



International Cooperative  
Alliance Asia and Pacific  
Committee on Women

*Gender Equality for a Brighter Future*

# INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVE ALLIANCE ASIA AND PACIFIC COMMITTEE ON WOMEN

25 Years of Promoting Gender Inclusion and Equality in Cooperatives



1998 - 2023





**Chairperson**

**Ms. Chitose Arai**



Dear members of the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women and cooperators from the Asia and Pacific region,

Cooperative greetings!

It is my pleasure to introduce to you the 25th anniversary booklet of the Women's Committee! This publication is like a time capsule in which we have strived to document the history of the Committee by tracing its genesis; compiled the list of important events and activities for archival purposes; record memoirs from those who have guided the Committee and have collaborated with us on multiple occasions; outline the evolution of our core work; enhance the visibility of the incredible work that members are pursuing on gender equality; and share the best compliments from our well-wishers from different parts of the world.

The Women's Committee has completed 25 years and I am very excited to be part of this historic milestone. The Committee was established with the earnest efforts of a group of cooperators who genuinely believed in the power of women and their important contribution towards the development and growth of cooperatives. The roots of the Committee lie in the strong desire to make women visible in the cooperative movement even though they are present in large numbers and have always contributed their best to the movement. This has been the foundational objective of the Committee and it continues to be the central approach that we follow.

As the cooperative movement is growing and evolving in the region, we are faced with newer challenges and opportunities. It is my sincere hope, objective and vision that women play a much more nuanced role in steering their cooperators towards a brighter future. A future that is based on respect, equity, equality, inclusivity and cooperation between women and men. A future that sees more cooperation among cooperatives across countries in Asia and Pacific. A future in which we as a collective, can emerge as the pioneers of leading and ensuring gender equality in the cooperative movement in the world.

I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank all the Office Bearers and members of this Committee without whom we would not have been where we are today. I sincerely appreciate your dedication and passion towards the Committee, which made it possible to celebrate the 25th anniversary.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude towards the contributors of this booklet. Your affection and support have given us more energy to work harder and hope for a brighter future.

In the end, I would like to convey my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Vice-Chairperson of the Women's Committee Ms. Priti Patel, Committee members Ms. Madhavi Vipradas from IFFCO (India) and Hajah Noorizan Binti Abdul Latif from ANGKASA (Malaysia) as planning members, ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Director Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, Committee Secretary Ms. Simren Singh and my colleagues from the JCCU Mr. Amano Haruyoshi and Ms. Takako Tsuchiya for their invaluable inputs and support towards the successful completion of this publication.

I hope that you all will cherish this booklet and that it inspires you in the times to come. I look forward to continuing promoting gender equality in cooperatives with you for a brighter and successful future of the cooperative movement in Asia and Pacific.



**Vice-Chairperson**

**Ms. Priti Patel**



Dear Cooperators,

I am very happy and proud that the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women is celebrating a significant milestone of 25 years. This is a momentous occasion, marking a journey full of unwavering commitment, shared values and collective efforts of each and every one of you.

The members of the ICA Asia and Pacific have always strived to uphold the true meaning of Cooperation and Unity. The success of the Women's Committee is a testament to the dedication and resilience displayed by our members, who are the true driving force behind our growth and progress. Together, we have navigated challenges, embraced opportunities, and created an environment of inclusion and support for all.

Let us, once again, strengthen our commitment to the principles of cooperation and continue to innovate and adapt to the changing times. The journey ahead may have its share of trials, but with our shared vision and determination, there is no challenge we cannot overcome.

The commitment of leaders, staff and committee members has played a vital role in shaping the success of the committee in advancing women's empowerment and gender equality in cooperatives. I sincerely thank every member - past and present for their trust, dedication and unwavering support.

With immense pride and gratitude, I wish all of us a very Happy 25th Anniversary and many more to come!



# **ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Director**

**Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer**





Dear Ms. Chitose Arai and members of the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women,

Warmest congratulations on reaching the significant milestone of your 25th anniversary! This is an occasion to look back at your journey, celebrate and acknowledge the contributions and achievements you have made in advancing women's participation in cooperatives throughout the region, and use the opportunity to look ahead. The Committee's steadfast commitment to promoting gender equality, fostering leadership and advocating for women's empowerment is truly commendable.

The first event I participated after assuming the position of Regional Director in 2014 was one organized by the Women's Committee. This was the leadership training program for women in Bangladesh. Following this, I had the opportunity to be part of the trainings in Mongolia, Palestine, Bhutan, India, Korea and Sri Lanka. These gave me the opportunity to engage and learn, from the inspiring members of the Women's Committee.

Over the past 25 years, your Committee has played a pivotal role in driving positive change and creating opportunities for women within cooperatives. One of the notable areas is the data study on women in cooperatives. Through research and analysis, you have shed light on the challenges faced by women in cooperatives, identified key areas for improvement and paved the way for evidence-based decision-making. Your efforts in promoting leadership among women in cooperatives through targeted initiatives and capacity-building workshops, have nurtured a new generation of female leaders who are making their mark in various cooperative enterprises. Your emphasis on ensuring women's representation in governance through the Tagaytay Conferences and Women CEO Summit have been instrumental in creating a more equitable cooperative landscape. By advocating for gender-balanced boards and decision-making bodies, you have championed for an environment where women's voices can be heard, valued and integrated in the working of cooperatives.

I would like to thank the JCCU for their unwavering support from the inception of the Committee. It has been instrumental in giving stability to the Committee and in carrying out its many activities. The leaders of the Committee have displayed steadfast commitment, and their vision and direction have played a pivotal role in shaping the success of the Women's

Committee. I acknowledge and appreciate the dedication of the ICA Asia and Pacific staff, whose efforts have propelled the Committee's initiatives forward. My gratitude to the Committee members and their organisations whose valuable contributions have fuelled the advancement of women's empowerment and gender equality within the cooperative movement.

As we celebrate your 25th anniversary, let us not only acknowledge the accomplishments of the past but also look towards the future with renewed determination. There is still much work to be done to ensure full gender equality and women's empowerment in cooperatives. The four pillars you have set out of economic empowerment, social empowerment, education and training, and solidarity will help build a movement that truly reflects the principles of equity, equality, inclusivity and social justice.

Congratulations to the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women for 25 years of exceptional dedication and achievements! May your commitment and passion continue to inspire and empower women in cooperatives for many more years to come.



**FROM THE  
ARCHIVES**



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women is one of ten regional committees of ICA Asia and Pacific. Established in 1998, in Seoul, South Korea, the Committee promotes gender inclusion and equality in cooperatives in Asia and Pacific.

