

ICA-AP NEWSLETTER

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

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11th Asia Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference



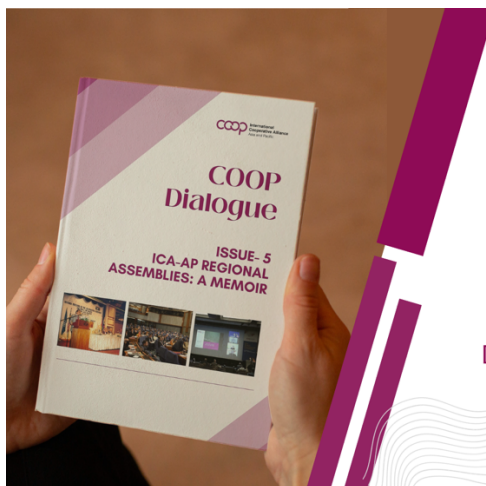
11th Asia Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference

28-30 April 2024 | Jordan

ICA-AP, in collaboration with the Jordan Co-operative Corporation (JCC) and the Ministry of Agriculture of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, will organize the 11th Asia Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference (APCMC) from 28 to 30 April 2024 in Jordan. The theme for the 11th APCMC is "Government-Cooperative Partnership for Cooperative Resilience, Sustainable Development & Inclusive Growth in Asia Pacific & MENA Region."

In line with the theme, a critical study has been commissioned to understand how far the governments are creating a conducive environment for the cooperatives to function, and specific areas and nature of partnership between state/government and cooperatives. The findings from the study will be presented at the Minister's conference. Stay tuned for more updates!

5th Edition of COOP Dialogue Launched



**COOP Dialogue 5
is out now!**

Dive into the world of ICA-AP
Regional Assemblies

ICA-AP Regional Assemblies (RAs) are a platform for cooperators in the Asia-Pacific region to share knowledge, experiences, and a shared vision for a better, more inclusive future. The 5th edition of COOP Dialogue (CD5) explores the journey of ICA-AP RAs since 1995.

CD5 features first-hand perspectives of those who have been integral to the RAs' success - dedicated staff and passionate members. Through their eyes, we witness the evolution of the assembly and how it serves to catalyze change and amplify the voices of cooperatives. We also engage in interesting conversations with Dr. Chandrapal Singh Yadav, ICA-AP President, and Ms. Sylvia Paraguya, the

Coordinator of the Philippines Cooperative Affiliates (PCA) to hear their thoughts on the past, present, and future of the assembly. [Read here.](#)

ICA-AP Updates

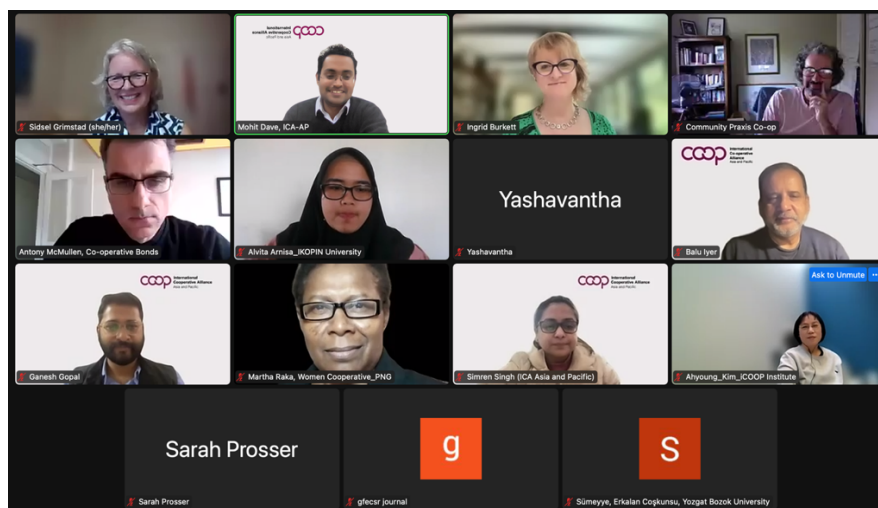
2023 Year-end Report



As we end this year, we take an opportunity to thank our members, partners, and cooperative stakeholders for their continuous support of ICA-AP. 2023 was a dynamic year for ICA-AP, full of engaging events and a collaborative spirit. In this brief report, we reflect on the events and achievements that have defined our work this year and look forward to working towards building a more sustainable, inclusive, peaceful, and cooperative world in the coming year. [Read here.](#)

We wish you a happy and prosperous 2024!

