

COOP Dialogue

ISSUE- 5 ICA-AP REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES: A MEMOIR



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Editorial

Dear Readers

The International Cooperative Alliance Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) Regional Assembly (RA) serves as a stage for cooperatives to showcase their achievements and contributions. This is where the diverse tapestry of cooperative endeavours is laid bare for all to witness - a testament to the resilience, innovation, and impact that cooperatives bring to the communities they serve. Beyond the official agenda, the assembly provides an invaluable opportunity to connect, exchange ideas, and establish partnerships. Members from diverse backgrounds and geographies find common ground in sharing knowledge, experiences, and a shared vision for a better, more inclusive future.

Complementing the Regional Assembly, the Cooperative Forum serves as a crucible where the flames of current issues are fanned into thoughtful discussions. It is where matters pertaining to the development of cooperatives are debated and distilled into actionable insights. The forum serves as a compass, guiding cooperatives through the ever-changing socio-economic landscape. The RA shines a spotlight on the host country, allowing it to showcase the work of its cooperatives, is an acknowledgement of the country's commitment to cooperative ideals and an opportunity for regional and global peers to learn from its experiences. The host country's success stories, challenges, and innovations enrich the collective understanding of cooperative development and foster cross-border collaborations that extend beyond the duration of the assembly.

In this issue, we bring you the firsthand perspectives of those who have been integral to the Regional Assembly's 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 sit down 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. Their opinions provide a panoramic view of the cooperative landscape, offering strategic insights and a glimpse into their vision for the future.

As we delve into the heart of the ICA-AP RA and Cooperative Forum, we invite you to join us on a journey of reflection and celebration. Since 1995, these gatherings have been the bedrock of cooperative synergy and helped propel the movement forward.

You can read the previous issues at www.icaap.coop. For feedback and queries, feel free to write to us at: coopdialogue@icaap.coop.

Best wishes,
Coop Dialogue team



Strengthening Cooperation for a Better Tomorrow: The Significance of the International Cooperative Alliance Asia and Pacific Regional Assembly

Introduction

At the forefront of the global cooperative movement stands the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), which is committed to promoting and advancing the cooperative ethos worldwide. Within the ICA, the Regional Assembly holds a special place, serving as a forum for cooperation and decision-making. This article looks into the history and significance of the International Cooperative Alliance Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) Regional Assembly. It explores its origins and structural transformations which show the enduring importance of this assembly in shaping the cooperative movement for a better future.

Move from Regional Council to Regional Assembly

The Stockholm Congress of 1988 instructed to have “the organizational and management structures of ICA” reviewed. The Structure Committee report of 1991 recommended, among other things, “the establishment of 4 new regional assemblies (including one in Asia and Pacific) in recognition of the growing importance of regional issues and trends within the ICA.” The recommendations to restructure the ICA were adopted by the Tokyo Congress of 1992.

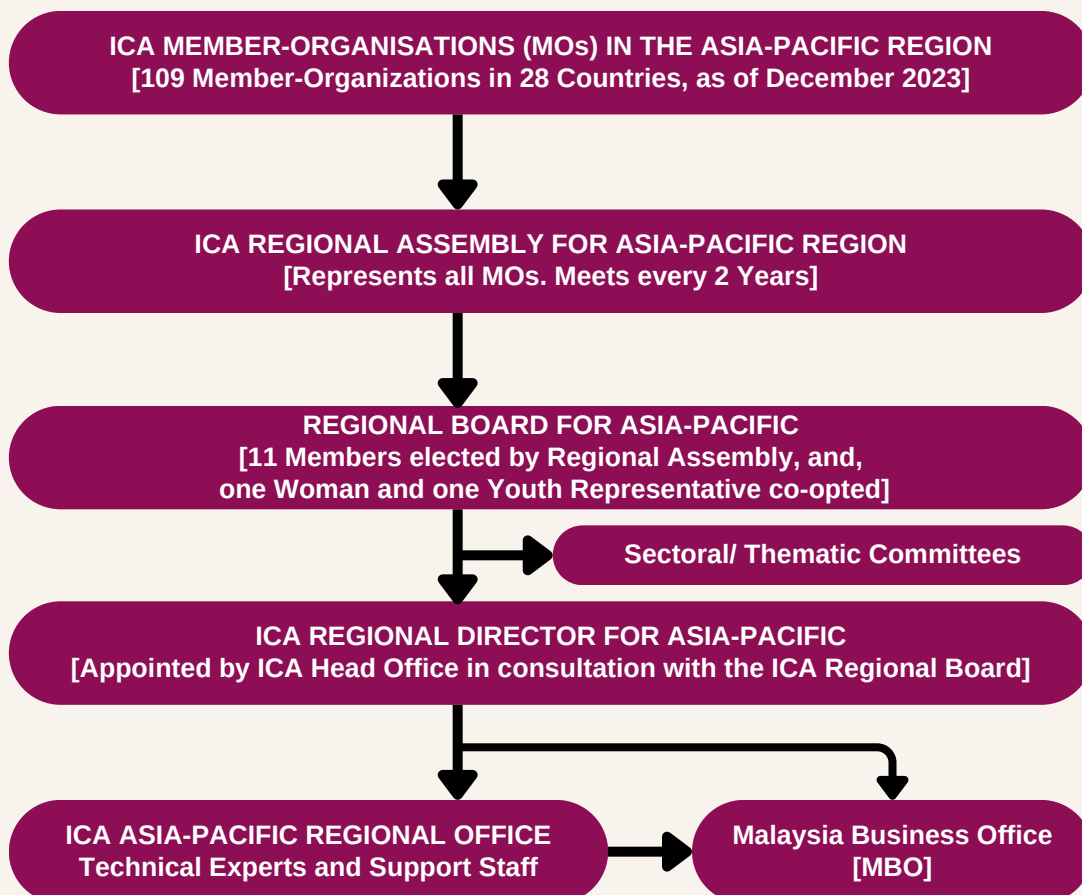
Following that decision, the region held a Consultation Meeting in the spring of 1993 in Beijing to pave the way for a regional structure including the adoption of the Rules of the Regional Assembly.

Prior to the restructuring, the highest policy body in the region was the Regional Council which consisted of two delegates from each country. As a result of restructuring, the Regional Council was replaced by a Regional Assembly in which all the members in the region were entitled to participate. In the meeting of all the members in the region held in Beijing, China, in April 1993, the Constitution of the new Regional Assembly was adopted, which was also approved by the ICA General Assembly. Based on the Constitution, the first meeting of the reconstituted Regional Assembly was inaugurated on January 5, 1995, in New Delhi.

The meeting in 1995 approved to modify Rule 7 to include ICA Congress, General Assembly and Board as also to modify the word “Regional Council” with “Executive Council.” The amended Rule allowed the Regional Assembly to elect at its first session a Chairman, normally from the host organization, to preside over the meeting; and elect one or more than one Vice Chairman as deemed necessary. The Regional Assembly was also to nominate one candidate for election as ICA Vice-President by the General Assembly who would serve a four-year term and be eligible for re-election if nominated again by the Regional Assembly.

ICA Regional Structure

In line with the organizational structure of ICA globally, all Regional Offices of ICA, have adopted administrative structures. According to the statute of ICA, the organizational and governing structure at the region consists of the regional authorities which at present include the Regional Assembly, Regional Board, Regional Director and several sectoral and thematic committees.



Structure of the ICA Asia and Pacific

Regional Assembly

The Regional Assembly is the highest policy body to promote collaboration among the ICA Member Organizations (MOs) at the regional level and provide a forum for discussion of regional as well as global issues. It is to guide the Regional Office on its programs of activities, make recommendations, and submit proposals and resolutions for consideration by the General Assembly.

The following Regional Assemblies have taken place since 1995:

Number	Year	Month	Place
1	1995	January	New Delhi, India
2	1996	June	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
3	1998	October	Seoul, Korea
4	2000	June	Singapore, Singapore
5	2003	February	Cebu, Philippines
6	2004	December	Chiang Mai, Thailand
7	2006	August	Colombo, Sri Lanka
8	2008	December	Hanoi, Vietnam
9	2010	September	Beijing, China
10	2012	November	Kobe, Japan
11	2014	September	Bali, Indonesia
12	2016	November	New Delhi, India
13	2018	November	Tehran, Iran
14	2021	February	Online
15	2021	November	Hybrid, Seoul, Korea
16	2023	November	Manila, Philippines



16th RA in Manila, Philippines in November 2023



12th RA in New Delhi, India in November 2016



11th RA in Bali, Indonesia in September 2014

Powers of Regional Assembly

The Regional Assembly, as a rule, take place at least every second year, alternating with the ICA General Assembly. It works within the framework of the ICA Strategic Plan and implements priorities decided by the Regional Authorities. It also:

- Implements the decisions of the ICA General Assembly in the region;

- Submits reports, proposals and resolutions for the consideration of the General Assembly;
- Elects a Chairperson of the Region who also serves as the nominee from the Region to the ICA Board for the position of Vice-President, subject to ratification by the General Assembly;
- Elects a Regional Board according to its rules; and
- Draws up its own statute, subject to approval by the General Assembly.