The activities of the Committee are driven with the objective of promoting gender equality in cooperatives and serve the interest and needs of women in the cooperative sector. Since its establishment, the activities of the Committee are supported by the Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union (JCCU), ICA member since 1971.

From the beginning of 1960s, the ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Office focused on gender issues and on enhancing youth and women's participation in cooperatives. During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, seminars on promoting women's participation and empowerment in the cooperative sector were held in the region. During the United Nations Women Decade from 1975 to 1985, initiatives for integrating women and gender concerns in cooperatives were accelerated by the Regional Office.

In 1990, Human Resources Development Project of the ICA identified the need for gender inclusion and women's participation in cooperatives. Between 1990-1991, the ICA Asia and Pacific conducted a series of surveys in 14 countries in the region to study the existing issues in achieving gender integration in cooperatives within a broader socio-economic environment of each country. These surveys resulted in 14 country studies and one regional study which were considered as the stepping stone to formulate gender policies and promote activities in the region based on facts. In April-May 1992, the 'Regional Consultation on Gender Integration and Women in Cooperative Development in Asia and the Pacific' was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. It was the first such consultation that was organised to identify appropriate strategies for gender planning in cooperatives at national and regional level. A year after the Colombo consultation, the ICA Asia and Pacific, the JCCU, the Swedish Cooperative Center and the ICA Women's Committee (at global level) jointly organised the 'Asia-Pacific Conference on Gender Planning in Cooperatives' in Tokyo, Japan in 1993. Based on the results of the fact-finding surveys conducted by the ICA Asia and Pacific in 1991, the conference concluded that the establishment of appropriate policies at all levels of cooperatives is essential to achieve gender equality.

In September 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, China to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women. The conference was attended by more than 17,000 participants, including more than 4,000 accredited NGO representatives and a host of international civil servants, as well as 6,000 government representatives. The ICA members from Asia and Pacific also participated. The conference adopted the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action towards respect for women's human rights and the realisation of gender equality. The Beijing Women's Conference marked a significant turning point for the global agenda for gender equality and it was a great encouragement for women cooperators in the region. The conference also had a positive impact on the cooperative movement in the region and shaped the perspective further on promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in cooperatives. In June 1996, during the Second ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Assembly in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, a proposal to create a Regional Women's Committee was formally approved. Later in September 1996, women cooperative leaders from the Region organised the 'Regional Consultation Meeting on Gender Integration in Cooperatives' in Bangkok, Thailand, where it was collectively recognised that awareness on gender equality needs to be generated and promoted at all levels within the cooperative sector.

A pro-tem Regional Women's Committee was formed in February 1997 and discussions on byelaws were facilitated with the guidance of the Malaysian National Cooperative Movement (ANGKASA). Immediately after, during the Fourth Asia and Pacific Ministers' Conference,



gender issues in cooperatives were put on the table before cooperative ministers for the first time. The conference resulted in a declaration that called for the need to work towards full participation and leadership of women in cooperatives. Since then, the Asia and Pacific Ministers' Conferences have made recommendations on laws and policies aimed at women's capacity development and the realisation of gender integration in cooperatives, and have positively influenced policy makers and stakeholders across the Region.

Before the formal inception of the Committee, another landmark activity was organised. The first 'Regional Conference on the Status of Women in Cooperatives in Asia-Pacific' was held in Tagaytay, the Philippines in May 1997. The ICA Asia and Pacific and the Asian Women in Cooperative Development Forum from the Philippines co-hosted the 'Conference on Decision-Making by Women in Cooperatives' or famously known as the 'Tagaytay Conference', in which over 100 cooperative stakeholders participated. The Tagaytay Conference adopted the 'Tagaytay Declaration' and 'Platform for Action' calling on all stakeholders to increase the participation of women in leadership and decision-making in cooperatives. Since then, two iterations of the Tagaytay Conference have been organised in 2006 and 2016 respectively, with each conference having reviewed the status of women and gender equality in cooperatives and resulting in identifying new areas of action such as research, education and training.

**On 25 October 1998, during the Third ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Assembly in Seoul, South Korea, then known as the ICA Regional Women's Committee for Asia and the Pacific (ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific) held its first statutory meeting.** The meeting was attended by



about 30 national committee members. Ms. Rahaiah Baheran from Malaysia was elected as the first Chairperson, and Ms. Hatsuko Omori from Japan and Ms. Rameshwari Ramchandra from Singapore were elected as Vice Chairpersons.

The first statutory meeting of the Committee identified the need to promote networking among women cooperators, organise exposure and exchange programs and trainings on leadership development.

To mark the establishment of the Committee, it was also decided to organise the Regional Women's Forum as an avenue to discuss the needs, challenges and issues faced by women cooperators and identify ways to address them. 130 participants from 19 cooperatives participated in the First Asia and Pacific Regional Women's Forum held in conjunction with the Third Regional Assembly. The participants shared a common need to make their respective cooperatives more democratic in order to achieve gender equality. It was a historic event with the participation of many women cooperators, previously unseen at the Regional Assembly.

