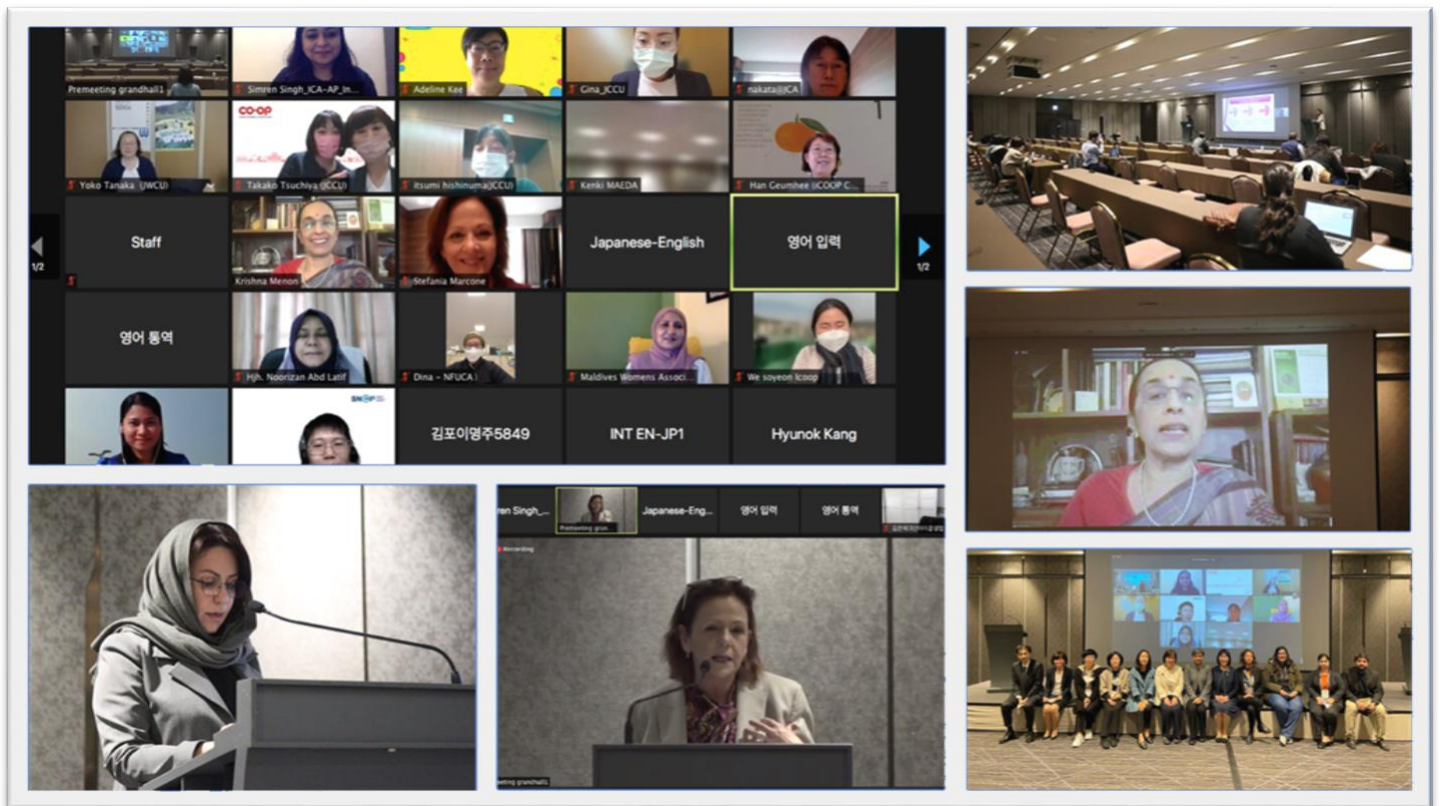

REPORT

11TH ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONAL WOMEN'S
FORUM

BY

ICA ASIA AND PACIFIC COMMITTEE ON WOMEN



NOVEMBER 29, 2021

HYBRID

(SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA)

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INTRODUCTION

The Asia and Pacific Regional Women's Forum is organised every two years by ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women along with the ICA Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) Regional Assembly.

The 11th Asia and Pacific Regional Women's Forum was held on November 29, 2021 in hybrid mode in Seoul, South Korea in conjunction with the 15th ICA-AP Regional Assembly and 33rd ICA Congress. In line with the theme of the Congress, 'Deepening the Cooperative Identity', the forum held discussions with women cooperators in Asia and Pacific on how and why the Cooperative Identity matters to women. It was attended by sixty participants from various countries in the region.