Coop Colloquium: Cooperatives and Systems Innovation



The 8th edition of the COOP Colloquium was organised online on 18th December 2023 and focused on the theme 'Cooperatives and Systems Innovation.'

Dr. Yashvantha Dongre, Chairperson of the ICA-AP Committee on Cooperative Research (CCR) welcomed the guest speakers and participants. He said that the COOP Colloquium was launched in 2022 to start an academic dialogue on issues that are relevant to cooperative education and research. Over the past two years, the committee has had good thematic discussions through this series of

colloquiums. Dr. Dongre noted that the theme for this session is very interesting and discussions around that in the cooperative context are much needed.

Dr. Sidsel Grimstad, a senior lecturer at Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation (GCSI), [Griffith University](https://www.griffith.edu.au/) led the presentation. The GCSI is a centre within Griffith Business School, with an aim to accelerate transitions to regenerative and distributive economies. She mentioned that we are at a critical juncture of change, challenge, and opportunity. Issues like the climate crisis, inequality, the future of work and ageing populations require innovative solutions. Cooperatives help grow capabilities and infrastructures to meet these challenges in ways that are better for people, places, and the planet. Cooperatives have a unique advantage in their response to these challenges. They are guided by cooperative principles and values including maximising member value and prioritising democratic participation in decision making. Cooperatives produce positive economic, social and environmental outputs for their members and communities. However, there are still questions about how cooperatives can bring about substantial systems change. How can the cooperative sector become a larger and more active player in bringing about systems innovation while maintaining the cooperative identity? How can cooperatives lead the way as innovators, not only for other cooperatives but also for non-cooperative organisations? Is this a way to cement the sector's relevance in a changing global business environment?

What do we mean by Systems Innovation ?

The history of innovation has been focused on 'innovators' + 'entrepreneurs'

Has largely ignored collective challenges + goals beyond 'growth' and individual 'profit'

Systems innovation focuses on the grand challenges that face us collectively.

The focus is on the relationships between entities that make up systems

Focus on the impact of innovation: challenged-led innovation focused on systems transformation + grand challenges

Focus on the direction of innovation: disposition of the purpose + direction of innovation, innovation for what purpose + towards what end?

Focus on the contexts of innovation: Moving innovation beyond economic productivity commercial + technological contexts to include user-driven innovation, social innovation + public sector innovation

Focus on the spread + adoption of the innovation: Diffusion of innovations, adoption + adaptation, early adopters + laggards

Focus on the 'innovator' + the power of the 'innovation?': Creative Destruction, time + entrepreneurs as innovators, innovation as localized in nature + firms

Focus on the types, scale + rate of innovation: Distinguishing the difference between radical + incremental innovation, growing range of types of innovation + nature of innovation

Focus on the process of innovation: Understanding the process of innovation + the conditions under which this process is supported

GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY

griffith centre for systems innovation

Dr. Ingrid Burkett, Director of the [Griffith Centre for Systems Innovation](https://www.griffith.edu.au/) followed up on the presentation. She has worked across Australia and around the world, with a focus on how we can shift systems to enable better outcomes for people, places and the planet. She highlighted that to be effective and successful in its territory, a cooperative federation must work hard to achieve interrelated goals: a) to strengthen the autonomy of its affiliates while maintaining social networks, b) to enhance its own viability and improve its ability to serve its members, c) to explore new ways of understanding the contribution of cooperatives, d) to examine the conditions required for cooperatives to remain innovative, economically viable and competitive enterprises.¹

To achieve these objectives cooperative federations must understand the basic assumptions on which the new focusses are built - linking complexity with systems innovation. This will enable them to provide better frameworks and conditions for their sector members to be innovative and to co-evolve in changing business environments.

¹ Building up an innovation region through cooperative experiences <https://www.cairn.info/revue-pole-sud-2009-2-page-71.htm#pa2>

Mr. Balu Iyer, Regional Director, ICA-AP in his reflection said that the colloquium helps examine the potential role of cooperatives in systems innovation and how cooperatives can inspire and play a positive part in larger structural changes that are needed to respond to global challenges. There are three areas of particular focus: 1) creating awareness and confidence in the cooperatives' capacity to innovate, 2) finding new pathways to scale innovations and 3) building the capital needed to support these initiatives.

Mr. Mohit Dave, Secretary, ICA-AP CCR gave a vote of thanks and mentioned that the colloquium is a starting point to deep-dive into the role of cooperatives in systems innovation. It aims to bring together cooperative advocates, practitioners and young scholars from the Asia and Pacific region. The recording can be watched [here](#).

