14 ICA Specialised Bodies participated in their annual consultation meeting at the ICA Head Office on 26 May.

Items on the agenda included the implications for the SBs of the ICA's five-year action plan, as approved by the General Assembly last year in Quebec City, the liaison role of ICA Board members with the SBs, the ICA's new gender strategy, and common interests in promoting co-operative development. The SBs also provided updates on their recent activities and future plans.

The SB leaders agreed that they should implement the main features of the ICA's new gender strategy, including the establishment of a 30 percent goal for women elected leaders by 2005, participating in gender training sessions, and preparing an annual report on their progress in this area.

Another agenda item included a report prepared by CICOPA on how its development experience could be extended to other sectors in support of small and medium size co-operative development. Participants agreed to study the document and to inform ICA if they wish to participate in joint efforts of this kind.

Participants concluded that the utility of these consultation meetings would be further strengthened by the presence of the ICA Regional Directors at future meetings, and by establishing a common format for their reports.

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## Co-op Assessment in East Timor

On the recommendation of a study team of the Asian Development Bank who were in East Timor, the International Co-operative Alliance Regional Office for Asia & the Pacific undertook an assessment of existing financial co-operatives, primarily credit unions, in this newly independent country. The assessment was undertaken for two reasons: First, to develop a response by the international cooperative movement to the situation in East Timor. Second, to outline a "road map" for the development community interested particularly in credit unions as part of the effort to develop a financial system for the new country.

Such report will situate credit unions in the context of the development needs of East Timor. Since the credit unions of East Timor, like other institutions, suffered from the wholesale destruction of the country, this report will also identify the requirements for rehabilitating as well as strengthening them. The objective here is to encourage a systematic response to a local situation, given the need for external assistance.

Mr. Romy Villamin, Director for South East Asia, was assigned to undertake the assessment. It is interesting to note that there is one vital lesson learned from the assessment. The national tragedy that inflicted East Timor did not destroy the credit union movement, hence a very positive experience that members had of their credit unions. The banking system, mostly run by the government, that existed before the crisis did not cater to the financial needs of the general population. They mobilized deposits from the public but gave credit only to a select few. People in the rural areas hardly had access to them. Moneylenders therefore thrived everywhere. But for the growing membership of the credit unions, a real alternative existed. Here was an institution that they not only built with their own resources; the credit union was a veritable "bank" performing financial intermediation function for their benefit and for the benefit of the community.

The knowledge and skills acquired by credit union members and leaders are still fresh. Leaders are discussing ways of rebuilding. Members are asking when their credit unions will start operating again. They soon realize that the answers are not easy: With households reduced to subsistence level, means of livelihood gone and very little cash economy, credit unions especially in the rural areas will have to wait before functioning again. (One leader commented that even if they had funds now, they would not start lending because members will not have the means to repay their loans.) Credit unions in the population centers, on the other hand, could start earlier as the local economy gradually picks up.

There is indeed a great potential for the growth of a "second" wave of credit union development in this young country.

[Robby Tulus](#)

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## Interview with President of JA Zenchu

The President of JA Zenchu, Mutsutami Harada, was interviewed in the latest issue of IDACA News. Following are excerpts from that interview:

**Q:** With the year 2000 setting in, how do you look back on the past JA activities:

**A:** It is the 100th year since the Industrial Co-operative Law was enacted. During the 20th century, Japan's co-operatives grew as indispensable entities for rural communities... Today, 725 million people are members of co-operatives worldwide. In the 21st century, the role of co-operatives will, I think, become more and more significant socially and economically, and a new age of co-operatives will open up.

**Q:** The hard fact of young rural people leaving farming remains a serious problem. Yet a segment of the urban population, it seems, shows a growing interest in rural communities. What do you think of the changing rural society?

**A:** Since the postwar high growth period, Japan has maintained a priority for development, mass production, and mass consumption as a value.... Recently, people have begun to question lifestyles and are taking a second look at agriculture and farming villages. I believe that during the 21st century our society, currently centred on urban life, should shift to one respecting rural life. And to achieve this, the rural living environment must be improved and revitalised. Thanks to the development of the Internet and transport networks, people will not be inconvenienced if they live in rural areas....

**Q:** Apparently, food self-sufficiency and the environment pose serious problems not only to Japan but to the rest of the world. What is your opinion in this regard?

**A:** The global population has exceeded 6 billion and continues to grow. More than 800 million people are suffering from dire food shortages. The 1996 World Food Summit committed itself to halving the undernourished population of the world by 2015, but no visible results have been achieved to date. Environmental deterioration, such as global warming, has evoked serious concerns over future food production. Thus food and the environment are bound to be dominating issues of the 21st century. This is indeed a serious matter for Japan, given the fact that its food self-sufficiency rate has fallen to 41 percent.

**Q:** Regrettably, the WTO ministerial meeting on farm trade late last year was closed without reaching any conclusion in the midst of confusion.... How are you ready to cope with the next trade talks?