The identity of women cooperators is embedded within a wide range of social, economic, cultural, political, and religious contexts, which shape and influence their position in society. The Cooperative Identity rooted in principles and values offer women the opportunity to organise themselves to realise their common economic, social and cultural needs irrespective of their diverse backgrounds and contexts.

The forum deliberated on how the Cooperative Identity positively impacts women cooperative members from diverse backgrounds; issues and challenges experienced by them in practising cooperative principles and values; and what can be done to further strengthen the positive impact.

The forum served as a timely platform to discuss why conditions of peace and non-violence are critical for women cooperators. The 21st century has seen the rise of intra and inter-state conflicts that disproportionately affects women, and increasing episodes of violence against women. The forum allowed exchange of views between cooperators on the impact of conflict and violence on women. It also sought their recommendations on whether peace and non-violence should be included in the Statement of Cooperative Identity.

The discussions in the forum were divided into two parts. The first part titled, 'In Praxis: Cooperative Principles and Values for Women' was moderated by Ms. Stefania Marcone, a senior cooperative leader from Italy and ICA Gender Equality Committee Member. In this session, four cooperative principles were looked at: Principle 1: voluntary and open membership; Principle 2: democratic member control; Principle 3: member economic participation; and Principle 5: education, training and information.

The second part titled, ‘Peace and Non-Violence as Prospective Values in the Cooperative Identity’ was moderated by Dr. Krishna Menon, Professor at the School of Human Studies, Dr. B.R Ambedkar University, New Delhi. In this session, the case of Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK) Women Entrepreneurs’ Cooperative Society in Sri Lanka, supported by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) was shared; and Committee members from Japan, Myanmar, Nepal and Palestine shared their views on how peace and non-violence affect women cooperators in their countries and why these are important values to be included in the Statement of Cooperative Identity.

This report provides a brief summary of the sessions held during the forum and key recommendations suggested by Committee members for the Statement of Cooperative Identity.

FORUM SUMMARY

OPENING SESSION

The opening session was addressed by the Acting Chairperson of the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women Ms. Chitose Arai and keynote address was delivered by Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Director. He presented the perspective of Cooperative Identity in the context of Asia and Pacific region.

SESSION 1

The first session, ‘In Praxis: Cooperative Principles and Values for Women’ was moderated by Ms. Stefania Marcone, a senior cooperative leader from Italy and ICA Gender Equality Committee Member. This session featured four cases:

Principle 1: voluntary and open membership by Ms. Anahita Eslahpazir, CEO, Rah-e-Roshd Cooperative Educational Complex, Iran

Ms. Anahita Eslahpazir presented an overview of Rah-e-Roshd Cooperative from a gender identity perspective and how the cooperative has kept its gates open for those who are interested in better and holistic education of their children. She explained that Rah-e-Roshd is a cooperative school which was initially formed as a kindergarten by women teachers during the Iran-Iraq war when kindergartens and education were not prioritised by the government.

Parents, especially mothers were not satisfied with the quality of the education and training that their children were receiving at the kindergarten level. They decided to set up a kindergarten where their children could be educated and trained about life. The parents became teachers of the newly formed kindergarten and after ten years formed Rah-e-Roshd as a cooperative, joining it as members. She added that Rah-e-Roshd is considered as second home by members and employees. It was noted that when members and teachers learn about how their cooperative functions, they develop a sense of collective identity and belonging which they don't find anywhere else.

Principle 2: democratic member control by Ms. Yoko Tanaka, Vice-President, Japan Workers' Cooperative Union, and President, Central Worker Cooperative, Japan

Ms. Yoko Tanaka discussed the importance of democratic member control in the context of new Worker Cooperative Act 2020 in Japan and the potential of associated work. She explained that associated work is a new way of working to create enterprises in which each person could be a master of his or her own life. It is a way of linking the needs of human life, local communities, and their difficulties, such that everybody jointly contributes to building capital, managing businesses democratically, and sharing responsibilities. She noted that her organisation, Central Worker Cooperative is a worker cooperative engaged in associated work, that is, a cooperative of associated work. She added that the foundational values of her organisation is to promote personal and human growth of each member by engaging in capital and work contribution, and managing the cooperative democratically. This is done by thorough discussions and managing the cooperative together.