ICA-AP CCR was established in the year 2000 to promote and support the initiation and furtherance of research activities within cooperatives and research organizations at regional, national, and local levels, to enhance their social and economic effectiveness.

Empowering Artisans Through 'My E-Haat': Revolutionizing the Handicraft Sector



My E-Haat, an initiative by the HCL Foundation, is a platform designed to strengthen the value chain of handicrafts, placing artisans at its core, and integrating both the supply and demand sides of the market. The uniqueness of My E-Haat lies in its holistic approach. By developing a portal where artisans can directly list and showcase their products, the initiative aims to bridge the gap between them and the market. This direct connection not only ensures better profit margins for the artisans by minimizing the role of intermediaries but also provides a platform for them to narrate their stories.

My E-Haat Conclave, a national-level assembly, was organized as a one-day event to delve into the multitude of challenges faced by artisans and women entrepreneurs, particularly in strengthening their value chains. The objective was to assemble public and private stakeholders, including government departments, CSR bodies, NGOs, and industry experts, under one roof and to derive recommendations and chart a way forward.

As part of the conclave, there were two panel discussions – 'Strengthening Craft Economy through Collaboration' and 'Future of Craft Cooperatives in India'. These discussions focused on how collaboration and cooperative models can be leveraged to enhance the capabilities of artisans and connect them with wider markets, thereby strengthening the artisan landscape.

Cooperatives play a critical role in this regard. They are recognized by governments and international agencies as instrumental in promoting inclusive and sustainable development. They address not only economic but also social, environmental, and cultural issues. The inclusion of cooperatives in

UNESCO's list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2016 underscores their significance in preserving traditional arts and crafts.

The C20 Policy Pack released during India's G20 Presidency highlights the need to support artisan cooperatives. It advocates for the establishment and support of cooperatives that unite artisans, providing them with the necessary training, resources, and marketing support. This policy recommendation aligns with the goals of My E-Haat, reinforcing the platform's relevance and potential impact.

Internationally, artisan cooperatives have been successful in supporting indigenous communities to preserve and promote their arts, culture, and livelihood. Examples like the Arctic Cooperative in Canada, Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in Australia, COWHED in the Philippines, and the Anou Cooperative in Morocco illustrate the global reach and effectiveness of such cooperatives. These organizations not only support artisans in marketing their products but also provide spaces for cultural expression and community building.

Initiatives like My E-Haat stand as a model of innovation and empowerment in the handicraft sector. By leveraging technology, fostering collaboration, and promoting cooperative models, it has the potential to transform the lives of artisans, preserving their crafts and traditions while connecting them to markets.

Visits by DGRV (Germany), APMAS (India) and CACA (Cambodia)



The International Cooperative Alliance - Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) recently had the honor of hosting two sets of visitors. The first group included Mr. Korbinian März from DGRV, the German Cooperative and Raiffeisen Confederation, and Mr. C.S. Reddy from Mahila Abhivruddhi Society, Andhra Pradesh (APMAS), an organization supporting self-help groups in India. The second notable visit was from Mr. Dok Luan of the Cambodia Agricultural Cooperative Alliance (CACA), accompanied by a board colleague. The visits provided an excellent opportunity to delve into strategic priorities, potential partnerships, and avenues for international cooperation.

DGRV, with its vast network and development projects across the Asia Pacific region, brings a wealth of experience in cooperative development. APMAS, known for its support to self-help groups, has an active interest in supporting the federation of cooperatives. The discussion with Mr. März and Mr. Reddy centred on leveraging their expertise, particularly in the areas of ratings and audits. The focus

was on how the strategic experiences of DGRV and APMAS could be integrated to foster sustainable growth and development within cooperatives in the Asia Pacific region.



Established in January 2020, CACA represents Agricultural Cooperatives (ACs) and Agricultural Cooperative Unions (ACUs) across Cambodia, advocating for their rights and providing essential support services. Their mission is to develop the agriculture sector and improve the socio-economic conditions of farmers. The discussion with Mr. Luan focused on the benefits of ICA membership, particularly in the realms of training, exchange programs, and advocacy. This meeting was a significant step towards understanding the needs and aspirations of agricultural cooperatives in Cambodia and exploring how ICA-AP's resources and network can be leveraged to support their growth and impact.