**A:** Substantive WTO debate is yet to begin. I will do everything I can to build a national consensus for the creation of well-balanced trade rules that will allow the agricultural industry to fully manifest its multifunctional virtues and to sustain development. To achieve this goal, we would like very much to work

together with rural communities and agricultural organisations in Asia and other regions of the world.

**Q:** With the rate of co-operative amalgamations accomplished before the year 2000 still low, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries expressed a grave concern over the situation. How do you grapple with the crucial domestic issues, including JA mergers?

**A:** As for JA reform, JA mergers have been concluded, but there are areas where merger projects are left unfinished. We will have to exert greater efforts to finish unfinished business, while at the same time pushing steadily for the reorganisation of JA federations now that it is becoming feasible.

In addition, I want to establish JA management on a steadfast, wholesome and transparent basis by strengthening the capital base of JAs, eliminating bad loans, and ensuring in-depth information disclosure, in the hope of strengthening JAs through the 21st century as entities open to and trusted by local communities.

Women play an important role in their homes, in activities for conservation of the environment, in farming and improving rural society. Given this fact, there is a definite need to restructure agricultural co-operatives in terms of organisation and function to facilitate activities of women in farming operations. Moreover, we have to promote more vigorously the well-being of the elderly, town-planning, and other activities to enable JAs to give full play to their respective capacity and contribute to regional society. We should aggressively make efforts to train potential JA leaders as excellent human resources are essential to these activities.

(from IDACA News, April 10, 2000)

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## Kenyan Co-operatives to Hold Leaders' Conference

Kenyan Co-operatives have planned a Leaders' Conference to take place on 7 - 9 June 2000 in Nairobi. The Conference is being organised to further respond to the need for reconstruction of the entire movement in the country - a need that has come about as a result of economic and political liberalisation. The Conference will pay particular attention to the impact of the reduction of involvement by Government in the affairs of co-operatives, and on the deficiencies in the Co-operative Societies Act and Rules. The theme of the Conference will be "The Future for the Co-operative Movement in Kenya."

Distinguished Co-operative, as well as non-Co-operative, leaders, scholars and practitioners from inside and outside Kenya, will present papers and introduce topics at Plenary Sessions and in Group Discussions at the Conference. Introductory remarks will be given by E.K. Mureithi, the Managing Director of Co-operative Bank of Kenya and Chairman of the Conference Steering Committee; and V.M. Lubasi the ICA Regional Director. The Guest of Honour will be the Kenyan Minister of Finance.

Key topics lined up for presentation and discussion include:

- Co-operative Reform and Reconstruction Process;
- Co-operative Banking System and Institutions;
- Funding of Co-operative Human Resource Development; and
- Problems of Liberalisation and Co-operative Structures

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## CWS Moves Ahead

The Co-operative Wholesale Society of the U.K., the world's largest consumer co-operative, "is in better shape than it has been for some time", according to Chief Executive Graham Melmoth.

In its just-released annual report for 1999, CWS reports:

- Consolidated operating profit up 15 percent to £130 million
- Members' funds up 17 percent to £830 million
- £12 million returned to corporate members as dividend
- £21 million distributed to customers as loyalty card dividend
- A record £114 million transferred to Reserves
- Capital expenditure again over £100 million

The Co-operative Bank recorded yet another highly successful year, with profits rising from £71.8 million to £88.3 million. The Co-operative Insurance Society, whose profits are not consolidated in the CWS accounts, showed further growth in life assurance, pension and unit trust business, with total premium income increasing by 19 percent.

According to Mr. Melmoth, "Our performance in food retailing looks like an achievement, too. Most commentators agree that our strategy--doing more of what we do best--is right....Our core food retailing business ended the year up 2 percent in sales, but up 16 percent in profits, thanks to tight control of costs and maintenance of gross margins, despite the price wars which began in earnest in the autumn, against the background of Wal-Mart's entry into the UK and the Competition Commission's scrutiny of the grocery sector.

The only dark note to report in the CWS "family of businesses" concerns agriculture, where for the first time since the Depression of the 1920s a loss was reported due to the dire state of the industry.

"Our strategy is in place", says Mr. Melmoth, the CRS merger is now a reality, and a fundamental review of the future of co-operation is underway. We enter the millennium with a sense of reinvigoration."

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## Historic Consumer Union in Germany

The long-standing division of German consumer co-operatives into East and West, which existed even before the Cold War, has come to an end.

The Boards of "Zentralverband deutscher Konsumgenossenschaften" in Hamburg, and "Konsumverband" in Berlin have announced the creation of a new central union of all consumer co-operative societies in Germany-- "Gesamtverband Deutscher Konsumgenossenschaften".

The most important tasks of the new Union will be to represent the co-operatives' interests with Government and Parliament, to promote consumer co-operation in Germany, and to assist their members in dealing with the strong market competition.

The establishment of the new Union will be celebrated at a special gathering in Berlin on 27 June. The ICA President has contributed a congratulatory message which will be included in a special publication to be issued on that occasion.