Principle 3: Member economic control by Ms. Elenita V. San Roque, CEO, Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Union (ACCU), Thailand

Ms. Elenita V. San Roque discussed the importance of member economic control and why it is important for women. She explained that ACCU has observed two main gaps between male and female members in credit unions. These are economic and leadership gaps. She noted that even when women are present in the board of directors, it is important that their voices are heard and they are contribute effectively to create impact in the lives of women members of credit unions. She added that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected credit union members in many ways, specifically impacting their ability to repay loans, fear of losing jobs, high liquidity in credit unions, inability to provide digital services to members, etc. However, in order to support members and ensure their equal economic participation, the recovery and support plan has been created by credit union federations in such a way that credit unions and members become resilient. Steps taken in this direction include personal financial planning for members, loan supervision, digitalization, financial and business coaching, among others.

Principle 5: Education, training and information by Dr. Ahyoung Kim, Fellow Research Professor, iCOOP, South Korea

Dr. Ahyoung Kim explained the importance of education, training and information in the growth and sustenance of cooperatives from the perspective of iCOOP and SAPENet. She noted that active participation of members in education and training programs are an important factor for the success of iCOOP and SAPENet. There are different training programs for members, active members which includes delegates and member leaders, directors, chairpersons and operations team. She added that women are given equal opportunity to participate in these programs.

SESSION 2

The second session, 'Peace and Non-Violence as Prospective Values in the Cooperative Identity' was moderated by Dr. Krishna Menon, Professor at the School of Human Studies, Dr. B.R Ambedkar University, New Delhi.

The session featured a video presentation of Puthukkudiyiruppu (PTK) Women Entrepreneurs' Cooperative Society from Sri Lanka, supported by the ILO. The (PTK) Cooperative is an association of conflict-affected women and a collective of women entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka's Northern Mullaitivu district. The cooperative stands uniquely placed as the sole all-female cooperative in the district, having been formed in 2016 via the facilitation and guidance of the ILO-implemented 'Local Empowerment through Economic Development' (LEED) project. Currently, the cooperative has 1900 members, of which 43% are female-headed households who were also ex-combatants during the conflict.

During the panel discussion, distinguished speakers comprising of Committee members Ms. Chitose Arai, Mrs. Om Devi Malla (Senior Vice-Chairperson, National Cooperative Federation of Nepal and ICA Global Board Member), Ms. Aisha Salem (Head of Gaza Office, Economic and Social Development Centre of Palestine), and Ms. Khin Moh Moh (Deputy General Manager, Central Cooperative Society, Myanmar) presented their views on peace and non-violence and their importance for women cooperators. Mrs. Malla noted that "the competitive advantage of cooperative approach is the best alternative to make equal level playing field for women and deprived classes of the society. Although the overall activities of cooperatives contribute to peace, consensus cooperation is impossible".

Ms. Aisha Salem observed that, "there is a peculiarity regarding the status of the Palestinian woman cooperator as she suffers from double violence. On the one hand, the Israeli occupation practices violence against Palestinian women in many forms, starting with killing, arresting, targeting, and violating basic rights such as residence, housing, freedom of movement, and denial of access to health, education, social security, and other rights. On the other hand, Palestinian women still suffer from internal societal violence based on a patriarchal culture

based on discrimination against women in all aspects of life. This discrimination finds its manifestation in the prevailing laws and regulations in force in Palestine until now”. According to Ms. Salem, “peace contributes to the economic empowerment of women through self-confidence and the ability to continue working”.

Ms. Khin Moh Moh suggested that “best practices and measures required to maintain peace and non-violence should be shared among cooperatives”. She added that “non-violent ways of resolving conflicts in cooperatives in order to maintain peace and harmony could be potentially looked at in the Statement of Cooperative Identity”.

Ms. Arai noted that the “theme of the panel discussion- peace and non-violence as prospective values in the Statement of Cooperative Identity is very important and requires a much deeper introspection. Voices from women, marginalised, weak, and poor need to be taken into cognizance while deliberating. This discussion was a step towards in that direction. The Asia and Pacific regional women’s Committee consists of 26 members from 16 countries. Each of these countries have their own independent contexts which can inform these discussions and guide us towards suitable recommendations”. She urged members to come forward and share their recommendations on this important theme. “For a brief panel discussion on this topic does not do complete justice to those who suffer silently at the peripheries”, she added.

CLOSING SESSION

The women’s forum was brought to close with a vote of thanks and closing remarks by Ms. Arai. She thanked the moderators, speakers and participants for attending the forum and contributing to the discussions with their rich inputs.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE STATEMENT OF COOPERATIVE IDENTITY

This section provides key recommendations made by members of the ICA-AP Committee on Women for incorporation of peace and non-violence as enabling values in the Statement of Cooperative Identity.