ICA-AP participates in Keraleeyam 2023: Reimagining Cooperatives in Kerala



Keraleeyam 2023, organised in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram by the State Government of Kerala (in India), served as a platform for reimagining cooperation in the state and celebrating the essence of Kerala. One of the talks and presentations titled 'Reimagining Cooperation in Kerala' within the panel discussion on 'Cooperatives in the State of Kerala' held on 4 November 2023, was delivered by Mr. Ganesh Gopal, Lead-Entrepreneurship Development at ICA-AP. The discussion delved into the

rich history and evolving role of cooperatives in Kerala, addressing current challenges and charting a course for cooperative innovation.

Kerala's Cooperative Movement: Beyond Tradition

Mr. Gopal began by underlining the historical significance of cooperatives, initially established as defenders of the marginalised during the Industrial Revolution. Today, Kerala boasts over 14,000 cooperative societies with a membership exceeding 10 million individuals. While credit cooperation mostly through a network of cooperative banks and Primary Agricultural Credit Societies (PACS) remains strong, there needs to be a concerted effort to diversify into potential areas of value-added products, exploring sectors like food processing, electronics clusters, and export-oriented industrial parks etc. as well where Kerala has an inherent strength and advantage in.

The discussion dissected Kerala's cooperative and developmental challenges, including limited land availability, brain drain, food safety and security, skilling, and educated unemployment. Despite these challenges, cooperatives have shown resilience, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, acting as community-led forces for rapid response in health, education, medical, and public distribution systems. Beyond crisis response, cooperatives in Kerala are exploring newer aggregation models for production in a primarily consumerist state.

Kerala's cooperatives were highlighted as an instrument in building a climate-resilient economy. The emphasis was on bottom-up movements through cooperation, sustainability, and the potential for environmental cooperatives, drawing inspiration from successful models in countries like the Netherlands.

Global Exchanges and Relatable Examples

Mr. Gopal emphasised the importance of global exchanges and relatable examples. Notable models such as the Emilian Model in Italy and the Mondragon model in Spain were cited, showcasing how cooperative networks can thrive, diversify, and address unemployment.

Emerging Domains and Sunrise Sectors

The discussion turned towards emerging domains and sunrise sectors in Kerala, including food processing, small-scale electronics, digital technologies, and more. The potential for cooperative entrepreneurship in newer domains like gig and knowledge economy, community data trusts, and decentralised autonomous organisations (DAOs) was explored.

He provided key statistics on educated unemployment in India, stressing the need for cooperatives to tap into the vast human capital within Kerala's tertiary sector. With over 50% contribution to India's GDP, the service sector was identified as a significant arena for cooperative innovation and alignment to tap into the gig-platform economy. Mr. Gopal concluded by outlining essential components for cooperative entrepreneurship in Kerala, including an enabling legal environment, inclusion of women and youth, and promoting cooperatives as business entities. The potential for cooperatives to respond to the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and drive sustainable development in Kerala was underscored.

Keraleeyam 2023's seminar on cooperatives in Kerala provided a comprehensive overview of the state's cooperative movement. The panel's diverse line-up, including government officials, industry experts, and international representatives, contributed to a holistic discussion on the future trajectory of cooperative entrepreneurship in Kerala. Notable panellists included Mr. V.N. Vasavan, Hon'ble Minister for Co-operation, Mr. K. V. Shaji, Chairman, NABARD, Ms. Simel Esim, Head, Cooperatives Unit ILO, Mr. Gopi Kottamurickal, President, Kerala Bank and Mr. Remeshan Paleri, Chairman, ULCCS, an ICA member organisation from Kerala, India.

The historical roots, current challenges, and future aspirations were explored by the panel, setting the stage for a new wave of cooperative innovation that can drive prosperity, equity, and sustainability in Kerala. The session opened a dialogue on how cooperative models can adapt to the evolving socio-economic landscape, ensuring a brighter future for the people of Kerala.

Empowering the 'Roots of Resilience': Highlights from the 3-day Global PCC 2023 Conference



In a celebration of collaboration and innovation, the 3-day Global Platform Cooperativism Consortium (PCC) 2023 conference was held at the Kerala Arts and Crafts Village, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala (India) from 30 November to 2 December 2023. Themed 'Roots of Resilience - Building Platform Cooperatives for Sustainable and Feminist Local Economies,' the conference was co-organised by the Platform Cooperativism Consortium (PCC) at the New School, New York, USA; IT for Change, the IT & policy focused think-tank based out of Bangalore, India; and the Kerala Development and Innovation Strategic Council (K-DISC), Government of Kerala.