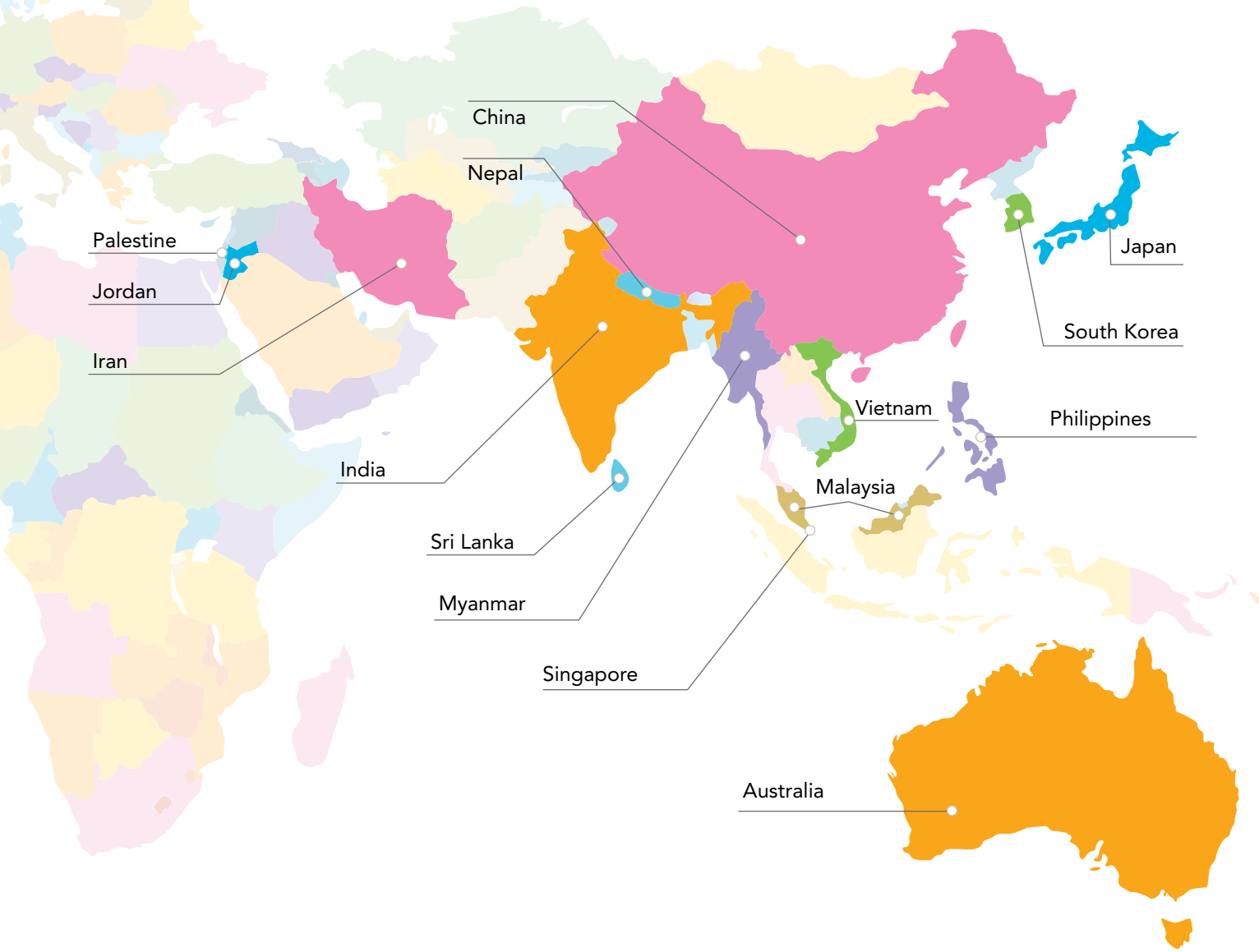
From October 1998 to May 2023, the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women has held 13 statutory meetings, 11 Regional Women's Forums, workshops, conferences, and seminars; participated in 7 Asia-Pacific Ministers' Conferences; conducted 18 trainings of trainers; published 2 regional research studies on gender-disaggregated data in cooperatives, 2 manuals and 1 resource guide for trainings on women's leadership development. The Committee takes pride in its association with international organisations such the Swedish Cooperative Center (now known as the We Effect), International Labour Organisation (ILO), Asian Women in Cooperative Development Forum (AWCF), and ICA member organisations in the region.





**OUR  
MEMBERS**

The Committee has diverse geographical representation in its membership. It has 32 individual members from 22 ICA member organisations in 15 countries including Australia, China, India, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Palestine, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Korea, and Vietnam.



**WHAT WE DO**

The activities of the Committee have reflected the needs of the time and the evolving dynamics of the cooperative sector.

At the time when the Committee was established, the pressing needs shared by women cooperators unanimously across the region was to be seen and heard. The Committee was established as a platform where women cooperators from different countries could be represented at an international level and participate in different international forums, seminars, workshops, trainings, etc. at par with men.

The period of early 2000s looked at the emerging requirements where building the knowledge on gender issues and capacitating women with leadership skills was the need of the hour; so that they can grow and assume positions in the governance of cooperatives. Sharing of



women's needs and experiences from different sectors and countries and exchanging best practices with women cooperators became a means to empower women with new knowledge and awareness. This reflected in the popular Tagaytay conferences. The Committee continued with its advocacy of improving women's representation at all levels of cooperatives by making its cases with different stakeholders such as the cooperative ministers through ICA Asia and Pacific Ministers' Conferences. Education, training and information sharing along with advocacy became core activities of the Committee as early as the beginning of the new millennium.

The Committee expanded its work by developing training manuals and collecting research-based evidence on gender statistics in cooperatives which became a first of its kind intervention by the ICA Asia and Pacific. The availability of gender-disaggregated data created room for the Committee to analyze the status of gender equality in cooperatives more effectively and come up with relevant programs such as the workshop on advancing women CEOs in cooperatives.

In the past few years, the Committee has streamlined its activities further by defining its core objectives coherently, based on the pressing needs, topical issues, emerging societal and economic contexts of women cooperators in the region. This is reflected through its strategy which forms the basis of its vision and line of action. In 2023, the Committee redefined its



strategy and introduced four broad pillars under which it will continue to serve its members and women cooperators at large, in the region. These pillars are –

**Economic empowerment**

**Social empowerment**

**Knowledge, education, and training**

**Solidarity**

The regular activities of the Committee such as the training of trainers, data studies, women's forums, seminars/webinars and interventions at different platforms will continue to be carried out as part of these newly defined pillars. The Committee has lately taken initiatives to increase the visibility of its work and its members by participating in external events such as the side events organized by the UN Commission on the Status of Women. These efforts are being taken to make visible not only the contribution of women cooperators towards the cooperative sector and the Sustainable Development Goals but also promote Cooperative Identity at international level. In 2021, the Committee advocated for peace and non-violence as essential values for cooperatives and women for their overall wellbeing and growth. With the ever-changing conditions in the world in which cooperatives operate, the Committee extends its support to the larger movement through solidarity.



**COMPLIMENTS  
AND MESSAGES  
FROM  
WELL WISHERS**

# ICA President

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Dear colleagues of the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women,

I am truly honoured to greet you on this 25th anniversary. It is a milestone of which you should be proud, as are all of us in the great global cooperative family. The work you have done over the past two and a half decades has enabled you to make significant progress in gender equality in the Asia-Pacific region.

It is a work undoubtedly based on a long effort of Asian women over many decades, that has flourished with hundreds of women cooperatives in areas as banking, agriculture, consumer and handicrafts. In summary, thousands of women organising cooperatives in their communities demonstrates the strength and success of your Committee, that is also appreciated by the regional organisation of the ICA and by the global cooperative community.

It is therefore very inspiring to have you with us at this time when we must continue to strive for a more equitable, more inclusive and fairer economy globally. The increasing participation of women in the cooperative movement is essential if we want to be the key to a sustainable future.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight in particular the four pillars that you are proposing from now on. Economic Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Knowledge, Education and Training, and Solidarity, are fundamental pillars for your Committee to continue growing, expanding its effects in the region and contributing to the global cooperative movement. Together, we can continue making great achievements in equity and demonstrate that the cooperative model is the fastest and most effective way to address the inequalities that exist in our communities.