The Regional Assembly brings together the representatives from MOs in the Region. It formulates policies on major issues affecting the organization and the Cooperative Movement in the Region.

ICA Regional Board

The Regional Assembly constitutes a Regional Board, elected from among the delegates to the Regional Assembly, to oversee the working and activities of the ICA Regional Office. The Chairperson of the Regional Assembly is the Chairperson of the Regional Board. The Regional Assembly elects a maximum of eleven members to the Regional Board from among the candidates proposed by MOs. The Chairpersons of the Women and the Youth Committee are co-opted to the Regional Board.

ICA Regional Committees

There are sector-specific and thematic committees established in the Region to take care of specific interests. The committees elect their office-bearers for a specific term as per the constitution of each committee. At present, the following committees are functioning in the region:

Sectoral Committees

ICA-AP Committee on Agriculture and Environment
ICA-AP Committee on Consumer Cooperation
ICA-AP Committee on Cooperatives in Educational Institutions
ICA-AP Committee on Credit and Banking
ICA-AP Committee on Trade and Business

Thematic Committees

ICA-AP Committee on Human Resource Development
ICA-AP Committee on Women
ICA-AP Committee on Youth Cooperation
ICA-AP Committee on Research

Cooperative Forum: A Catalyst for Collaboration

One of the hallmarks of the Asia and Pacific Regional Assembly is the Cooperative Forum. These forums serve as platforms for cooperative leaders, experts, and practitioners to come together, exchange ideas, and chart a course for cooperative development.

1. **Collaborative Learning:** Cooperative Forums provide a space for collaborative learning and knowledge sharing. Experts and practitioners share insights on a wide range of topics, from sustainable agriculture to digital transformation.
2. **Addressing Regional Challenges:** Forums address regional challenges head-on. They identify specific issues faced by cooperatives in the region and work collectively to develop solutions and strategies for overcoming these challenges.
3. **Fostering Innovation:** Forums foster innovation within the cooperative movement. By bringing together diverse perspectives, they encourage cooperatives to adapt and embrace new technologies and approaches.

The following Cooperative Forums have taken place since inception:

Number	Year	Place	Theme
1	2000	Singapore, Singapore	Cooperatives in the 21 st Century: Are We Changing
2	2002	Cebu, Philippines	Cooperatives: Past 10 Years and 10 years Ahead
3	2004	Chiang Mai, Thailand	Re-engineering Cooperatives in the Globalize Economy
4	2006	Colombo, Sri Lanka	Capacity Building: The Priority for Cooperative Enterprises
5	2008	Hanoi, Vietnam	Cooperative Advantage in the Economy of Asia & the Pacific
6	2010	China	Cooperatives – The Sector of Global Importance
7	2012	Kobe, Japan	Role of Cooperatives in times of Natural Disaster
8	2014	Bali, Indonesia	Cooperatives for Sustainable Development in Asia and Pacific
9	2016	New Delhi, India	Cooperatives: Power to Act for a Sustainable Future
10	2018	Tehran, Iran	Cooperatives: Building Resilience and Sustainability
	2021	Seoul, Korea	33 rd World Cooperative Congress. Cooperative Identity
11	2023	Manila, Philippines	Cooperatives: Our Common Agenda

Conclusion: The Enduring Significance

The ICA-AP Regional Assembly is a testament to the enduring significance of cooperatives in addressing regional and global challenges. Through its key decisions, the power of Cooperative Forums, and the guidance of visionary leaders, it has championed the cooperative movement, advocating for enabling policies, inclusivity, and sustainability.

As the world faces complex issues, from economic disparities to environmental crises, the cooperative model stands as a beacon of hope, offering a path toward a more equitable and sustainable future. In the spirit of cooperation and solidarity, the Asia and Pacific Regional Assembly continues to inspire, empower, and lead the way, reminding us of the enduring importance of working together for a better tomorrow.



Highlights from ICA-AP Regional Assemblies

The ICA Asia and Pacific held its 16th Regional Assembly from November 6-10, 2023, in Manila, the Philippines. The ICA Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) Regional Assembly is a central policy-making and representative body of the ICA Asia and Pacific that brings together all ICA members in the region and provides them with a platform to discuss multiple issues concerning the development and growth of cooperatives. From 1995 to 2023, there have been 16 Regional Assemblies and have covered important agenda items and thematic discussions that have helped the governance of the ICA Asia and Pacific and benefitted members with new and topical knowledge.

1995, India

The first ICA-AP Regional Assembly was held in 1995 in New Delhi, India. It was attended by members and delegates from 15 countries - Bangladesh, China, Thailand, Israel, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam, and Turkey. In addition to members, representatives from the Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Union (ACCU) Swedish Cooperative Center (SCC) and International Labour Organisation (ILO) attended the Assembly. The assembly approved modifying Rule 7 to include ICA Congress, General Assembly and Board and the word "Regional Council" with "Executive Council." The amended Rule allowed the Regional Assembly to elect at its first session a Chairman, normally from the host organization, to preside over the meeting; and elect one or more than one Vice Chairman as deemed necessary.

1996, Malaysia

The Second ICA-AP Regional Assembly, held in Malaysia in 1996, was special as a Board Committee on the rules and finance was established. The Regional Assembly approved the proposal to form the ICA Regional Women's Committee for Asia and the Pacific. The Model Constitution for the Specialized Regional Committee was also adopted. The Statement of Cooperative Identity (SCI) as approved by the ICA Congress in Manchester was discussed by the Assembly. Many members explained the steps being taken by them to translate the SCI into local languages, and initiatives taken to familiarize people with the Cooperative Principles and to get them included in the respective laws of their countries.

1998, Korea

The Cooperative Forum was officially included in the Third ICA-AP Regional Assembly, held in Seoul to provide more value-addition services to members and for effective networking and collaborative strategies with UN and multilateral agencies. The open forum was held on the theme, 'The Impact on Asia Economic Crisis' to discuss the role of and the impact on cooperatives with speakers from the ICA, ICA-AP, Asian Development Bank (ADB), UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN/ESCAP), ILO and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The amendments to the rules of the ICA Regional Assembly for Asia and the Pacific vis-à-vis Article on the Rules of the Executive Council and Article 7 on Elections were adopted. The rules called for elections of the Vice President of the ICA-AP, Chairperson to preside over the Regional Assembly Meeting, four Vice-Chairpersons, giving fair representation to the sub-regions in Asia and the Pacific, and at least one of the four shall be a woman. The RA also agreed to change the words "Chairman/Vice Chairman" in all constitutions of various Specialized Committees with "Chairperson/Vice Chairperson."



Drs Robby Tulus, then Regional Director, ICA-AP addressing the delegates at the 2nd RA in Malaysia, 1996



1st Cooperative Forum held in Singapore, 2000



4th Regional Assembly in Singapore, 2000

2000, Singapore

In the midst of evolving economic conditions in the world, the new millennium, and increasing globalization, liberalization and privatization, it became imperative to have continued discussions with members on the impact of these on cooperatives. The first Coop Forum was held in conjunction with the Fourth ICA-AP Regional Assembly in Singapore in 2000 on the theme 'Cooperatives in the New Millennium: Are We Changing?' It was pointed out that cooperatives had suffered a great deal due to the economic crisis. However, the exchange of information and discussions by the ICA with its members have helped them learn about what is being done in other countries and how to survive.

2003, Philippines

The 5th Regional Assembly, held in Cebu, Philippines in 2003, brought about 160 delegates together, along with special invitees from Brunei, Canada, Germany, AARDO, ILO and CICOPA. Rules were amended for the Regional Assembly to elect a maximum of eight members in addition to the Chairperson and two Vice-Chairpersons. The Chairperson of the ICA Regional Assembly would also serve as Vice President of ICA from the Asia-Pacific region, on the Global Board. Regional Elections took place and the chairperson, eight members of the standing committee and two vice chairpersons were elected for the next 4 years.

2004, Thailand

In 2004, all ICA regions were confronting common issues such as globalization, growing inequality and poverty. At the 6th ICA-AP Regional Assembly, hosted by the Cooperative League of Thailand, members in the region had concerns about identifying ways to fight poverty both in Asia and as well as supporting Africa. Meetings were held and decisions were taken to come up with solutions to end poverty.

2006, Sri Lanka

The cooperative movement of Sri Lanka hosted the 7th ICA-AP Regional Assembly in 2006. The members were informed about the outstanding performance and financial results of the ICA-AP and were informed of the post-tsunami reconstruction activities and support in India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia. There was a discussion about regionalization (which was first stated at the ICA-AP Regional Assembly in Seoul) which has a bearing on the solidarity of the whole of ICA. The Assembly was informed about the steps taken regarding this matter, including the establishment of the Regional Working Group (RWG) to discuss and report on this issue. The Assembly approved the Constitution of the ICA Committee on Youth Cooperation for Asia and Pacific.



International delegates at the 5th Regional Assembly held in Cebu, Philippines, 2003



Mr. Ivano Barberini, ICA President at the inauguration of the 7th Regional Assembly in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2006



Members casting their vote to elect new Regional Board at the 8th Regional Assembly in Hanoi, Vietnam, 2008

2008, Vietnam

The 8th Regional Assembly was hosted by the Vietnam Cooperative Alliance (VCA) in 2008; 195 participants from 24 countries along with 3 International organizations attended.