Platform cooperatives being democratically owned and governed digital platforms, provide a means for individuals and communities to cooperatively own and manage digital services. The conference aimed to examine how these models can be leveraged to empower local collectives, self-help groups, producer organisations, worker collectives, etc.

One of the key highlights of the event was the panel discussion on 'Public Policy for A Just Digital India', where Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, Regional Director of ICA-AP, delivered a compelling talk exploring how the Digital India model has catalysed the adoption of the digital services across the country and explored this from the lens of the cooperatives. He opined that the specific instances of digitisation of PACS and cooperatives across the country and encouraging their participation in the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) would help them seize the digital transformation opportunity in the country.



Mr. Iyer outlined appropriate policy measures as five key pointers merely beyond IT infrastructure, namely a) in the case of India where cooperatives are a state subject there is a need for harmonisation of laws, b) exploring how local communities can be empowered by digitalisation - promoting financial inclusion (physical mode) and bridging the digital divide keeping in mind the gender gaps within the digital divide, c) decentralised governance through people-centred models that imbibe normative digital rights and promotion of digital literacy and education through the same, d) having a policy push for promotion of platform cooperatives in the country, and e) access to funding for such newer models of digital cooperative entrepreneurship.

The session, designed to explore the pivotal role of policy in supporting alternative digital platforms, featured seven-minute flash talks and policy recommendations from other key experts like Ms. Anita Gurumurthy, Executive Director, IT for Change, Mr. Kiran Jonnalagadda, Co-founder & CEO HasGeek, National General Secretary, Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT), and Prof. Trebor Scholz, Founder of Platform Cooperativism Consortium, The New School. The interactive format, including a two-minute challenge and rapid-fire policy pitches, added dynamism to the session, offering a wealth of insights and ideas.

Three staff from ICA-AP – Mr. Ganesh Gopal, Lead - Entrepreneurship Development, Mohit Dave, Head - Partnerships and Resource Mobilisation, and Shree Padmanabhan, IT/Communications Support Officer participated actively in the panel discussions and community lab sessions.

Three insightful community lab sessions were organised on the sidelines of the conference. Community labs saw participation from a mix of experts, practitioners and cooperative researchers as a platform to discuss challenges faced by platform cooperatives in the Global South and brainstorm their solutions. The first community lab on “Guiding cooperatives for the digital future and advancing platform co-ops in India for sustainable growth” stressed the need to re-look at techno-centrism merely as a solution for several problems. The session opined that while building technology for a people and planet-centric future, the technology used should be adopted, understood and owned by the community to create normative, non-exploitative algorithmic frameworks.

The second community lab on “Co-op Tech and the Digital Commons” undertook an exploration of merging cooperative models with digital technology to foster a global data commons, promoting shared ownership, democratic governance, and inclusivity in the digital realm. The third community

lab themed “Gig Workers Re-Imagine Their Futures” explored visionary and practical pathways towards better working conditions and opportunities within the gig economy.



The final day of the conference was marked by the unveiling of the '[Thiruvananthapuram Declaration](#).' Dr. PV Unnikrishnan, Member-Secretary of KDISC, presented this landmark outcome in the presence of Prof. Trebor Scholz and Prof. Thomas Isaac, Former Minister for Finance, Govt. of Kerala. The declaration charts a clear path forward for the platform cooperative movement at large across the world and was hopefully described by Prof. Scholz as a ‘new magna–carta’ for the movement.

The declaration envisions a techno-social order based on fraternity and cooperation, challenging the extractivist impulse of digital capitalism. The key points include a call for a paradigm shift towards cooperativist production principles, emphasising shared ownership of technological resources for inclusive, equitable, just, and creative societies. The five-point agenda focuses on innovative public goods, a whole-of-society approach for empowering futures of work, a digital-age overhaul of cooperatives and social enterprises, civic intelligence, and socio-political citizenship, as well as a sustainable digital transition. The declaration urges global support and endorsement, emphasising the need for collective commitment to shape a positive digital future. The declaration reflects a commitment to reshape the digital landscape with a cooperative and inclusive ethos, promoting fair distribution of value, digital rights awareness, and sustainable technological practices.

During the closing ceremony, Mr. Gopal delivered a short synthesis of the three-day conference, encapsulating the rich discussions, insights, solutions and collaborative spirit that defined the event. Representatives of ICA-AP member organisations like the INKUR Federation from Indonesia, and National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI), the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (IFFCO) and the Uralungal Labour Contract Co-operative Society (ULCCS) from India also participated in the conference. Two of the former ambassadors for the Global Cooperative Entrepreneurs (GCE) initiative organised by the ICA-AP office as part of the ICA-EU partnership project (2016-21) also attended the conference from Indonesia and India respectively.