I congratulate you on your 25th anniversary. I wish you a great celebration on September 19-20 and I send to you with warm cooperative greetings.

***By Mr. Ariel Guarco, ICA President***



# ICA Asia and Pacific President

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Dear Ms. Chitose Arai, Ms. Priti Patel and members of the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women

Cooperative greetings!

As I write this message, I am filled with immense pride that our Regional Committee on Women has completed 25 long years in the Asia and Pacific region! The Women's Committee is one of the most active Committees of the ICA Asia and Pacific, which shows the dedication, passion and energy of women cooperators towards the cause of women's empowerment and gender equality in cooperatives.

My heartiest congratulations to the Office Bearers and members who have been part of the Committee on this very special achievement and milestone!

The Committee was established with the foremost objective of increasing the participation of women cooperators in management and leadership in cooperatives. It was a very genuine concern and goal to see that more women be given opportunities to attend trainings, knowledge and capacity building programmes and forums such as on policy and law where important issues are discussed that impact women and men equally. The Committee has accomplished this laboriously and we see the results of its hard work in the management and leadership of cooperative organisations across countries in Asia and Pacific! We also see large number of women participate in activities and events within countries and abroad.

I very much appreciate the dynamic approach that the Committee has followed through the years in identifying topical and pressing areas where interventions are required. This includes advocating for a gender-disaggregated database in cooperatives; developing training

manuals on cooperative leadership; making recommendations for reservation for women in cooperatives at the Asia-Pacific Ministers' Conferences; making visible the role played by women cooperators during COVID-19; advocating for peace and non-violence as important values to be included in the Statement of Cooperative Identity; and now looking at climate change as a priority area for educating and training women cooperators at the grassroots.

I am indeed very proud of the work done by the Women's Committee and the role it plays in representing the voices of women cooperators at ICA Asia and Pacific level.

The Women's Committee has coined a new slogan, 'Gender Equality for a Brighter Future'. This is befitting as the future of the Committee is very bright. I wish you best of luck for your 25th anniversary celebrations and your journey ahead!

***By Dr. Chandrapal Singh Yadav, ICA Asia and Pacific President***



# ICA Gender Equality Committee Chairperson

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Today, I am joining in the 25th anniversary celebration of the ICA Asia and Pacific Women's Committee, a vivid example of how, by joining forces, we can make great changes for the betterment of other women. 25 years of struggles and fulfilled challenges that put today's women in a position where they can continue to grow and to exercise an ever more visible and influential cooperative leadership in decision making.

Over the course of time, women have taken steps towards the development of their identity. Gradually, women began to demand social equality and their access to positions of leadership. Regulatory changes have been achieved and targeted policies are being pursued, but the vast majority of women in the world still work in precarious, insecure and informal jobs, unprotected by labour laws and lacking social protection.

Nevertheless, we must acknowledge the great progress we have made in recent years, especially as regards empowerment and political involvement, thanks to the contributions of women leaders who have given their best so that more women can reach their full potential. Today, more of us hold decision-making positions, in addition to the leadership that comes with our participation in management spaces. Women's empowerment lies in free decision-making, where our thoughts and feelings about a given situation are the prevailing factor. That is the reason why, when women legislate, laws tend to balance the scales. The same is true when women hold positions in governments or join together in peer groups to defend their spaces, as is the case with women's cooperative committees.

At present, there is a long list of unfinished business when it comes to achieving parity and social welfare, eliminating the violence against women and girls that severely cripples our communities and stopping the orientation of educational institutions that steer young women

into traditional and service-based careers and away from the new trends of digitisation. Not to mention all the implications of being paid less than our male counterparts for the same work, a situation that persists despite numerous international treaties.

We are more than aware that there is still a long way to go before we live in fair equality with our male counterparts. Cooperatives have an important role at stake. As organisations founded on principles and values, democracy and equity, they can use their incredible and ever-growing reach to influence an individualistic society that is increasingly detached from the best interests of women and girls.

On this 25th anniversary, I urge you not to lose heart and to continue to shine even brighter for an ever more just and equal planet for everybody. Keep growing! Sky is the limit!!

***By Ms. Xiomara Nuñez de Céspedes, ICA Gender Equality Committee Chairperson***



# Former ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Director

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The ICA has always stood firm in its belief that recognizing women achievements in cooperative development helps to build strong women networks and connections, and thus create solidarity that drives progress towards gender equality. The ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women was established in 1998 for exactly this fundamental reason.

During the ICA ROAP/AWCF Conference on 'Women in Decision-Making in Cooperatives', Tagaytay, 7-9 May 1997, in my role as the Regional Director of the ICA ROAP (currently called ICA-AP), I stated that *"It is my belief that gender inequality prevails because there has not been enough honest and mutual reflection on the roles of both men and women in their day-to-day activities. It is thus important for co-operators to subject themselves to honest introspection and understand the source as well as root causes of gender inequalities"*. During my tenure I was privileged to have such fine and dedicated staff at the ICA ROAP in the persons of Ms. Akiko Yamauchi and Ms. Yukiko Yamamoto, both seconded by the JCCU, who worked hard and conscientiously in mainstreaming gender among ICA members in the region. They did so in close collaboration with, and under the guidance of Madam Rahaiah Baهران, Chairperson of the Regional Women's Committee from ANGKASA.

It is extremely gratifying to discern that the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women has gone to so much greater heights in realizing GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) up to now, which tributes will obviously be recorded in its 25th Anniversary booklet entitled 'Gender Equality for a Brighter Future'. It is akin to witnessing the sowed seeds in 1998 that flourished over 25 years to find light of the world, and will continue to blossom over the next 25 years. It is my earnest hope that women's representation will not only continue to improve across

the cooperative movement in the Asia-Pacific region, but also increase in their leadership positions and decision-making roles.

I take this opportunity to warmly congratulate Ms. Chitose Arai, Chairperson of the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women, as well as all other women leaders throughout the 25 years of the Committee's existence, who have stood up to the most daunting challenges to make their voices heard and accept full recognition for their achievements in realizing GESI in cooperative development in this region.

***By Mr. Robby Tulus, Former ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Director (1996-2001)***



# Former ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Director

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I am very pleased and honored to add a well-wisher's message to the 25th anniversary of the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women. The Committee is not merely a regional body for gender equality but has been representing women specific activities committed for and led by women cooperators in the ICA de facto.