An important highlight of this Regional Assembly was the approval of the Constitution of the ICA-AP Committee on Youth Cooperation. The Assembly received two proposals for establishing two separate committees for (a) Cooperative Research and (b) University/Campus Cooperative, which were approved by the Regional Assembly.

2010, China

In the 9th ICA-AP Regional Assembly, held in China in 2010, a few important decisions were taken. This included changing the name of the Standing Committee to Regional Board and approving of its powers, meeting schedule and its constitution. Some of the significant changes in the rules of ICA-AP were:

- The Regional Assembly to elect a maximum of eleven (11) members to the ICA-AP Board for a term of four years. Per the new Rules, the members of the Regional Board would elect the Chair and the Vice Chairs.
- The Standing Committee of ICA ROAP, representing the Regional Assembly was an important governing structure of ICA in Asia and the Pacific. The new Rules of ICA-AP changed the name of the Standing Committee to the Regional Board.
- The Asia Pacific members of the ICA Board who are not members of the Regional Board shall have the right to attend and speak at the Regional Board.
- The Youth Representative was co-opted in the Regional Board.

The Regional Assembly reviewed the Rules of the ICA in the regions to ensure conformity with the ICA Rules approved by the Special 2008 General Assembly held in Rome. The Assembly had resolved that there should be only a one-time annual membership fee for ICA, thereby doing away with the membership fee of sectoral organizations and thematic committees. Accordingly, no sectoral organization/thematic committee, globally or regionally, would be allowed to collect separate membership subscriptions or have non-members participating in the meetings.



His Excellency Liangyu HUI, Vice Premier of the Peoples Republic of China and Ms. Dame Pauline Green, ICA President at the Opening of the 10th Regional Assembly in Beijing, China, 2010



Mr. Setyo Heryanto, Mr. Balu Iyer, Ms. Dame Pauline Green, Mr. Li Chunsheng and Mr. Nurudin Halid at the 11th Regional Assembly in Bali, Indonesia, 2014

2012, Japan

There was outstanding participation in the 10th Regional Assembly held in Kobe, Japan in 2012. This was a memorable year for the cooperatives as it was declared as the International Year of Cooperatives by the United Nations and the motto of ICA was to make it into a cooperative decade. This was the chance to raise public awareness about cooperative values and principles, to recognize the unique role of cooperatives in social development, and to provide an environment in which cooperatives would get stronger government support. The agenda for the formation of the ICA-AP Committee on Forestry was presented and approved by the Regional Assembly.

Per the Rules of ICA-AP, the Regional Assembly elected a President, two Vice Chairs and eight members to the Regional Board for the next four years. It approved the Malaysia Business Office.

2014, Indonesia

The new Regional Director of the ICA-Asia and Pacific, Mr. Balasubramanian (Balu) G. Iyer, was introduced to the delegates of the Regional Assembly. The Assembly adopted the Bali Resolution on “Co-operatives for Sustainable Development in Asia and Pacific,” to recognise the relevance of Sustainable Development Goals and position co-operatives in the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda.

2016, India

The 12th Regional Assembly was held in New Delhi in 2016 and elections for the Regional Board were held. This was also the start of a new focus area of involving more youth in cooperatives, as the ICA came to realize that the youth were alienating themselves from “cooperation” and cooperative activities. This led to the creation of avenues for youth to come to the ICA-AP activities, such as committee meetings and assemblies.

Given the importance the region places on participation of women in cooperatives and representation of women in leadership positions across all levels, including the board; the regional board meeting unanimously approved the co-option of Women’s Committee Chair to the ICA-AP Regional Board without voting rights. The Regional Assembly unanimously approved the proposal.



Cooperatives Delegates at the 8th Cooperative Forum in Bali, Indonesia, 2014



Mr. Radha Mohan Singh, Honorable Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India, at the 12th Regional Assembly in New Delhi, India, 2016



International Delegates at the 13th Regional Assembly in Tehran, Iran, 2018

2018, Iran

The 13th Regional Assembly was hosted by the Iran Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC) in Tehran, Iran. By 2018, the ICA-AP membership had reached 104 member organizations from 32 countries.

The Assembly approved the amendment to change the name of the Committee on University/ Campus Cooperatives to ICA-AP Committee on Cooperatives in Educational Institutions (ICEI) to be more inclusive of its stakeholders (covers all kinds of educational institutions including universities, colleges, high schools and others).

The Regional Assembly approved the Rules of ICA-Asia and Pacific (Article-7: Regional Board, para-3) regarding the co-option of the Chair of the ICA-AP Women Committee to the Regional Board. The new rule stated that the Chair of the ICA-AP Committee on Youth and ICA-AP Committee on Women shall be co-opted to the ICA-AP Regional Board without voting rights. The Asia and Pacific members of the ICA Board who are not members of the Regional Board shall have the right to attend and speak at the Regional Board.

2021, Online and Korea

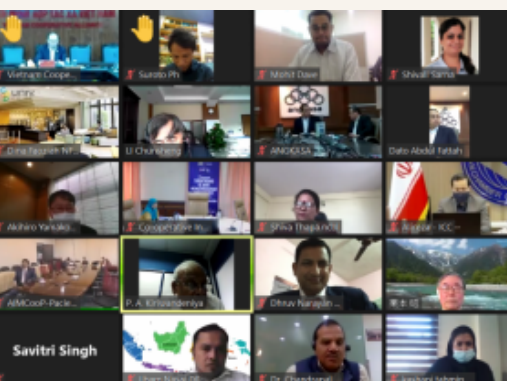
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Regional Assembly could not meet in 2020. In 2021, the ICA-AP Regional Assembly met twice, first online in February and the second time in Seoul, Korea in November along with the 33rd ICA World Cooperative Congress.

The assembly discussed administrative issues and held elections for the new Regional Board in November 2021.

2023, Philippines

The 16th Regional Assembly was hosted by the Philippines Cooperative Affiliates under the aegis of the Philippines Cooperative Movement. The overarching theme this year was “Cooperatives: Our Common Agenda.” The 11th Cooperative Forum culminated with the Manila Declaration. This Assembly was a great show in terms of delegates' attendance. More than 250 international delegates from 21 countries and around 285 delegates from the Philippines attended the Regional Assembly. Among these, the noteworthy was a delegation from Mercosur countries and the Consumer Cooperatives Worldwide (a sectoral organisation of ICA) which were looking to forge potential partnerships and trade linkages.

A key highlight this year was the institution of the ICA Asia Pacific Cooperative Excellence Awards. The Uralungal Labour Contract Co-operative Society Limited (ULCCS), a 100-year-old workers' cooperative from India won the award for Enterprising Cooperative. Datuk Seri Dr. Abdul Fattah Abdullah from Malaysia won the award for Inspirational Cooperative Leader. He is the Vice President of the ICA-AP Regional Board and the President of the ASEAN Cooperative Organization (ACO).



**14th Regional Assembly
Online, 2021**



**Mr. Ariel Guarco, ICA President
addressing the delegates at the
15th Regional Assembly in Seoul,
Korea, 2021**



**ICA Asia Pacific Cooperative
Excellence Awards Ceremony
during the 16th Regional Assembly
in Manila, Philippines, 2023**

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE - ASIA AND PACIFIC 12th Regional Assembly & 9th Co-operative Forum

CO-OPERATIVES : THE POWER TO ACT FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

17 - 18 November, 2016

Ashok Hotel, New Delhi, India



Cooperative Forum Over Two Decades

An open platform for critical reflection, debate, and discussion for cooperatives

The idea for a Cooperative Open Forum was mooted in the Third ICA-AP Regional Assembly in Seoul, South Korea in 1998 when the region was bearing the impact of the Asian Financial Crisis. This open forum discussed the impact of the Asian Financial Crisis on cooperatives and the role of cooperatives. In the subsequent Fourth Regional Assembly in Singapore in 2000, the Cooperative Forum was officially instituted as a core aspect of the Regional Assembly to have open and candid discussions with members in the region on matters pertaining to the development of cooperatives.

The First Cooperative Forum in 2000 was held in close collaboration with the Canadian Cooperative Association with the twin objectives of having open and frank discussions on important issues concerning the development of cooperatives and helping cooperatives to seriously take up strategic initiatives in a fiercely competitive world. Over 23 years, the Cooperative Forum has become a critical platform provided by the ICA-AP to the cooperative and government leaders in the Asia-Pacific region to reflect and discuss important topical issues.

Since 2000, the Cooperative Forum has been held in conjunction with the Regional Assemblies and complements the theme of the Regional Assembly. Organization of the Forum has had a positive outcome on the participation of members in the Regional Assembly including the participation of women and young people. The Forum has also seen the participation of delegates from the UN specialized agencies (UNDESA and ILO), and other non-governmental international organizations. The Forum has presented an opportunity to delegates for learning and mutual exchange of knowledge and good practices.

The table below presents an overview of all the Cooperative Forums that have been organized by the ICA-AP between 2000-2023.