1. Include peace and non-violence as two important cooperative values.
2. Describe how a peaceful environment in community is important for smooth and successful functioning of a cooperative as an economic enterprise, and to ensure wellbeing of women cooperative members/employees. For example, cooperatives allow women to become

entrepreneurs, thereby ensuring that they become economically independent. Their economic independence contributes to lasting peace in their families. For the sake of their economic independence and peaceful atmosphere in their families, it is important that cooperatives operate in peaceful environment.

3. Home and work atmosphere without violence and harassment against women are important to ensure self-confidence and dignity of women in cooperatives, community and society as economic and social actors. Illustrate measures that cooperatives could adopt in order to ensure violence and harassment free work atmosphere for women members/employees; and what cooperatives could do to support women cooperators/members affected by violence and harassment at home/community as an extension of Cooperative Principle 7: Concern for the Community. For example, a dispute resolution cell in cooperatives could be a very important support system for those women members who lack knowledge or skills to seek justice from formal legal systems and/or are without adequate resources.
4. Make attractive to youth (young girls), women and marginalised communities so that peace in communities can be maintained through their economic and social empowerment.
5. Include examples of non-violent ways of resolving conflicts in cooperatives in order to maintain peace and harmony among members.

ANNEXURE

PROGRAM AGENDA

Time	Agenda	Speakers/Discussants
Opening session (9:00 - 9:20 am) Facilitator: Ms. Simren Singh, Secretary, ICA-AP Committee on Women		
9:00 – 9:05 am	Welcome remarks	Ms. Chitose Arai, Acting Chairperson, ICA-AP Committee on Women
9:05 – 9:20 am	Keynote address: Cooperative Identity from the Asia and Pacific perspective	Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, ICA-AP Regional Director
In praxis: cooperative principles and values for women (9:20 - 10:20 am)		

Moderator: Ms. Stefania Marcone, ICA Gender Equality Committee member

9:20 – 10:20 am	Principle 1: voluntary and open membership <i>Case: Rah-e-Roshd Educational Complex, Iran</i>	Ms. Anahita Eslahpazir, CEO, Rah-e-Roshd Educational Complex, Iran
	Principle 2: democratic member control <i>Case: Japan Workers' Co-operative Union, Japan</i>	Ms. Yoko Tanaka, Vice-President, Japan Workers' Cooperative Union, Japan
	Principle 3: member economic participation <i>Case: Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Union (ACCU), Thailand (in the age of digitalisation)</i>	Ms. Elenita V San Roqu, CEO, Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Union (ACCU), Thailand
	Principle 5: education, training and information <i>Case: iCOOP, South Korea</i>	Dr. Ahyoung Kim, Fellow Research Professor, iCOOP, South Korea
	Summing-up	Moderator

**Tea/coffee break
(10:20 – 10:30 am)**

**Peace and non-violence as prospective values in the Cooperative Identity
(10:30 - 11:50 am)**

Moderator: Dr. Krishna Menon, Professor at the School of Human Studies, Dr. B.R Ambedkar University, New Delhi

10:30 – 11:40 am	Peace and non-violence: enabling environment for women's empowerment <i>Case: Puthukkudiyiruppu Women Entrepreneurs' Cooperative Society,</i>	Video
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	<p><i>Sri Lanka</i></p> <p>Should peace and non-violence as enabling contexts for women be included in the Statement of Cooperative Identity?</p> <p><i>Panel discussion and recommendations</i></p>	<p>Ms. Om Devi Malla, Senior Vice-Chairperson, National Cooperative Federation of Nepal (NCF), ICA Global Board Member</p> <p>Ms. Khin Moh Moh, Deputy General Manager, Central Cooperative Society (CCS), Myanmar</p> <p>Ms. Aisha Salem, Head of Gaza Office, Economic and Social Development Centre of Development (ESDC) Palestine</p> <p>Ms. Chitose Arai</p>
11:40 – 11:50 am	Summing-up	Moderator
<p>Closing session (11:50 am - 12:00 pm) Facilitator: Ms. Simren Singh</p>		
11:50 am – 12:00 pm	Vote of thanks and closing remarks	Ms. Chitose Arai

PICTURES



IMAGE 1: PARTICIPANTS PRESENT ONSITE IN SEOUL FOR THE FORUM



IMAGE 2 MS. STEFANIA MARCONE MODERATING SESSION 1 AT THE FORUM



IMAGE 3 PARTICIPANTS PRESENT ONLINE FOR THE FORUM