The Asia-Pacific covers 30% of the Earth, with diverse landscapes, climates, societies, cultures, religions and economies. More than half of the world's population or 4.3 billion people live in this region. Therefore, the share of membership from Asia-Pacific is also in similar position in the ICA.

Ms. Hitomi Tanaka, Former Chairperson of the ICA Asia and Pacific Women's Committee, mentioned once about the difficult situations for gender mainstreaming works in the region and emphasized the need for putting more energy by cooperative movements in the region. For this need, the JCCU has provided special contributions since the start of the Committee in this regard.

During the last two decades, gender equality had moved ahead steadily in the world and Asia-Pacific as well. However, currently, the situation has become worse due to the social and economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the SDGs Report of the United Nations.

Now, I would like to recall the message of Ms. Tanaka again saying that "let's keep moving forward" when the Committee published the 2008-2010 Annual Report. But for a brighter future, its vision, activity scope and mode would be different from the past in sharing more the responsibilities among Committee members.

In relation, the vision said by the then Acting Chairperson, Dr. Nandini Azad, seems still valid - "to ensure a minimum of 30 to 50% participation of women at all levels in cooperatives; and representation of all ICA Asia and Pacific members on the Women's Committee".

Likewise, 'the Resource Guide for Advanced Training of Co-operatives on Entrepreneurship Development of Women and Gender Equality' also seems still useful for this vision, which was released by the former ICA President, Ms. Dame Pauline Green in 2015.

However, now in an era of complex and multidimensional world, the 'Training Manual on Gender and Climate Resilience made by the UN Women Asia-Pacific' would be more useful to tackle the two issues at once by the Committee.

I am sure that this commemorative booklet will be an excellent milestone towards the next 25th anniversary of the Women's Committee.

***By Dr. Chan Ho Choi, Former ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Director (2010-2014)***







# ILO COOP

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Dear friends in the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women,

Warm greetings from the ILO's Cooperatives Unit in Geneva. I would like to extend my congratulations to you for having completed 25 years of service in the Asia and Pacific region!

The ILO, the UN agency responsible for social justice and decent work, is the only part of the UN system with an explicit mandate on cooperatives. It has had a Cooperatives unit since 1920 and cooperatives are mentioned in the ILO constitution. And the international cooperative movement has a general consultative status within the ILO since then.

Although circumstances may vary according to context, within the cooperative movement there is growing interest in gender issues, greater recognition of the value of women in leadership roles and an increase in the number of cooperatives that are led by women. Cooperatives can offer multiple benefits in terms of providing affordable and accessible services for women in housing and finance and a range of care services. Women can advance their situation by negotiating with public authorities through their cooperatives. The democratic and participatory governance of cooperatives allows women the opportunity to engage in decision-making and power-sharing. Women who are engaged in cooperatives may be better positioned to address personal and communal needs such as freedom from discrimination, violence and harassment. Moreover, cooperatives established by and for women help overcome social and cultural constraints, which might otherwise limit women's participation in the workforce.

Although cooperatives may be based on values of equality and equity, they may be constrained by legal provisions, social norms and historical inequalities. Women are often disadvantaged in terms of assets, education and training which can impede their access to the resources and markets needed to establish, expand or sustain an organisation. Even when women participate

in cooperatives on an equal footing to men, they may find it difficult to participate in decision-making bodies or to accede to leadership positions as prevailing horizontal and vertical gender divisions of labour are often reproduced. Women are also generally less connected to vertical cooperative structures and other support structures than men are.

In mobilizing cooperatives to further gender equality, two areas of focus emerge: the strengthened participation of women in cooperatives, including in leadership positions; and the development of cooperatives in undervalued economic sectors or professions with a stronger participation of women (for example, in the care economy). Cooperatives offer observable benefits in respect of achieving gender equality.

Transitional measures such as affirmative action can be used to correct inequalities with benefits beyond the enterprise level, reaching into the home, community and public spheres. Participatory gender auditing or gender-responsive budgeting could be among other methods used by the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE). Governments can support women's empowerment in cooperatives by providing capacity-building programmes for women, including in organisational leadership and management, financial planning and marketing. Social policies that ease the care burden and strengthen women's civil and political rights can facilitate their participation in the policy process.

Our best wishes to you in your important work in advancing equality, diversity and non-discrimination in the Asia-Pacific region.

***By Ms. Simel Esim, Head, ILO - Cooperative Unit***



# Asian Women in Cooperative Development Forum

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The AWCF was organised in 1990 by national cooperative organisations in Asian countries to address gender issues in cooperatives. As a regional support group to cooperatives for gender equality, the AWCF worked with the then ICA Regional Office for Asia and Pacific (ICA ROAP)'s gender awakening that happened through a 1992 regional consultation in gender integration in cooperative development, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The 'ICA Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality' was developed in 1995, the same year that the United Nations (UN) 'Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)' was adopted worldwide. In 1996, the ICA ROAP formed its Regional Women's Committee (RWC) in a regional workshop. The ICA ROAP RWC was formalised at the ICA Asia and Pacific Regional Assembly in 1998. Then, the ICA ROAP RWC and the AWCF collaborated on regional programs and events, including regional conferences (1997 and 2006, both in Tagaytay, Philippines) that tackled women in decision-making/gender integration in cooperatives; visibility of women and gender integration in cooperatives; and declarations/calls for action to enhance women's participation in leadership and decision-making.

The collaboration and events to fortify gender equality in cooperatives also offer a reflection for gender equality advocates. It seems that there is slow progress in globally achieving equality between women and men; and still much work is needed towards this objective, based on data from different organisations. But because gender equality is for both women and men, and cooperatives also get socio-economic benefits from mainstreaming gender, the continuing call then is for cooperatives not to waver in their gender equality advocacy. Cooperatives should continue to recognise the values of both equality and difference. Women and men are different, but difference is not the opposite of equality nor does difference should deny equality.

To achieve gender equality, cooperatives should mainstream gender in the areas of people; policies; programs, projects, activities; and enabling mechanisms; and apply the two-pronged approach of the gender mainstreaming framework. The first approach is to enable women and men, young and old in all genders to advocate change in and through cooperatives for their benefit. The second approach is to transform and enable cooperatives to become a vehicle for gender equality and gender equity.

Congratulations to the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women on your 25th year of working on gender equality in cooperatives. May your new gender equality strategy helps in attaining the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and foster gender equality in cooperatives globally.

***By Ms. Salome (Sally) Ganibe, Executive Director (2001-2013), AWCF***



# SOME MEMBERS



Congratulations to the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women for completing 25 years since its establishment. The Committee has taken excellent steps to share the experiences, achievements, and success of women's cooperatives in the Asia-Pacific countries. I feel proud to be part of this Committee which has well-structured programs.