Sr. No	Year	Theme	Country
1	2000	Cooperatives in the 21st Century: Are We Changing?	Singapore
2	2003	Cooperatives: Past 10 Years and 10 Years Ahead	Cebu, the Philippines
3	2004	Re-engineering Cooperatives in the Globalized Economy	Chiangmai, Thailand
4	2006	Capacity Building: The Priority for Cooperatives Enterprises	Colombo, Sri Lanka
5	2008	Cooperative Advantage in the Global Economic Crisis	Hanoi, Vietnam
6	2010	Co-operatives – The Sector of Global Importance	Beijing, China
7	2012	Role of Cooperatives in Times of Natural Disaster	Kobe, Japan
8	2014	Cooperatives for Sustainable Development in Asia-Pacific	Bali, Indonesia
9	2016	Cooperatives: The Power to Act for a Sustainable Future	New Delhi, India
10	2018	Cooperatives Help Economies Become More Resilient and Sustainable	Tehran, Iran
11	2023	Cooperatives: Our Common Agenda	Manila, the Philippines

Several important thematic discussions have taken place in each Cooperative Forum. Some of these themes are –

- Cooperative Governance
- Cooperative legislation
- Cooperative Identity
- Globalization
- Capital mobilization
- Cooperative Trade
- Climate change and natural disasters
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Technology
- Future of work

After the initial few Cooperative Forums, members and delegates gave feedback on the topics covered and the discussions that took place. The need was expressed to bring in diverse experts from Asia as well as other regions so that delegates could learn more about the global scenario and gain new perspectives. The Cooperative Forum has been attended by several eminent personalities from the global cooperative movement as subject matter experts. These include former ICA Presidents, ICA Global Board Members, Presidents/CEOs of the national cooperative apex organizations, government representatives, cooperative scholars such as Dr. Ian MacPherson, and representatives from the UN agencies and the ILO.

From 2000 to 2012, the general proceedings of the Cooperative Forum were summarized and presented during the Regional Assembly. It was for the first time in 2012, during the Cooperative Forum on the 'Role of Cooperatives in Times of Natural Disaster' in Kobe Japan, that a formal Resolution was prepared and presented to the Regional Assembly for approval. The Cooperative Forum Resolutions have been presented in each Regional Assembly thereafter and subsequently approved.

The Resolutions of the Cooperative Forum have called upon cooperatives, governments and other relevant stakeholders for recognition, action, and support to and for cooperatives.



Opening of the 1st Cooperative Forum in Singapore, 2000



Opening of the 8th Cooperative Forum in Indonesia, 2014

Bali Resolution (2014) on the Role of Cooperatives in Sustainable Development

- The Bali Resolution on the "Role of Cooperatives in Sustainable Development".
- The 8th Asia Pacific Co-operative Forum, representative of the ICA in the Asia and Pacific and the co-operative movements therein; having met during the 11th Regional Assembly of the ICA Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) from 16 – 19 September, 2014 at Bali, Indonesia, while
- Recognizing the relevance of Sustainable Development Goals and the importance of positioning co-operatives in the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda,
 - Reaffirming the International Co-operative Identity Statement and its promotion in theory and practice at all levels of co-operative education and training systems,
 - Realising the significance of the ICA Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade and its themes as indicators in the development of co-operatives in the 21st Century, and in achieving sustainable development while articulating the concern of co-operatives for the community,
 - Noting the contribution of co-operative enterprises in ethical and value based business practices and the role of the global co-operative movement in promotion of Sustainable Development Goals.
 - Appreciating the inherent ability of co-operative enterprises in mainstreaming women, youth and marginalised sections of the society and, in creating equal opportunity for all and,
 - Conscious of inadequate enabling legal, policy and regulatory environment for co-operatives and the resultant constraints in realisation of the complete potential of people-based economic enterprises in Asia Pacific region, hereby resolve with the spirit of co-operation to,
 1. Commit to assess and measure the contribution of co-operatives while increasing the body of co-operative research and knowledge by efficient data collection and management, to enable dissemination of information on co-operatives and sustain sovereign support of national governments and other stakeholders,
 2. Invest in technology, education and training for members, staff, management and board to increase participation, service and competitiveness of co-operative enterprises in realizing their inherent sustainable nature.
 3. Initiate activities at national and local level, focusing on achieving inclusive and democratic sustainable development through increased member participation with greater focus on women, youth and other marginalized persons, while addressing their socio, economic, cultural and environmental needs and aspirations,
 4. Call upon national governments, inter-governmental agencies and other stakeholders to recognize co-operatives as representative of a significant section of the population, and to work in co-operation with the national, regional and global co-operative movements in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by pledging support, integrating resources and implementing joint strategies in developing co-operatives in sectors vitals for sustainable development such as clean energy, marine/ ocean resources etc.
 5. Urge national co-operative movements to call on their governments to revise co-operative laws and policies in conformity with internationally recognized definition, meaning and scope of co-operative enterprises, to participate in the global co-operative movement as a significant institutional partner and,
 6. Work closely with the Alliance (ICA) to identify responses of co-operatives to each of the Sustainable Development Goals to be adopted by the international community, and create an enabling atmosphere for co-operatives to play a larger role in realising the goals so adopted.



Opening of the 9th Cooperative Forum in India, 2016



Breakout Session during 11th Cooperative Forum in Philippines, 2023

2012 was a special year as in the aftermath of the global recession and economic crises (2008-2012), the UN recognized the sustainable characteristics of the cooperative model of business and declared 2012 the UN International Year of Cooperatives (IYC). It was a testament to the resilience of cooperatives that people rely on the cooperative form of business, especially during their most trying times. The UN provided cooperatives "a lifetime opportunity" to increase awareness, promote growth and establish appropriate policies to strengthen the cooperative institutions. The 8th Cooperative Forum in 2014 deliberated ways to create a roadmap to position cooperatives as "Builders of Sustainability" through innovation in management, gathering evidence through data collection, research and case studies, advocacy, and use of technology.

2023 marks the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs. Cooperatives across the Asia-Pacific region are actively involved in the implementation of the SDGs and there has been a focus on SDG1 (no poverty), SDG5 (gender equality), SDG8 (inclusive growth), and SDG13 (climate action). The efforts of cooperatives have been recognized and are reflected in national SDG plans and the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) of many countries. The post-COVID-19 pandemic world has shown organizations the importance of diversity (how well they reflect the communities they serve), equity (everyone has access to the same opportunities), and inclusion (sense of belonging). In the post-pandemic world, these are more relevant to address the needs of a changing demography. Cooperatives with their inclusive structure create avenues for anyone willing to join the cooperative movement; although there is a need to re-look at the enabling environment providing better opportunities and addressing the needs of women, youth, and marginalized communities. Cooperatives, with their human-centric model, concern for community, and cooperative values and principles, have proven time and again that a better world is possible with cooperation.

The table below presents a brief summary of the Cooperative Forum Resolutions approved by the ICA-AP Regional Assembly between 2012-2018.

Year	Cooperative Forum (CF) & Country	Resolution Title	Recognize (Among others)	Recognize (Among others)	Action / Support (Among others)	Action / Support (Among others)
2012	7 th CF, Japan	Role of Cooperatives In Times of Natural Disaster	Being aware that during the last decade and especially in the last few years, the entire region has been devastated by natural disasters and several member countries suffered irreparable loss of human life and property. A large number of cooperatives were destroyed, many members lost their lives, several people were disabled and rendered homeless and jobless	Recognizing that during all these times of disaster, the cooperatives tried to alleviate the sufferings of the people with all means. The role of the International Cooperative Alliance and its members in providing resources and extending solidarity has been exemplary and the cooperatives can play an integral role in disaster mitigation and management if their efforts are backstopped with support and resources from the Governments and other agencies as partners in joint endeavour	Call upon the Cooperatives, Governments, UN agencies and other stake holders to come together and recognize cooperatives as representative of largest group of people in a country which represents individuals as well as their community more than any other civil society in any country for that matter and to facilitate cooperatives in Asia-Pacific countries to integrate resources for developing and implementing emergency relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction projects during disaster and also must acknowledge cooperatives as essential partner in revival of local economy in post disaster reconstruction	Call upon the member nations to raise awareness about role of cooperatives during the disaster and to resolve and recommend that cooperatives be recognized as "Partner in Disaster Management" by respective governments and UN and establish UN-ICA partnership for capacity building of cooperatives for disaster management
2014	8 th CF, Indonesia	Role of Cooperatives In Sustainable Development	Recognizing the relevance of SDGs and the importance of positioning cooperatives in the Post-2015 Global Development Agenda	Noting the contribution of cooperative enterprises in ethical and value-based business practices and the role of the global cooperative movement in promotion of SDGs	Commit to assess and measure the contribution of cooperatives while increasing the body of cooperative research and knowledge by efficient data collection and management, to enable dissemination of information on cooperatives and sustain sovereign support of national	Call upon national governments, inter-governmental agencies, and other stakeholders to recognize cooperatives as representative of a significant section of the population, and to work in cooperation with the national, regional, and global cooperative movements in achieving the SDGs