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## First Co-op in Sweden Celebrates 150 Years

The first real co-operative in Sweden was a consumer co-operative for farmers, close to the old university town of Uppsala, north of Stockholm. It is considered to be the cradle of both the consumer and agricultural co-operatives in Sweden.

The farmers who founded the co-operative--named Lagunda Hagunda Häraders varuanskaffnings Aktiebolag--in 1850 did so in order to jointly purchase food, tools, and farming equipment. The co-op first took orders from the members and then looked for the best supplier.

First on the co-op's purchase list was (of course, since this is Sweden) herring from the North Sea. This was followed by herring from the Baltic Sea. Then came the traditional Swedish red paint, tools, etc.

The celebration of the 150th anniversary took place in Orsundsbro, attended by representatives of both the consumer co-operatives in Sweden, KF, represented by Lars Hillbom, and the agricultural co-operatives, LRF, featuring the presence of former President Bo Dockered.

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## US Co-operative Conference Shows Strength of U.S. Co-ops

This year's Co-operative Conference, held in Washington, D.C., from 26-28 April, demonstrated that co-operatives are a significant sector of the U.S. economy. Over 100 million Americans are members of 47,000 co-operative businesses, ranging from small buying clubs to businesses included in the Fortune 500.

In the National Co-operative Business Association's Annual Report for 1999, President and CEO Paul Hazen reports that the U.S. "is experiencing an explosion in the co-operative sector. Each year millions of people across our nation are choosing to control more of their lives by joining co-operatives.....For example, during the past five years, U.S. credit union membership grew from 60 million to 76 million people."

NCBA Chair David Miller said that one of the greatest benefits that NCBA provides to its member co-operatives "is to engage more fully in the global economy. NCBA's programs are designed to provide our members with new business opportunities in the U.S. and around the world." Mr. Miller, who is also a Board member of ICA, added that, "Just as important is NCBA leadership in the International Co-operative Alliance. Through ICA, NCBA has developed valuable relationships for our members with co-operatives around the world."

Following the completion of Mr. Miller's term of office, Pete Crear, executive vice president and chief operating officer of the Credit Union National Association, was elected as NCBA chair.

Earlier, NCBA's Co-operative Business Journal had reported a significant indication of support from the federal government. In the budget submitted to Congress in February, President Clinton proposed funding of \$130 million over the next two fiscal years to create an equity fund for value-added, new generation co-operatives. Unlike the guaranteed loan programme that lends money directly to farmers to make their equity payments into a new co-operative, this funding is intended to provide equity directly to the new co-op.

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## World Environment Day - 5 June 2000

 World Environment day

World Environment Day is celebrated worldwide on 5 June to demonstrate their commitment to the protection of the environment.

Under the theme of the Day, The Environment Millennium - Time to Act, this year's celebrations take on a special significance. This is the first World Environment Day of the Third Millennium.

Mr. Klaus Toeffler, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme UNEP

in his message for the Day noted some of the pressing issues the planet faces including water shortages, climate change, land degradation, the decline of land fertility, the increase in air and water pollution, the loss of biodiversity and the effects of a growing population. "Poverty of the majority and the excessive consumption of the minority - are driving the forces of environmental degradation." Mr. Toeffler underlined that if we are to make real progress, the environmental agenda of the 21st century should be one that drives environmental improvement to accompany economic and social gains.

The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in his message noted that, Never in the history of mankind have we done so much, in so little time to destroy the wonderful ecosystem that sustains us. The repercussions of our destructive action will be felt for generations to come. Indeed, it may take another millennium to put things right"

He highlighted that fact that environmental issues are inextricably linked to those of peaceful coexistence, international cooperation and economic development. Despite the great strides made in recognizing that development must coexist with the environment, we continue however to search for economic progress in ways that erode the ecological foundations of our existence.

He called on the global community to take positive steps to fight the degradation of our environment and combine our technological and creative skills to reverse the trend.

The ICA joins the United Nations on to call on its members to review their activities in view of their environmental impact. It reminds its members of the commitments made by co-operatives in Co-operative Agenda 21 and joins with the UN in asking that " we take the necessary steps, which will lead us into a

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## Agricultural Co-op Starts Youth Programme

A large agricultural co-operatives >society, called APOFRUIT, located in Cesena ( Emilia-Romagna Region) and adhering to Legacoop, has recently decided, within its training programme for board members and insertion of youth within the governing bodies of the co-operative, to set up a Youth Committee. The Committee was composed by more than 50 young people (between 16-and 30 years old), members themselves or whose parents are members of the co-operative. The Committee provided the youth involved with a seat in which to debate the issues connected with agriculture. The first meeting of this committee was held on the 31st of May and included the E.U. agricultural policy and programmes.

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more sustainable future marked by improvements in our standards of living and in the health of the planet on which we all depend".

For more information: <http://www.unep.org/wed/2002/Default.asp>

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