The Global PCC 2023 conference was not just a convergence of minds but a testament to the potential of cooperative movements in shaping sustainable and feminist local economies. Reflecting on the event, the participants felt reminded that roots of resilience grow stronger when nurtured by values of collaboration, innovation, and a shared commitment to building a just and inclusive digital future and that a world of collaboration lies ahead, beyond one fraught with competition primarily for profits.

More information about the conference including programme details, speaker interviews and session recordings are [available here](#).

Strengthening Cooperative Education: Insights and Proceedings from the 15th ICEI Annual Statutory Meeting



The 15th Annual Statutory Meeting of the ICA-AP Committee on Cooperatives in Educational Institutions (ICEI) was convened on 7 November 2023, in Manila, the Philippines. The meeting took place on the sidelines of the 16th ICA-AP Regional Assembly and saw 12 attendees from 7 countries actively participating in the discussion.

The ICEI, formerly known as the ICA-AP Committee on University/Campus Cooperatives, was established in 2008 during the ICA-AP Regional Assembly in Hanoi, Vietnam. Its primary objectives include promoting the development of cooperatives in educational institutions, such as universities, colleges, and high schools, with active participation from teachers, staff, and students. Additionally, ICEI aims to integrate youth into cooperatives, emphasising cooperative values, self-help, and mutuality.

The meeting was Chaired by Dr. Mohd. Azlan Yahya, Chairperson, ICEI representing ANGKASA, Malaysia and supported by Dr. Yashwantha Dongre, Vice Chancellor, Chanakya University, India, the Co-Secretary. The incoming Secretary-Designate of the ICEI, Mr. Ganesh Gopal, Lead-Entrepreneurship Development, ICA-AP was introduced by the Chair to the committee members. ICEI has 22 members from 13 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Three new members from the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam joined the committee in 2023, signifying a growing interest and commitment to cooperative education in the region.

Prof. Dongre presented the report from the ICEI Secretariat and updated members about the activities undertaken by the committee since the previous statutory meeting. ICEI has been active in organising various activities including a seminar in partnership with the Shri Ram College of Commerce (University of Delhi, India) in December 2022. The seminar focused on 'Cooperative Business and Opportunities for Youth Entrepreneurship in Asia and Pacific,' aligning with the committee's mission. A webinar on

World Teachers Day in October 2023, titled 'Teachers in the World of Cooperatives,' was organised to demonstrate ICEI's commitment to cooperative education. Additionally, online meetings, including office bearers' meetings, ICA-AP consultations with committees, and meetings with prospective members, have been instrumental in fostering collaboration and advancing the committee's objectives.



The strategic planning session at the meeting resulted in specific goals and strategies for the years 2024-2026. These include increasing membership, promoting digital technology adoption, addressing emerging needs of students and faculty, enhancing awareness among youth, and seeking funding opportunities. To achieve this goal, ICEI resolved to reach out to ICA AP members and interact with existing members to understand the status of cooperatives in educational institutions in their respective countries. Collaboration and encouragement to join forces with ICEI will be pivotal in achieving this goal.

Understanding the current status and potential for digital technology adoption in educational cooperatives was identified as a focus area. Therefore, advocacy and training initiatives are to be employed to promote the use of digital technology within these cooperatives.

For the upcoming year, the ICEI aims to conduct advocacy with relevant stakeholders, including governments and apex cooperative organisations and to raise awareness among youth. Workshops on Cooperative Identity and engagement with youth on topical issues will be organised to boost the cooperative image.

Identifying activities that require funding and reaching out to ICA member organisations for support or exploring partnerships for rolling out newer initiatives of ICEI in the upcoming years was also discussed. As part of the activity plan and calendar for the year 2024, the committee discussed a proposal to hold the statutory meeting, field visit and workshop in Thailand to be hosted by the country's cooperative apex and ICA-AP member organisation, the Cooperative League of Thailand (CLT), in Bangkok.

With a robust strategy plan for 2024-2026 and a dedicated team of office bearers, the ICEI is uniquely positioned and committed to making lasting contributions to the development of cooperatives in educational institutions, creating a positive impact on the lives of students, faculty, and communities across the region.

Brainstorming Meeting of the ICA-AP Committee on Agriculture and Environment



The 16th ICA-AP Regional Assembly held on 9 November 2023 in Manila, Philippines ratified the proposal to establish the new ICA-AP Committee on Agriculture and Environment. The newly established committee came into existence through the merger of two existing committees – the ICA-AP Committee on Agriculture and the ICA-AP Committee on Forestry.