					governments and other stakeholders	by pledging support, integrating resources and implementing joint strategies in developing cooperatives in sectors vital for sustainable development such as clean energy, marine/ocean resources etc.
2016	9 th CF, India	Cooperatives: The Power to Act for a Sustainable Future	Appreciating the efforts of the ICA and its members in the Asia-Pacific region towards implementing the ICA Blueprint for a Cooperative Decade within the context of the SDGs	Understanding that sustainability is regaining ecological integrity as opposed to strategy of unethical economic growth which has sacrificed mother earth and the people at all costs.	Ensure peace and harmony in nations by active practice and propagation of the cooperative model of enterprise in line with the ICA Statement on Cooperative Identity	Enhance innovation in cooperatives by investing in education, training and research activities among members and relevant stakeholders of cooperatives; and increase the confidence of people in cooperatives as partners in development and growth of societies and economies by increasing transparency, honesty and integrity while upholding the cooperative values and principles
2018	10 th CF, Iran	Cooperatives Help Economies become More Resilient and Sustainable	Recognize the inherent nature of cooperatives as 'people-entered', democratic, inclusive, participative, and conscionable forms of enterprise and organizations	Are aware of the international recognition accorded to the potential of the cooperative enterprise model in paragraph 41 of Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (UN A/RES/70/1) as a relevant actor in the implementation of the Goals and targets, and the overall pursuit of development of	Devise institutional mechanism (policy directive) to consciously support inclusion and capacity building of all sections of the society, particularly women and youth in cooperatives and prioritize to support vulnerable and marginalized sections such as refugees, displaced, migrants and the differently able for social cohesion	Invest in strengthening capacities through research and innovation, building partnership and network, embracing technology, venturing into new emerging areas to address the Future of Work agenda, and adopt a knowledge-based approach that can support development of cooperatives]

				<p>humanity and the planet, and other important international legal instruments such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the EU New Consensus on Development, and the UNESCO recognition of cooperatives as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity, the Colombo Declaration on Mainstreaming Youth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda</p>		
2023	11 th CF, Philippines	Cooperatives: Our Common Agenda	<p>Reaffirm the Statement on Cooperative IDENTITY and its promotion in theory and practice at all levels of cooperative education and training systems</p> <p>Recognizing the need for cooperatives to drive the CLIMATE agenda forward by advancing sustainability through cross sector collaboration, and reimagining how we produce, consume, and dispose of</p>	<p>Recognizing the urgency of TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION to increase participation, service, and competitiveness of cooperative enterprises in realizing their inherent sustainable future</p> <p>Recognizing the relevance of SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS and the importance of positioning cooperatives in the Global Development Agenda, and the creation of enabling legal, policy and</p>	<p>Initiate activities at national and local levels to preserve and promote the cooperative identity towards reaching our COMMON AGENDA</p> <p>Urge national cooperative movements to call on their governments to revise cooperative laws and policies in conformity with the universally-accepted statement of the cooperative IDENTITY</p> <p>Call upon national Governments, inter-governmental agencies, and other stakeholders</p>	<p>Initiate activities at national and local levels to pursue and achieve INCLUSIVE and democratic sustainable development by increasing member participation, and with greater focus on women, youth and indigenous and marginalized people</p> <p>Harness the power of cooperation among cooperatives and expertise in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world, to ensure access to TECHNOLOGY for all sizes of cooperatives</p> <p>Assess and measure the contribution of cooperatives while augmenting</p>

			<p>resources</p> <p>Recognizing DIVERSITY and INCLUSION by appreciating the inherent ability of cooperative enterprises in mainstreaming women, youth, and marginalized sections of the society, thus creating equal opportunity for all</p>	<p>regulatory climate to realize the complete potential of people-based economic enterprises in Asia Pacific region</p>	<p>to recognize cooperatives as representative of a significant section of the population, and to work in co-operation with the national, regional and global cooperative movements in tackling CLIMATE CHANGE and pursuing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals</p>	<p>cooperative research, and use technological tools to gain knowledge, efficient data, and management capacity to enable dissemination of information on cooperatives as well as sustain sovereign support from national Governments and other stakeholders.</p>
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Over the years, the Cooperative Forums have been an ideal platform for cooperators in the Asia Pacific region to mull over these important issues, chalk out actionable items, and pave a path towards a common agenda to strengthen the regional cooperative movement and tackle socio-economic challenges cooperatively.



11th Asia Pacific Cooperative Forum on ‘Cooperatives: Our Common Agenda’

The 11th Asia Pacific Cooperative Forum on the theme ‘Cooperatives: Our Common Agenda’ was successfully held on 8th November 2023 in Manila, the Philippines. The response to the Forum was enthusiastic with the participation of more than 600 attendees representing 22 countries. The Forum hosted 16 speakers from 11 countries and witnessed a thought-provoking plenary, three informative breakout sessions, and the adoption of the [Manila Declaration](#). The discussions during the Forum delved into crucial topics such as cooperative identity, driving the climate agenda forward through cross-sector collaboration, empowering cooperatives by promoting diversity and inclusion and ensuring cooperatives’ relevance by embracing disruptive technologies for sustainable growth.

It was exciting to hear Mr. Andrew Allimadi, Coordinator on Cooperative issues at the United Nations Department on Economic and Social Affairs speak about the resolution on [cooperatives in social development](#) calling for the proclamation of 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives. The [resolution](#) - presented by the Government of Mongolia – was adopted on 3rd November during the 47th plenary meeting of the United Nations General Assembly (recording in [this link](#) – to watch the adoption of this resolution from minutes 25 to 35).

The Forum reaffirmed the Statement on Cooperative Identity and its promotion in theory and practice at all levels of cooperative functioning. It recognized the need for cooperatives to drive the climate agenda forward by advancing sustainability through cross-sector collaboration, and reimagining how we produce, consume, and dispose of resources.

It also recognised diversity and inclusion by appreciating the inherent ability of cooperative enterprises to mainstream women, youth and marginalised sections of society, thus creating equal opportunity for all. It also recognized the urgency of technology adoption to increase participation, service and competitiveness of cooperative enterprises in realizing their inherent sustainable future; recognizing the shift towards digitalization and the requirements for digital channels for cooperative shared services, and improved digital tools and technology for enhanced productivity, risk management with cybersecurity system to protect members' identity and data. The Forum highlighted the relevance of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the importance of positioning cooperatives in the Global Development Agenda, and the creation of enabling legal, policy and regulatory climate to realise the complete potential of people-based economic enterprises in the Asia Pacific region.