***By Hajah Noorizan Binti Abdul Latif, ANGKASA, Malaysia***



Happy 25th Anniversary! Over the past 25 years, the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women has advocated for women and cooperatives in the Asia and Pacific region. On joining this Committee in 2010, iCOOP members met women with diverse backgrounds who shared the same values of cooperatives. As it has been for the past 25 years, if we gather the experiences, aspirations and capabilities of women cooperators in Asia and Pacific, we will be able to gather ideas that can solve not only the current issues related to women in the region but also the various economic, social and environmental issues of the world we face.

***By Ms. Juhee Lee, iCOOP, South Korea***



I would like to congratulate the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women on its 25th anniversary! The Committee has conducted many events and awareness programs for member organisations. The best thing about the Committee is that the Office Bearers and members believe in unity and open discussion and are active and energetic. I personally have learnt a lot from the Committee and the various strategies and recommendations formulated in different conferences or forums.

***By Ms. Moh Moh, Central Cooperative Society, Myanmar***

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I'm honoured to be part of this Committee since 2000 which represents the voices of women cooperators from Asia and Pacific, and has assisted them through trainings and workshops and raised awareness about the role and importance of women in economic and social development of countries. As a member of the ICA Asia and Pacific, my organisation has hosted many events which has helped women cooperators in Vietnam to learn about different subjects and enhance their knowledge.

***By Ms. Tran Thu Hang, Vietnam Cooperative Alliance, Vietnam***

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Activities conducted by the Committee inspire me to develop similar programs for women cooperators in my country. I look forward to more initiatives of the Committee addressing climate change, and social and economic barriers faced by women cooperators.

***By Ms. Abeer Qtairy, Economic and Social Development Center of Palestine, Palestine***



The Committee has not only enabled me to network with women cooperators around the world but also enlightened me about valuable contribution of women in cooperatives. I am delighted to be part of this Committee and my best wishes for consistent efforts for the future initiatives.

***By Ms. Madhavi Vipradas, Indian Farmers Fertilizer Cooperative Ltd., India***



I had joined the Committee for three reasons, 1) to identify problems faced by women cooperators and find solutions, 2) to work for the rights and interests of women in the ICA Asia and Pacific cooperative movement and 3) to utilize the ICA platform to empower women cooperators. The Committee has prompted me to work hard, and its members have inspired me a lot. I am thrilled to see the projects of the Committee produce positive results and I enjoy every meeting of the Committee.

***By Liu Ting, All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives, China***



# FORMER PARTICIPANTS

The training on digital financial inclusion was very useful for us. Most of the women we work with in Vellore are from rural areas. To work in the area of micro finance in our office, this training will be very useful for the village community. We only know about ATM machines but don't know any other digital payment method in detail. Internet banking and online payment on apps are very rare in villages. But these apps are very useful in our daily life. This training was very useful in many ways and will help our members to take or repay loans from their homes in emergencies.

***By Ms. Esther Rani, Vellore Branch, Indian Cooperative Network for Women (Participant of the Training of Trainers Program On Digital Financial Inclusion Of Women Cooperators, India, September 2020)***

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Climate change has strongly affected agricultural cooperatives with its negative effects such as drought, flooding and saltwater intrusion. This affects labour productivity and agricultural area in Vietnam. In particular, it affects women, elderly and the children. This group is vulnerable to the effects of climate change. In this training on climate change organised by my organisation and the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women, we became aware about what causes climate change and its consequences. We are willing to spread this awareness among small cooperatives in Vietnam so that they are aware of the practical solutions that can be taken. As women, we will do our part to make the Earth greener.

***By Ms. Vũ Thị Bích Hà, Vietnam Institute for Cooperatives and Enterprises Management (Participant of the Training of Trainers Program on Climate Change and Action for Women Cooperators, Vietnam, May 2023)***

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**GENDER EQUALITY  
IN COOPERATIVES:  
PAST, PRESENT AND  
THE FUTURE**

*Interview with*  
**Ms. Rahaiah Baheran,**  
**former Committee**  
**Chairperson (1998-2008)**

*(Views expressed are personal)*



- 1. The ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women has completed 25 years in the Asia-Pacific region. You were the first Chairperson of the Committee and served for ten years. How does it feel to see that the Committee has come a long way since 1998?**

I feel great to know that the ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Women has completed 25 years! It means that what we did was appreciated and is being handed down to the new generation now. That is the cooperative way of doing things. We work together for a common cause. The motto back then was that we as women would like to be heard and seen. The Committee was set-up by women cooperators to achieve this very objective – to be seen and heard. All ICA members at that time were very supportive of us.

I fondly remember Ms. Katarina Apelqvist from Swedish Cooperative Center. She was the Chairperson of the ICA Women's Committee (At global level. The Committee is now called the ICA Gender Equality Committee). She was the one who floated the idea and played a very important role in the formation of the Regional Women's Committee. She was on the global Board of the ICA at that time. Mr. G.K. Sharma who was the Regional Director of the ICA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific had commissioned country surveys on the status of gender integration in cooperatives in member countries of the ICA. After that, a consultation meeting was organised by the Regional Office in Colombo in 1992 to discuss strategies for gender planning and initiatives in cooperatives.

That is when I met Ms. Katarina who chaired that meeting. The meeting was attended by many delegates from the Philippines, India, Japan, Sri Lanka, Sweden and other countries. I remember the meeting was attended by Ms. Momoe Tatsukawa from Japan.

Imagine, that from 1992 to 1998, it took us six long years to make the Regional Women's Committee a reality.

**2. Can you take us back to the memory lane and share how the situation on gender equality was in cooperatives in the late 1990s and early 2000s? A few examples would be helpful.**

When we began, we did not see many women in regional committee meetings and more so at world conferences. This was more true within the cooperative sector.

The country surveys conducted by the Regional Office showed us that women were substantially present as members in cooperatives but they were hardly present in the leadership positions. There were 14 countries which were surveyed and all agreed with these findings. All of us wondered why women were not given leadership opportunities. This was felt by cooperators from different countries such as Malaysia, Philippines and Japan. For example, they wondered why their consumer cooperatives were run by men alone. If women were there, things could have been different and better for everyone. That is when we declared that we were not seen nor heard, and so we started to talk about this issue. We spoke about it in our subsequent conferences in Japan and the Philippines.