ICA-AP member representatives and expert observers who had shown interest in the Agriculture and Environment committee came together for a brainstorming meeting (held in a hybrid format) on the same day, on the sidelines of the Regional Assembly to discuss the strategy, roadmap and next steps for the newly formed committee. The meeting was convened by Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, Regional Director, ICA-AP to receive and understand the viewpoints of ICA-AP members regarding the way forward for the committee. It was decided to create a roadmap for the committee's operation, outline focus areas based on the discussion and hold elections for the committee in the first quarter of the next calendar year, 2024.

The meeting was attended by academics, agriculturists, forestry practitioners, members of the erstwhile committees on agriculture and forestry, and several other members of the ICA-AP from Malaysia, India, Japan, Nepal, Myanmar and the Philippines.

The former Chair of the ICA-AP Committee on Forestry, Mr. SP Singh, Managing Director, Indian Farm Forestry Development Cooperative (IFFDC) joined online and briefed the group about the activities undertaken by the committee so far, including on the ground activities on forestry, creation of a sub-group on water, various knowledge sharing exercises etc.

Datuk Seri Dr. Abdul Fattah Abdullah, President, the Malaysian National Cooperative Movement (ANGKASA) raised the crucial issue of food security and opined that in today's age, it is necessary to ensure that food is affordable and not just accessible. Representatives from the Japan Cooperative

Alliance (JCA) highlighted the need to promote sustainable practices and improve productivity in the farm sector.

The group also discussed the importance of creating sustainable food supply chains in the present time of crises including the severe impacts of climate change as well as wars and instability in the region. Representatives from the India Farmers' Fertilizer Cooperative (IFFCO) also highlighted the importance of ensuring sustainable food production while pursuing higher productivity from farmland using newer methods of farming and agri-technology. Mr. Ashok Taneja, Advisor, ICA-AP and Mr. Ganesh Gopal, Lead - Entrepreneurship Development, ICA-AP also attended the meeting and provided support to facilitate the same.

The brainstorming meeting of the ICA-AP Agriculture and Environment Committee deliberated on current challenges faced due to environmental and climate change as well as the sharing of best practices on agricultural production. Several key inputs and potential solutions to the challenges raised were discussed by the interest group and were well-received by attendees from across the region.

Member Updates

NEFSCUN Elects it's New Chairperson



The Nepal Federation of Savings and Credit Cooperative Unions Limited (NEFSCUN) – an umbrella organization of savings and credit cooperatives in Nepal elected Mr. Chandra Prasad Dhakal as its new Chairperson in the election held on 24 December 2023. The [32nd Annual General Meeting and Convention](#) of the federation took place in Kathmandu on 23 and 24 December. ICA-AP congratulates him for his new role!

Empowering Rural Youth and Women through Agricultural Finance and Cooperatives: ICAO-IFAD-CLT Joint Workshop



The International Cooperative Agricultural Organization ([ICAO](#)), the International Fund for Agricultural Development ([IFAD](#)), and the Cooperative League of Thailand ([CLT](#)) organised a joint workshop from 27 – 29 November in Thailand. The workshop, attended by 46 representatives from 11 countries, delved into the theme, “The role of agricultural finance in fostering youth and women farmers and cooperative development.” It provided an opportunity to exchange of best practices and the success stories of the visited cooperatives illuminated the potential for sustainable growth within the agricultural sector. [Read more.](#)

Policy and Legal Watch

Consultation and Regional Workshop on New National Cooperation Policy 2023 - Northern & Central Zone



ICA-AP participated in a pivotal discussion and consultation as part of the Regional Workshop on the New National Cooperation Policy 2023 of India, held on 21 November 2023. It was organised by the National Cooperative Policy Secretariat in collaboration with the Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management (VAMNICOM), Pune, and held at Laxmanrao Inamdar National Academy for Cooperative Research and Development (LINAC), Gurugram. The event aimed to enlighten stakeholders about the vision and provisions of the New National Cooperation Policy (NCP) and discuss feedback on the draft national policy document.

The policy, drafted under the chairmanship of Shri Suresh Prabhu, Ex-Union Minister, by a 47-member committee established by the Government of India, seeks to achieve "Sahkar se Samridhi" by fortifying the cooperative movement in the country through collaboration. The regional workshops were designed to provide insights into the drafting process and the policy's approach.