Plenary Session on Cooperative Identity



Breakout Session on Diversity & Inclusion

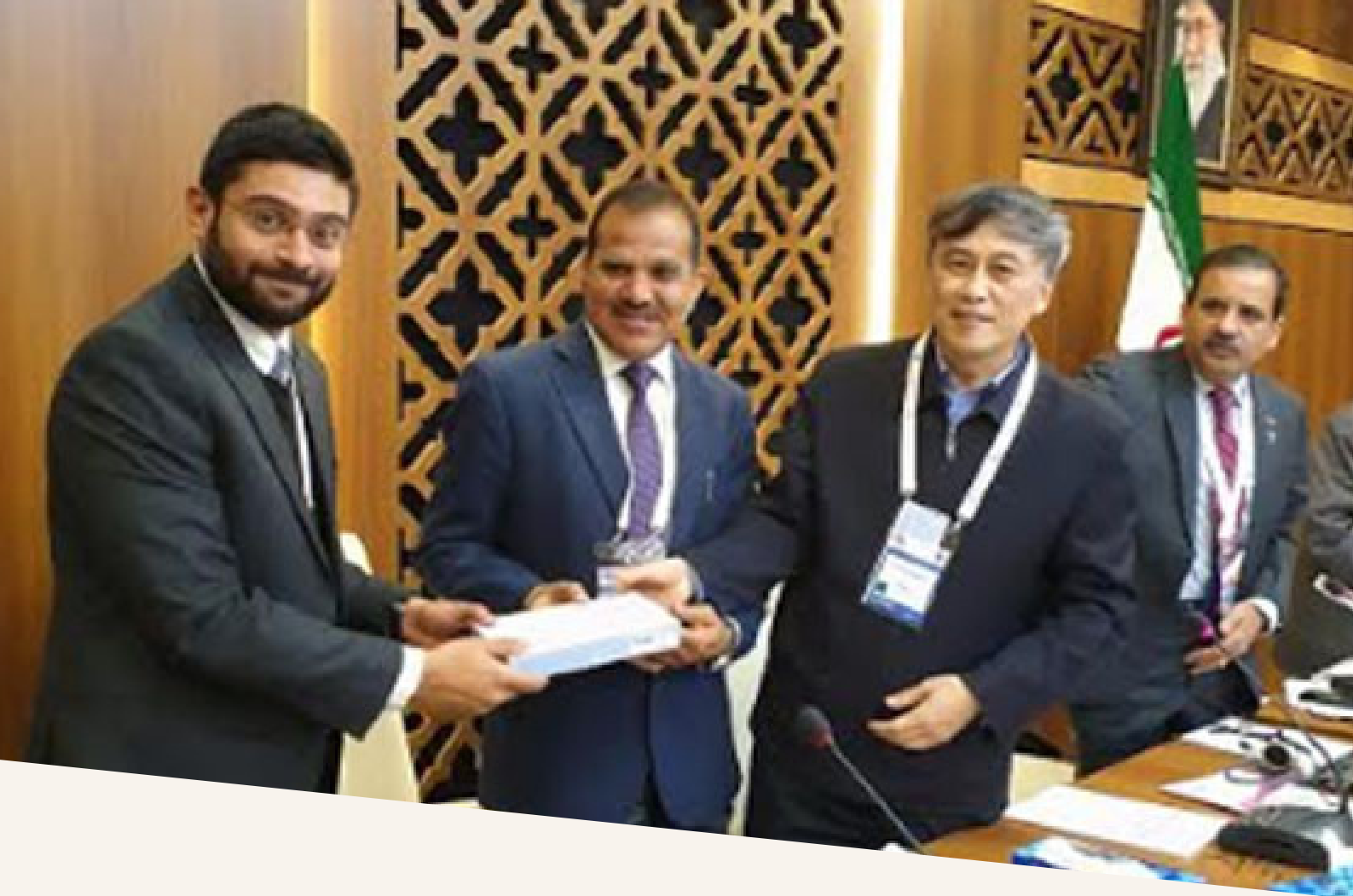


Breakout Session on Climate Agenda



Breakout Session on Adoption of Technology

The Manila Declaration, adopted in the Forum, calls on cooperatives to initiate activities at the national and local levels to preserve and promote the cooperative identity towards reaching our common agenda. It urges national cooperative movements to call on their Governments to update cooperative laws and policies in conformity with the universally accepted statement of the cooperative identity. It calls upon national Governments, inter-governmental agencies and other stakeholders to recognize cooperatives as representatives of a significant section of the population and to work in cooperation with the national, regional and global cooperative movements in tackling climate change and pursuing the achievement of the SDGs. The Declaration urges all stakeholders to initiate activities at the national and local level to pursue and achieve inclusive and democratic sustainable development by increasing member participation, and with a greater focus on women, youth and indigenous and marginalized people while addressing their socio-economic, cultural and environmental needs and aspirations. They need to harness the power of cooperation among cooperatives and expertise in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world, to ensure access to technology for all sizes of cooperatives, showcase the use of technology to expand the reach and diverse community, and the practice of cooperative values and principles in the digital economy. It stresses the need to assess and measure the contribution of cooperatives while augmenting cooperative research and using technological tools to gain knowledge, efficient data, and management capacity, to enable dissemination of information on cooperatives as well as sustain sovereign support from national Governments and other stakeholders.



Consultative, Collaborative, and Cooperative – Reflections from the ICA Asia and Pacific Assemblies (2010-2018)

*By Mr. P. Santosh Kumar**

Education center to a political platform

One of my first supervisors at ICA-AP told me early on that ICA was a “beautiful organisation.” Through my years of service at the ICA, I discovered that apart from its noble mission of promoting the emancipation of disadvantaged communities through self-help, mutual benefit and enterprise, ICA is also quite beautifully structured, with a very high degree of autonomy for ICA regions and sectors on the one hand, and interdependence between these actors in the development and implementation of motions and programs on the other. It is for this reason that I continue to agree with my former supervisor about our beautiful structure, which shows and lives a profoundly sovereign yet interconnected life that not many international organizations can claim to lead. Having invested some time deciphering the UNO system and organizational mechanics through my studies and interest in public international law and the law of international organizations, I see ICA Regions and Sectors similar to the principal organs of the United Nations – each with its distinct scope yet bound by a purpose, which in the case of all ICA bodies is to promote, unite and develop cooperatives.

ICA's global leadership in the 1950s discussed and acted to extend the ICA's technical expertise and management to the so-called Global South, culminating in the establishment of the ICA Regional Office and Education Centre in New Delhi in 1960. A few years ahead of the Co-operatives (Developing Countries) Recommendation, 1966 (No. 127) of the ILO, and the formal adoption of our 6th principle on cooperation among cooperatives, in the rules of the ICA. This landscape paved the way for internationally coordinated programs and actions in supporting decolonization and contributing to the real independence of the former colonies through the promotion of cooperative development programs and the like. The ICA's journey in Asia started in the form of an educational centre comprising technical experts and continued into its current form which is, among other things, a political platform for cooperative movements in the region to stand united in nurturing and safeguarding the cooperative enterprise form. It was in the 1990s that the ICA General Assembly formally accorded its regions a status higher than "offices" and as (regional) assemblies.

The central aspect of cooperative governance, as well as the *raison d'être* of the ICA, is the primacy of the Assembly of its member organizations. The ICA Regional Assemblies and their mandate to implement the decisions of the ICA General Assembly are evidence of the above-mentioned autonomy of the regions and their interdependence with the global structure. Over the years, the ICA-AP Regional Office has led the process of bringing together cooperatives from our diverse region and has clearly contributed to making the festival of cooperatives of different types, forms and nationalities that the Regional Assemblies truly are, a great instrument of fellowship, solidarity and progress, with cooperative prosperity at its core.

Recollecting some moments from ICA-AP Regional Assemblies

2010 (Beijing) 2012 (Kobe), 2014 (Bali), 2016 (New Delhi) and 2018 (Tehran)

I have fond memories of the autumn of 2010 when the 9th ICA-AP Regional Assembly was organized and hosted by the All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives in Beijing, PRC. Beijing had recently hosted a hugely successful Olympic Games, with Usain Bolt in the spotlight, Delhi was preparing to host the XIX Commonwealth Games in October that year, and the global economy was trying to emerge from the shambles of the collapse of Lehman Brothers & Company in the United States. ILO had published a paper on the resilience of financial cooperatives authored by Johnston Birchell and Hammond Ketilson, which was doing the rounds and being received favorably at several high-level political meetings of the day, and US President Barack Obama had just called cooperatives the world's best kept secret. Loomio, the famed decision-making online tool utilized by the UN, ICA and several others in facilitating democratic decision-making, was created as a worker cooperative in New Zealand, as a direct response to the Occupy movements in Wellington, New Zealand. Furthermore, the United Nations General Assembly, at the request of the Permanent Mission of Mongolia to the UN, proclaimed 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives, with the slogan "Cooperative Enterprises Build a Better World" and the term enterprise was added to bring cooperatives further into the mainstream discussion and discourse on the economy as a distinct entity within the diversity of enterprises. I also recollect the following moments from Beijing 2010, which was my first time participating in an ICA Regional Assembly: Representatives of Israel and Iran sat next to each other during the Assembly as seating is almost always done in alphabetical order, and Israel was serviced by the ICA-AP at the time; the investiture of the then recently appointed ICA Director General, Charles Gould, an Oxonian and human rights lawyer from the United States inspired me immensely to get involved in the legal aspects of the cooperative form of enterprise; and the parting words of Iain MacDonald, the outgoing ICA Director General, who showed an absolute affection for the staff, the organization and the cause it stood for.

The 2008 ICA General Assembly in Singapore marked an important milestone in the life of the ICA-AP Youth Committee, which had its origins in the early 2000s. For much of 2010, the ICA-AP Youth Committee was staffed by Mr. Yoshimitsu Nakamura, seconded from the Japan Consumer Cooperative Union (JCCU) to the former ICA-AP Singapore office, together with Ms. Kanako Miyazawa, then one of the main JCCU liaisons to the Regional Consumer Committee. Since then, she has pursued and successfully completed her law studies.

The 2010 ICA Regional Assembly saw a joint session of the Regional Women's Committee and the Youth Committee, chaired until 2010 by Mr. Ilham Nasai of Dewan Koperasi Indonesia (DEKOPIN), who went on to represent the DEKOPIN President's Cabinet at ICA meetings. The Joint Meeting was made special by the election of Ms. Tahmineh Kashani of CURACI (Iran) as its first female Chairperson. One of the Youth Committee members, Mr. Vishal Singh, who was present at the meeting in 2010, has recently been elected as perhaps the youngest ever chairperson of the Indian National Consumer Cooperative Federation! The 2010 ICA-AP Regional Assembly gave a shot in the arm to the office in enhancing coordination among youth cooperators in the region. It helped the ICA-AP bring in youth from roughly 15 countries onto the committee. The theme of the 2011 International Day of Cooperatives was "Youth, the Future of Cooperative Enterprise" and this added further momentum to youth-led actions at the ICA-AP.



Ernesto Guevara – Training Manger, Caja Popular Mexicana making a video presentation during 7th meeting of Youth Committee



Delegates at the Joint Regional Women and Youth Forum in Beijing, China, 2010



Joint Workshop of the ICA-AP Committee on Youth and Cooperatives in Educational Institutions in Tehran, Iran, 2018

The year 2012 was special mainly because it was the UN International Year of Cooperatives and the ICA at all levels had put its promotional activities into high gear. The only other recognition of cooperatives as such was when the UN declared 1965 as the International Year of Cooperation and the famous Indian singer Smt. M.S. Subbalakshmi performed at the UN General Assembly that year and received praise from all quarters, including the then UN Secretary-General U.U. Thant of Myanmar. In 2012, the ICA Blueprint for a Cooperative Decade was launched, and the movement was ready to turn a new page in its history and present itself as a serious alternative to investor-owned companies. The 2012 ICA-AP Regional Assembly was held in Kobe, Japan. A country still reeling from the Fukushima disaster, hosting the event in Kobe allowed delegates to recognize the courage of the Japanese in rebuilding cities, economies, and lives. By this time, the Youth Committee had held two online meetings and was looking for new leadership to bring the necessary resources to the Youth Committee. This resulted in the election of Mr. Sukhesh Zamwar of Buldana Urban Credit Cooperative Society (BUCCS) of India as Chair and Mr. Ahsan Ali Thakur of Karachi Cooperative Housing Societies Union (KCHSU) of Pakistan as Vice-Chair.