Setting up the Committee required the means (resources) to fulfil its objectives. The participation of each member depended on self-finance basis. But the decision to get this funding was not in our hands. Not many countries at that time wanted to spend so much funds on a Women's Committee. Ms. Katarina did a lot of lobbying with ICA members, to first get more women participation, and then the required resources. Some countries like Japan were much better because they had women in the front like Ms. Akiko Yamauchi. The JCCU provided financial support for our activities. But in other countries, it was difficult. It was the President of ANGKASA who decided that for me to be able to carry out these objectives, I needed funds for my travel. Ms. Akiko, Ms. Momoe and I could get funding for ourselves from our nominating organisations. Gradually, other countries started supporting their nominated members. Later on, Ms. Katarina recommended the ANGKASA President to let me chair the Regional Women's Committee in the first meeting in Seoul in 1998. That is when it all started. But like I said, it was a group effort to establish and support the Committee.

**3. During your tenure as the first Chairperson of the Women's Committee, what were some of the challenges you faced and how did you overcome them?**

In Asia, the cultural context differed from other parts of the world. We could not at the onset, start talking about 'gender equality' as a slogan or agenda. Here, we believed that women were not submissive or lesser than men. What we needed was to make them more visible. So, we followed an approach where women were encouraged to become members of our Committee and take part in regional level activities. Until we started our partnership with the ILO to develop a training manual, we focussed on including the idea of 'women in development' or topics concerning women in meetings and events.

The most critical challenge back then was lack of a platform for women, which was easily accessible by men. The platform was an opportunity for women. And, we got a lot of support from ICA member organisations. We wanted to create the Committee as a stepping platform to get women more involved, visible and recognised in the movement.

The main challenge was back in our home countries. If a woman leader was always travelling abroad or attending meetings or events abroad, etc., sometimes men leaders did not think that these women needed these many opportunities. I do not know the situation in the West but in Asia, I think, women faced this kind of opposition or resistance from men more. Within the cooperative movement here, men and women are treated equally as members or employees. They are not discriminated. So, when an opportunity comes and that is given to women, men do question it and sometimes do not like it. It is also thought at times that what women are doing is not worthwhile.

**4. What is your best memory of the Committee and why?**

My best memory of the Committee is that I made many friends who believed that cooperatives can work together and achieve a lot, that too in a short period of time.

**5. If you would like to give a message to the new generation of young women in cooperatives, what would it be?**

My message for the new generation or younger women is that first become members of a cooperative, for I don't know why young people do not want to join cooperatives now. The second is that once you become a member, take advantage of the opportunities that are available to you as a member or even staff. Be more involved. That is how they will grow.

# Gender, law, and policy in cooperatives by Mr. Santosh Kumar, Legislation Coordinator, ICA

*(Views expressed are personal)*



## 1. Subject and scope

International law is a set of rules that nations make for themselves in order to predict their behaviour towards each other, while at the same time helping them to pursue the maintenance of peace and tranquillity among nations. The purpose of this article is to introduce a handful of international legal instruments that concern cooperatives and to conclude with a possible policy initiative.

## 2. UN resolutions on cooperatives

The General Assembly of the United Nations is a consultative mechanism which, for the most part, establishes a certain equality among sovereign States in the creation of programmes, policies and partnerships necessary to, inter alia, reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small; to create conditions under which justice and respect for obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained; and to promote social progress and better standards of life in greater freedom.<sup>1</sup>

Successive UN General Assembly resolutions, namely A/74/119 and A/76/135 in 2019 and 2021 respectively, encourage Governments to take appropriate measures to adopt or develop legislation and policies that provide women with equal access to land, support women's cooperatives and agricultural programmes and enable women's cooperatives to benefit from public and private procurement processes and increase trade.

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<sup>1</sup> Preamble of the United Nations Charter. The UN Charter is an instrument of international law, and UN Member States are bound by it.

The international community has repeatedly called upon Governments to adopt, where necessary, legislation and policies favourable to cooperatives, and an important milestone in this regard is UN General Assembly resolution A/56/114 of 2001, which welcomed the elaboration of guidelines for Governments to create an environment conducive to the creation and development of cooperatives and, to this end, called for the cooperation of international cooperative organisations to provide assistance to UN Member States through conferences, etc., at the national and regional levels.

### 3. Resolutions and others as a source of international law

Resolutions of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) can be considered as part of the broader spectrum of international law, in that they can have legal implications if the subject matter of the resolution reflects customary international law or is used as evidence of State practice in establishing a norm. Customary international law is a source of international law that arises from the general and consistent practice of States, accompanied by a belief that such practice is legally binding (*opinio juris*).<sup>2</sup> UNGA resolutions can, in certain cases, contribute to the formation of customary international law if they demonstrate a widespread and consistent practice of States on a particular matter and indicate that States consider that practice to be legally binding.

These resolutions have repeatedly recalled the universal values and principles of cooperatives, while calling on Member States to review and reform the legal, regulatory and policy environment for cooperatives. Often, cooperative legislation and policies in UN Member States recognise and incorporate the above values and principles into their text, thereby ensuring the protection of the basic structure of the cooperative enterprise, such as democratic control and economic participation of members, education on the benefits of cooperation, social responsibility and mutual cooperation, etc. at the international level.

In his paper on *Cooperative law - translating cooperative principles into legal rules that respect the legal concept of sustainable development*<sup>3</sup> prepared for the UN Expert Group Meeting on the Role of Cooperatives in Economic and Social Development: Recovering Better from the Covid-19 Pandemic, Prof. Hagen Henry, Chair of the ICA Cooperative Law

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2 Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice <https://www.icj-cij.org/statute>

3 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/12/ICA-Cooperative-Law-Hagen-Henry.pdf>

Committee, points out that the norms around genuine cooperative practices are gradually entering the realm of customary international law. The inclusion of the idea and practice of organising common interests in cooperatives in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)<sup>4</sup> in 2016 confirms this indication as a plausible reality. Interestingly, the evolving international law related to cooperatives and the 2003 UNESCO Convention (see footnote 3) is peppered with experiences of women cooperatives. The first of these is the fishing cooperative of the Haenyeo culture<sup>5</sup> in the Jeju Islands of the Republic of Korea, which coincidentally was listed in 2016! The second, but equally significant in its contribution to the development of international law on cooperatives, is the experience of women, including women cooperators, involved in practices and know-how related to the argan tree in Morocco. These practices were included in the UNESCO ICH list in 2014.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, in 2021, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution A/75/262, which proclaimed 10 May as the International Day of Argania<sup>7</sup> to be observed annually, while recognising the important role of cooperatives in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

#### 4. International law for social justice

International Labour Standards (ILS) are legal instruments adopted by the ILO at the annual International Labour Conference through its constituents, i.e., representatives of

