

Concept Note

Asia-Pacific Women CEOs in Cooperatives Summit

**Organised by ICA-AP and ICA-AP Committee on Women in Collaboration with the
Vietnam Cooperative Alliance (VCA)**

Empowering Leadership: Navigating the Future of Cooperatives with Women at the Helm

Hanoi, Vietnam

July 29-31, 2024

Background

The Asia-Pacific Women CEOs in Cooperatives Summit will be jointly organized by the ICA-AP, ICA-AP Committee on Women and Vietnam Cooperative Alliance (VCA) on the theme, 'Empowering Leadership: Navigating the Future of Cooperatives with Women at the Helm'.

The summit aims to present one-of-its kind opportunity to women CEOs and executive leaders in the cooperative sector to congregate on a common international platform to share, learn, and network across countries and industries/sectors in the fast changing post COVID-19 world environment.

Women wear multiple hats both at professional and personal levels. As CEOs and leaders of cooperative businesses and/or federations, they drive business decisions, manage operations, and are the leading face of cooperatives both among members and external stakeholders. Like men, they also face numerous challenges at work. However, their challenges get amplified more so because of the many cultural and societal expectations and stereotypes that still exist against women. For example, "women face the need to be warm and nice (what society traditionally expects from women), as well as competent or tough (what society traditionally expects from men and leaders)"¹. The summit will target women in leadership who are at the forefront of anchoring cooperative businesses and organizations and serve as an enabling platform. It will be an exclusive platform for women, tailored to address their needs, engage them in critical dialogue on issues that concern them the most, and strive to empower them with rich and diverse inputs and knowledge. It will be an

¹ <https://hbr.org/2018/11/how-women-manage-the-gendered-norms-of-leadership>

opportunity for them to meet other women CEOs and leaders from different countries and cooperative sectors/industries and build new networks.

At Asia-Pacific level, over the past 25 years, many platforms have been created by the ICA-AP Committee on women for women cooperators to learn and engage with each other through trainings, regional forums and workshops. However, the summit is exclusively for women who are CEOs and executive leaders in the cooperative sector. The first such attempt to gather women CEOs from cooperatives was in 2018 at the regional workshop organised by ICA-AP, ICA-AP Committee on Women, and All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives (ACFSMC) on the theme, 'Re-imagine and Re-shape: Advancing Women CEOs in Co-operatives'. The objectives of the workshop were to understand their journey to the 'top job', contemplate why they are almost invisible at the higher ranks, examine the challenges and identify opportunities for the future to ease their career growth in cooperatives. Read the workshop report [here](#).

The summit is being planned as follow-up and continuation of the 2018 regional workshop. The theme 'Empowering Leadership: Navigating the Future of Cooperatives with Women at the Helm' aims at empowering women in leadership with a more nuanced approach with the below objectives.

The core objectives of the summit are –

- i. Enhance knowledge of women CEOs and executive leaders in cooperatives
- ii. Provide a room for dialogue on common issues and challenges
- iii. Facilitate connections and networks across countries and sectors/industries
- iv. Build capacity of women CEOs and executive leaders in cooperatives for a brighter and sustainable future

Thematic sessions

Mentorship and Leadership Development:

- ⇒ Skills in mentoring and developing future leaders, with a focus on supporting other women in the cooperative sector. This includes succession planning and talent management. Discuss the influence that women CEOs have on ensuring gender-friendly practices/policies at workplace.

Personal Development and Work-Life Balance:

- ⇒ Prioritizing self-care and personal growth, stress management, and achieving a healthy work-life balance, which is especially crucial for women balancing multiple roles.

Building Resilience and Adaptability in a Changing World:

- ⇒ Recognize the challenges posed by global changes, including economic volatility, climate change, and societal shifts. Focus on how women CEOs can lead their cooperatives in adapting and thriving amidst these changes. Learn hands-on tools for business goals such as business development, partnerships, visibility for cooperatives, financial wellness, technology incorporation and sustainable growth of cooperatives.

Fostering Inclusivity and Social Responsibility:

- ⇒ Focus on the role of cooperatives in promoting inclusivity, social justice, and community welfare, with a particular emphasis on the leadership of women. Address issues like gender equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and cooperatives as vehicles for social change. Discuss the influence that women leaders have in advocating for gender-inclusive policies and laws for cooperatives, supported with data and robust evidence.

Training Session on Purpose Driven Leadership by Women in Cooperatives

Focus on the role of women leaders in cooperatives in line with the Cooperative Identity, how to enhance communication skills (verbal and non-verbal), including public speaking, negotiation tactics, and conflict resolution, tailored specifically for women in leadership roles within cooperatives. Aims to provide tools to assertively and effectively communicate ideas, lead discussions, and navigate complex negotiations.

Target participants

The target group is 40 women CEOs and executive leaders from the cooperative sector in Asia-Pacific region. There will be a diverse representation of participants from different countries and national/sectoral cooperative organisations.