Bali, Indonesia hosted the ICA-AP Regional Assembly in 2014. I had the great privilege of working closely with Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, who had recently taken over as Regional Director of ICA-AP. A joint meeting of the Youth Committee and the then ICA-AP Committee on University/Campus Cooperatives was held at this meeting. A memorandum of understanding was agreed between the two committees to work closely together, as it was the young people that the committees were essentially seeking to serve.

The 2016 Regional Assembly in New Delhi took place in mid-November, and the Union Government of India had ordered the demonetization of most of the banknotes in circulation on 8 November that year. The international delegates visiting India, who had exchanged currencies in their home countries, found themselves in unexpected stress! I must recall and remind readers of the stewardship of the staff of the Indian cooperative movement, who helped countless international delegates during this Assembly.

As decided during a joint meeting of the Youth and University Cooperatives Committees, the 2016 Regional Assembly witnessed a joint workshop on youth and the cooperative business model with the support of two leading colleges of the University of Delhi namely, the Sriram College of Commerce and the Jesus and Mary College.

Hosting the Regional Assembly in Tehran in 2018 was a big step by the ICA-AP leadership to bring the world closer to dialogue and discussions on issues of tranquillity among nations. The assembly was a great success and witnessed the participation of international guests from different parts of the world, not only from the AP region. During the year, the University/Campus Cooperative Committee was renamed as the ICA-AP Committee on Cooperatives in Educational Institutions, clarifying the purpose of the committee to promote cooperation in all educational institutions and spaces, not just universities. This committee was chaired by Dato Mohd. Azlan Yahya from the Malaysian National Cooperative Movement (ANGKASA).

The ICA-AP Regional Assemblies are perhaps the best forum for young cooperators in the region to mix with veterans, researchers, and policymakers. It is a combination of forums for discussion on different types of cooperatives, as well as the political forum to dis/agree and shape the programming and spending of the ICA-AP - a forum of accountability of representatives of the cooperative movements as well as the staff and leadership of the ICA to build a stronger cooperative movement in the region. I am sure that 2023 Manila will be no different and given the involvement of young people in cooperatives in the Philippines, this Assembly will be truly special for youth cooperators!

**Santosh Kumar worked at the ICA Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) from 2010-2019 in the capacities of Program Officer and Program Manager. He currently serves the ICA as its Legislation Director.*



ICA-AP Regional Office: From a Member's Perspective

*By Mr. Bhima Subrahmanyam**

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) unites, represents and serves cooperatives worldwide. Its members are international and national cooperative organisations from all sectors of the economy – agriculture, banking, consumer, fisheries, health, housing, insurance, and industry & services. The ICA is also known as the guardian of the Statement on the Cooperative Identity, which includes the definition of cooperatives, cooperative values, and the seven cooperative principles.

After 75 years of operations and several deliberations, ICA realized the need to establish an appropriate network at regional levels to disseminate the vision and mission of ICA. It set up the first-ever ICA Regional Office & Educational Centre (ICA ROEC) in New Delhi, India in 1960. ICA ROEC was then renamed in 1963 as the ICA Regional Office for Asia and later in 1990 as the ICA-Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) Regional Office.

ICA-AP has completed 63 years of effective service in the Asia Pacific region in successfully transforming the overall objectives of ICA Global by undertaking a number of activities in identified sectors of the cooperative movement. Through its varied initiatives, ICA-AP ensured that the cooperatives in the region were actively supported. The ICA-AP created and/or advocated an enabling environment for cooperative organisations to grow and develop in the region.

The Regional Office shared best practices among the cooperative enterprises aimed to replicate the experiences to showcase their performance, innovation, and sustainable growth in areas such as economic growth and empowerment, social development, environmental sustainability, and promotion of innovative ideas. The office made efforts to establish closer contacts and initiate the consultative process towards the promotion of cooperatives by organising various events and emphasised the need for freedom of functional autonomy to cooperative enterprises.

ICA-AP Regional Office has recognized the need and put effort into ensuring the development of leadership. Under the dynamic elected leadership and with the support of well-trained and experienced Regional Directors, the office has demonstrated exemplary growth, both in terms of numbers and member services. It is encouraging to note the impressive growth in the membership of ICA-AP, which has increased from 71 members in 25 countries (2010) to 108 members in 28 countries (2023) over a decade.

The regional office deserves appreciation for upholding the Cooperative identity, values and principles and for its committed service to the members during the past 63 years, by carrying out a large number of programmes in the region, timely conduct of statutory meetings, establishing nine thematic committees and closer inter-personal relations.



Mr. Bhima with other delegates at the 5th Regional Assembly in Cebu, Philippines, 2003



Mr. Bhima presenting activity report of regional Cooperative Banking Association at 8th Regional Assembly in Hanoi, Vietnam, 2003



Mr. Bhima with Indian delegates at the 16th Regional Assembly in Manila, Philippines, 2023

Priority Areas of ICA-AP

Regional Assembly - The biennial Regional Assembly, represented by all members, is the highest authority of the ICA-AP. It has played a vital role in strengthening the democratic governance process of cooperatives by building consensus on issues and passing the agenda after discussion to the satisfaction of all members. ICA-AP has been regularly organizing the statutory meeting of the regional assembly for the past three decades. Over the years, it has introduced other important and regular meetings and events like the Cooperative Forum, thematic seminars and meetings by the regional committees that have been immensely beneficial for the members and other cooperative stakeholders.

Regional Forum and Cooperative Registrars conferences - Statutory proceedings centred around the legal framework on cooperatives in the region, status of cooperative development, harnessing the potential of cooperatives in implementing the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, and creation of Registrars network are the major highlights of the various Forums organized by the ICA-AP.

ICA-EU Partnership Project on Cooperatives in Development - In March 2016, the ICA and the European Union signed a Framework Partnership Agreement to implement a multi-year and multi-country development program aimed at benefitting and advancing cooperatives worldwide.

The Partnership was titled "Co-operatives in Development: People Centred Businesses in Action". The 5-and-a-half-year-long project had 8 Result Areas and 33 Activity Streams for delivery by 5 units, one housed in each regional office and one at the coordination level in Brussels. The AP unit worked with an outlay of around 1 million Euros, conducted close to 90 activities and engaged more than 80 members in 25 countries.

Research Outputs - The contributions of the ICA-AP Research Committee on various topical issues like Cooperative Identity, Leadership Development, Gender issues, and the Sustainability of Cooperative Banks have been extremely useful for members. The publications and presentations in regional assemblies included a range of topics like Cooperative Legislation, Financial Inclusion etc. and all these efforts helped the members to replicate the better areas and best practices.

I have had a good opportunity to associate with ICA-AP on many occasions since 1991, the first being the State Cooperative Ministers' Conference very well coordinated by NCUI with ICA AP. I have been a regular delegate to the ICA-AP Regional Assemblies since 1995 (New Delhi) and have been part of other events organized by ICA-AP like Cooperative Ministers' Conferences, Cooperative Registrars' Conferences and Regional Forums. I have been also associated with the events of the Human Resource Development Committee and Credit & Banking Committee, set by ICA AP.

ICA AP assumes greater importance and significance in the regions where ever the cooperative movement is either underdeveloped or developed. It further assumes greater significance wherever the policy initiatives are either yet to be taken or at the final stages of formulation. The regional office has the potential to demonstrate its capabilities to ensure that the above are well executed. ICA AP has been a great supporter of ICA Global both in terms of extending member/membership and technical support through important committees and thematic groups - Agriculture, Banking, Fisheries, Human Resources, Youth, Women/Gender etc. The Periodic consultations with regional members established closer relationships and image-building efforts.

The regional office may initiate certain steps to enhance its visibility and improve governance, such as:

- Initiate process for re-orientation to members and orientation to new members for a better understanding of the ICA-AP Regional Office and its objectives.
- Design inductive courses for the executives of member organisations aimed to encourage training and education.
- Develop a mechanism to get to know their members to work on need-based events and programs. This can be done in coordination with the existing training network within the region. Such programs may have the provision to provide a Certificate of Attendance or Appreciation.
- Convene periodical meetings of the members or visit them at least once a year to help to continue 'business' relations. A workable strategy may be formulated to bring further improvements to facilitate the Region office as an exchange platform for members.
- Understand and assess their role in terms of Principles of Cooperation, Values and Ethics, further to understand their role in addressing the issues involved in 17 SDGs.
- Reconsider the policy of levying fees for attending General Assembly meetings.
- ICA-AP publishes a good number of study reports on important themes. These can be shared with all member organisations free of cost (wherever feasible) or on payment. ICA-AP can maintain good libraries or documentation centres.
- Develop a system to provide easy access for members to visit the ICA-AP Regional office to seek guidance and support.
- The structure of the ICA AP office may be re-examined to widen the scope of participation either as members of their Board or special invitees/observers.
- Develop a system to establish working relations with ICA Sectoral organisations and initiate meetings among ICA entities across the globe.