The consultation saw active participation from various stakeholders, including Registrars of Cooperative Societies, State Cooperative Departments, State Federations, Regional Cooperative Institutions, Cooperative Societies, Cooperative Banks, Credit Societies, State Union, NCP Committee members, and Primary Cooperative Societies.

Mr. Ganesh Gopal, Lead-Entrepreneurship Development, represented ICA-AP at the consultation and workshop where several inputs including global best practices, assessing adherence to cooperative identity, use of technology by cooperatives, promotion of youth entrepreneurship, diversification into sunrise sectors and priority lending to sustainable financing by cooperatives were provided.

The workshop, conducted in a hybrid mode for the first half of the day, commenced with an address by Mr. Suresh Prabhu, the Chairman of the NCP committee, followed by a panel discussion and interactive sessions with stakeholders. The event had two primary objectives:

- a) **Informing Stakeholders:** Participants were briefed about the NCP 2023, highlighting its provisions and key features.
- b) **Apprising Stakeholders:** The workshop aimed to apprise stakeholders of the approach followed in the drafting of the policy document and take feedback on the same.

Mr. Satish Marathe, Director, Central Board of the Reserve Bank of India, National Housing Bank and Vice Chairman, LINAC and also a member of the NCP Committee, addressed the audience on NCP 2023, providing insights into its approach and the drafting process and addressing several of the questions raised by the panellists. Dr. Hema Yadav, Director of VAMNICOM, Pune, made a detailed presentation on the policy document, highlighting seven areas that the policy has focused on while emphasising the transformative potential of cooperatives in society.

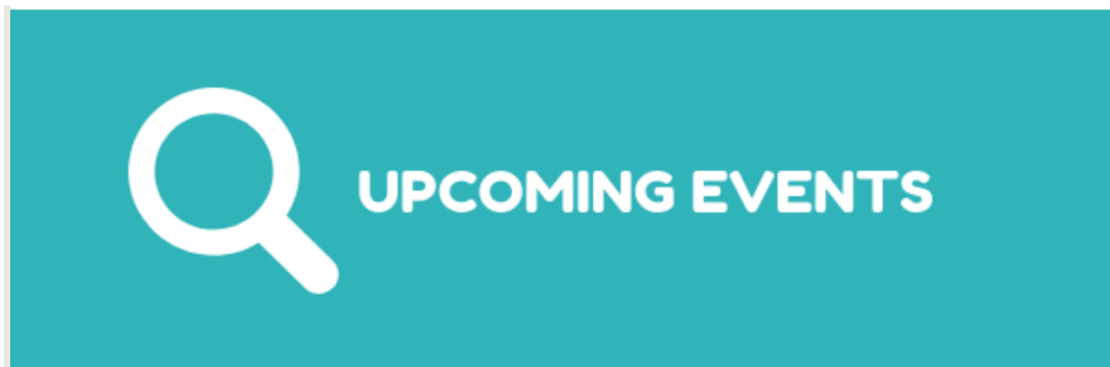
The regional workshop served as a platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration and provided an opportunity for shared deliberation among cooperators in the Northern and Central zones. The engagement of stakeholders, expert insights, and interactive sessions underscored the significance of cooperative endeavours in realising the vision of "Sahakar se Samridhi."

ILO Discusses Research Findings on the Social and Solidarity Economy in Kyrgyzstan



Picture Credits: ILO

The International Labor Organization held a hybrid workshop in Bishkek to review and validate the findings of the study on the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) in Kyrgyzstan. The study mapped the SSE entities and explored how they contribute to decent work and sustainable development. The National advisory committee members who reviewed the findings included representatives from the government, employers' and workers' organizations, SSE support organizations, observers from SSE representative institutions, and UN entities (UNICEF and WFP). The results of these studies will be presented at a regional conference and study tour in March 2024 in Bangkok, Thailand. [Read more.](#)



- 1st ICA-MAFF (JAPAN) Training Course on “Capacity Building of Farmers to Respond to Challenges through the Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in FY2023” – 21 January to 03 February 2024
- 1st ICA-MAFF (Japan) Training Course on “Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture and Improvement of Farmer’s Income through Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in FY-2023” – 1 – 29 March 2024
- 11th Asia Pacific Cooperative Ministers’ Conference in Jordan – 28-30 April 2024
- Regional Workshop by ICA-AP Trade and Business Committee, ICA-AP Consumer Committee, and Saigon Co-op – May 2024
- International Day of Cooperatives – 6 July 2024
- Women CEO Summit – July 2024 (Venue TBC)
- ICA General Assembly in India – 25-30 November 2024