**Managing Director/ CEO, National Federation of State Cooperative Banks & President, International Cooperative Banking Association (ICBA), A sectoral organization of the ICA*



Regional Assemblies: A Platform to Connect with Cooperative Community

*By Mr. Ashok Kumar Taneja**

As I start writing this article, I am reminded of the countless moments of collaboration, inspiration, and growth that I have witnessed over the years at the International Cooperative Alliance-Asia and Pacific's (ICA-AP) Regional Assemblies. As one of the longest-serving staff members of ICA-AP, I've had the privilege of attending many of these gatherings, and I can unequivocally state that Regional Assemblies hold a special place in the heart of cooperative enthusiasts.

In this piece, I will reflect on the significance of these assemblies, how they have evolved, their outreach and scale, and the structural changes, and share some personal anecdotes.

The Importance of Regional Assemblies for Staff

Regional Assemblies serve as a vital platform for staff members of ICA-AP to connect with the broader cooperative community. These gatherings are much more than just meetings; they are an embodiment of the cooperative spirit. They provide a unique opportunity for staff to interact directly with members, understand their needs, and witness the impact of our collective efforts on the ground. It's a humbling experience that reaffirms our commitment to the cooperative movement.

Evolution in Organizing and Planning

Over the years, the process of organizing and planning Regional Assemblies has undergone a remarkable transformation. The meticulous planning, attention to detail, and the adoption of innovative technologies have made these assemblies more efficient and engaging. What was once a largely manual process has now embraced digitalization, making it easier for participants to register, access information, and engage with the event content.

Outreach and Scale

One of the most striking changes has been the expansion of outreach and scale. Regional Assemblies have evolved into truly global events, attracting participants from our region and cooperative movements worldwide. This globalization has enriched the diversity of perspectives and experiences shared during the assemblies. The active participation of staff members in reaching out to a wider audience, through social media and digital channels, has been instrumental in this expansion.



Mr. Taneja at the 44th meeting of ICA Committee on Consumer Cooperation in Beijing, China, 2010



Mr. Taneja at the 40th meeting of ICA Committee on Agriculture in Bali, Indonesia, 2014



Mr. Taneja at the meeting of ICA Committee on Fisheries in Beijing, China, 2010

Structural Evolution

The structure of Regional Assemblies has also adapted to meet the evolving needs of the cooperative community. The inclusion of thematic tracks, workshops, and interactive sessions has made these assemblies more engaging and informative. The emphasis on inclusivity and diversity in panel discussions and speaker line-ups reflects our cooperative values.

Personal Experiences

During one such assembly, I had the privilege of witnessing a cooperative leader from a remote village sharing their success story. Their journey from adversity to prosperity through the cooperative model was a testament to the transformative power of cooperation. This experience not only moved me but reaffirmed my belief in the cooperative principles that guide our work.

In conclusion, Regional Assemblies are not just events but a celebration of cooperation, a testament to our shared values, and a platform for growth and learning. As staff members, our role in shaping these assemblies and ensuring their success is both a privilege and a responsibility. The evolution of Regional Assemblies mirrors the growth of the cooperative movement itself, and I am excited to see how they will continue to evolve in the years to come. Together, we will keep advancing the cooperative cause.

**Mr. Ashok Kumar Taneja is a former employee of ICA-AP. He joined the office in 1990 and has worked as Manager, Administration and Programme Coordinator for ICA-MAFF (Government of Japan) Training Courses. He also served as the Secretary of the ICA-AP Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Forestry.*



Reminiscing about ICA-AP Regional Assemblies: An Interview with Dr. Chandrapal Singh Yadav

Continuing the series of interviews, we spoke to Dr. Chandrapal Singh Yadav, ICA-AP President to learn about his experience and fond memories of attending various Regional Assemblies of ICA-AP since 1995.

Dr. Yadav is a Member of the Upper House of the Indian Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and the Chairman of Krishak Bharti Cooperative Ltd. (KRIBHCO) and all its subsidiaries. He was also the President of the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI), the apex institution of the cooperative movement in India. In addition, Dr. Yadav was the Vice-President of ICA-AP from 2010-2021. He is also on the Boards of the International Raiffeisen Union (IRU), Germany, National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India (NCCF), National Agriculture Cooperative Marketing Federation (NAFED), National Federation of Urban Coop Banks & Credit Societies (NAFCUB), National Federation of State Coop Banks (NAFSCOB) among others. He has been a regular attendee at the ICA-AP Regional Assemblies, in various capacities over the last three decades.

Remembering his first experience at the ICA-AP Regional Assembly, he said that it was a great experience in terms of knowledge exchange and networking with the international cooperative movement. He noted that in the initial assemblies, the registrations, elections, and other logistical arrangements were all manual which have now become digitalised.

Earlier, less number of delegates would join the assemblies; this situation has improved a lot over the years with many women and youth actively participating in the regional assemblies. The assemblies also provided him with the opportunity to meet senior national political leaders from many other countries.

Dr. Yadav believes that the Regional Assembly is significant as it brings together members from different countries and organizations on one platform and provides them with an opportunity to interact, meet old associates, make new friends, and discuss common issues. He says that the Regional Assemblies are a symbol of ICA-AP's democratic governance.

Talking about the theme of the 16th ICA-AP Regional Assembly, which is 'Cooperatives: Our Common Agenda', he outlines some of the common areas where more cooperation is needed among cooperatives not only at the regional level but also within countries. These include - Improving the policy and legal environment for cooperatives; Enhancing partnerships between cooperative businesses to improve value chains and fight competition from private players; Strengthening the Cooperative Identity; Improving public opinion towards cooperatives; Working on common community-based issues such as climate change, environment protection, social welfare, etc.; Incorporating technology and digitalization in cooperatives; Involving more youth and women in cooperatives and giving them opportunities for decent work and employment; and Collaborating to address SDGs and informing the government about their impact on communities.

Dr. Yadav says that the Regional Assemblies provide an opportunity for members to learn from each other and exchange best practices. For some members, it can be a first-time opportunity to meet and interact with their peers and for regular attendees, it provides a fresh perspective and overview of current issues and happenings across the region. He encouraged members to participate wholeheartedly in all the meetings and events organised along with the Regional Assemblies to maximize the benefits of the grand platform that they provide.



Watch the full interview here



An Interview with Ms. Sylvia O. Paraguya on the Experience of Hosting ICA-AP Regional Assemblies

As part of the COOP Dialogue series, we had an interesting conversation with Ms. Sylvia O. Paraguya, CEO of NATCCO Network and the Overall Coordinator for the 16th ICA-AP Regional Assembly and Cooperative Forum 2023. She talks about hosting the Assembly again in the Philippines after two decades.

The ICA-AP held its 5th Regional Assembly in Cebu, the Philippines in 2003. After 20 years, the Philippines cooperative movement hosted the 16th Regional Assembly in November 2023. Ms. Paraguya has been associated with cooperatives for three decades. She has served as the CEO of cooperative federations for over two decades, Chairperson of CODE NGO (the biggest coalition of NGOs in the Philippines) and is presently also the Chairperson of the Network of Consolidated Cooperative Bank (A coalition of six cooperative banks where NATCCO is the strategic third party investor).

She shared that in 2003, NATCCO was a tertiary organization and worked with several regional federations. It was the focal coordinator and worked together with other ICA-AP members in the Philippines to organise the Regional Assembly. In 2023 as well, NATCCO was the focal coordinator. From 2003 to 2023, NATCCO has grown immensely with 900 member cooperatives and 7.5 million individual members. The consolidated assets of NATCCO are almost half of the whole cooperative sector in the Philippines.

While remembering the 2003 Regional Assembly, she noted that the Vice-President of the Philippines was one of the eminent delegates who attended the ICA-AP Regional Assembly. One of the main things that has changed since the early 2000s is that, now cooperators in Congress help make required cooperative legislations as compared to the political party representatives back then. She mentioned that now more cooperators are elected to the Board of Directors in the Cooperative Development Authority as compared to before. She also noted that over the past 20 years, medium-sized cooperatives have seen more growth in assets as compared to small and large-size cooperatives.

She hoped that by 2030, the overall individual membership in cooperatives will grow to 20 million so that cooperatives can show with evidence their impact and contribution to the development of the country. She pointed towards the recurrent occurrence of natural disasters in the Philippines post-2003. She noted that climate change has become an important and imperative topic for consideration because the Philippines is at the highest risk and is the most disaster-prone country. She underlined the importance of future-proofing cooperatives against climate change in the future.

Talking about the theme of the 16th Regional Assembly, 'Cooperatives: Our Common Agenda', she emphasized the need for increased participation of women and youth in cooperatives to ensure their sustainability. She noted that even though there are many women visible in the Philippines cooperative movement, there is a need to have more women in the leadership. She raised a pertinent question about digitalization and making cooperatives attractive for the next generation.

With an outlook towards the future, she hoped that financial cooperatives (the largest segment in the Philippines cooperative sector) adopt technology and digitalization and that cooperative unions and federations would be strengthened in the future.



[Watch the full interview here](#)



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