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4 Article 1 of the UNESCO Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003 defines "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention#:~:text=The%20E2%80%9Cintangible%20cultural%20heritage%E2%80%9D%20means,part%20of%20their%20cultural%20heritage.>

5 Experience documented by ICA: <https://icaworldcoopcongress.coop/stories/mothers-of-the-sea-women-divers-cooperatives-preserve-jejus-cultural-heritage/> | UNESCO Decision <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-16-11.COM-Decisions-EN.docx>

6 UNECO Decision: <https://cloud.ica.coop/index.php/s/gtsTZcpRqJW7ye5>

7 UNGA Resolution A/75/262 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/057/82/PDF/N2105782.pdf?OpenElement>

governments, employers and workers. ILS set out fundamental principles and rights at work through Conventions and Recommendations, which are ratified and adopted respectively. The ILO is governed by its Constitution, adopted by the Declaration of Philadelphia. Article 12 of this Constitution obliges the ILO to cooperate with recognised non-governmental international workers' organisations in making appropriate arrangements for consultation in relation to the specific fields of competence of such organisations and, of course, in promoting universal and lasting peace based on social justice.<sup>8</sup> Article 22 of the ILO Constitution requires Member States to submit annual reports on the measures taken to give effect to the provisions of the Conventions to which they are party, thus providing an adequate legal basis not only for the ILO but also for its partner NGOs to ensure that the relevant ILSs are implemented. The most important ILS concerning cooperatives is, as is widely known, the ILO Recommendation (No. 193) on the Promotion of Cooperatives of 2002 [ILO.R.193], which was adopted in rapid succession following the elaboration of the 2001 UN Guidelines, and which sets out the harmonised international law intended to guide national policies and international cooperation for the promotion of cooperatives of all types and forms, and the rights and obligations of all relevant actors in this regard.

The ILO Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 is one of the four governance (priority) Conventions that the ILO strongly encourages Member States to ratify because of their importance to the functioning of the international labour standards system. The Convention allows Member States to extend labour inspection in agriculture to certain categories of agricultural workers and provides a mechanism for making declarations to include additional categories if not initially covered. Countries that have ratified the Convention are expected to report on the implementation of its provisions regarding labour inspection in agriculture for the specified categories of workers. Article 5 of this Convention obliges Member States to exercise labour inspection in agriculture, including in the interests of persons participating in collective economic enterprises, such as members of cooperatives.<sup>9</sup>

There are several other instruments and legal instances in international law that warrant careful analysis and consideration by cooperative organisations in advancing their policy

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8 Preamble of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:62:0::NO:62:P62\\_LIST\\_ENTRIE\\_ID:2453907:NO](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:62:0::NO:62:P62_LIST_ENTRIE_ID:2453907:NO)

9 ILO Labour Inspection Convention, 1969 (No. 129) [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100::NO:12100:P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C081:NO](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100::NO:12100:P12100_ILO_CODE:C081:NO)



and advocacy objectives, particularly in relation to the creation of supportive legal and regulatory environments for cooperatives worldwide. One such piece of legislation is Article 2 of the Constitution of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), which requires the organisation to take necessary and appropriate action, including promoting and encouraging the development and use of planning techniques and assisting in the formulation of development, scientific and technological programmes and plans for industrialisation in the public, cooperative and private sectors.<sup>10</sup> The overall literacy of women and their safe participation and employment in industry can be effectively promoted through cooperatives, including through supportive policies and legislation.

## 5. Conclusion

The first point made in this article was that the United Nations was a consultative mechanism. The ICA, as a separate entity, has been instrumental as an NGO, together with the ILO and the UN, in developing a set of norms for the development of cooperatives internationally.<sup>11</sup> The space for consultation between cooperators and legislators in creating a supportive environment for cooperatives is essential to fostering an international cooperative movement that is resilient, collaborative and, importantly, inclusive. In this regard, and specifically on facilitating international cooperation in support of cooperatives, ILO R.193 recommends the elaboration of common regional and international guidelines and legislation in support of cooperatives, in consultation with cooperatives, employers' and workers' organisations.<sup>12</sup>

In light of the recent UN General Assembly resolutions on cooperatives in social development, which specifically emphasise the importance of a supportive legal and policy environment for women's cooperatives (as discussed in section II of this article), and taking into account the ICA's consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, one of the main bodies of the United Nations, the ICA Asia and Pacific Women's Committee has a unique opportunity to lead an important initiative.

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10 Full text of Article 2 and the rest of the Constitution of UNIDO [https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-11/19-12162\\_UNIDO\\_Constitution\\_ebook.pdf](https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/files/2020-11/19-12162_UNIDO_Constitution_ebook.pdf)

11 Paragraph 61 of the 2021 Report of the UN Secretary General on Cooperatives in Social Development states Self-identification, diversity of enterprises and recognizing the legal concept of sustainable development, as well as cooperatives' central role in sustainable development, warrant the sharpening of the profile of cooperatives through law and policy.

12 Paragraph 18 of ILO Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation (No. 193)

The Committee could consider facilitating an effort to compare and analyse laws and policies relating to women's cooperatives. This could be done through the ICA's influential high-level conference tools such as the Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference, the Cooperative Registrars' Conference and the Asia-Pacific Cooperative Forum. In undertaking this analysis, the Committee aims to promote the sharing of knowledge and expertise within the cooperative movement.

In addition, as the ICA has strong links with the United Nations, the ICA Asia and Pacific Women's Committee could play a crucial role in providing the UN with valuable information on laws and policies that support the establishment and growth of women's cooperatives. This joint exchange of information will further contribute to the empowerment and development of women in the cooperative sector.



# Gender equality in cooperative governance by Ms. Elenita V. San Roque, CEO, Association of Asia Confederation Credit Union (ACCU)



*(Views expressed are personal)*

Having been associated with ACCU since 1995 and working closely with women in the credit union sector, I deeply understand the importance of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in cooperative governance. In this article, I will reflect on women's past and present roles in collaborative governance, highlight their contributions and impact, identify the challenges they face, and provide suggestions for involving more women in governance in the future.

## **1. Women in cooperative governance: past and present**

Over the years, women have played vital roles in cooperative governance, both in the past and the present. In the early days, women's participation in decision-making was limited, and they were often confined to supporting roles. However, with the gradual recognition of their capabilities, women have increasingly assumed leadership positions within cooperatives. Today, we see women serving as CEOs, board members and key influencers, making significant contributions to the growth and success of cooperatives in the Asia-Pacific region.

## **2. Contributions and impact of women in cooperative governance**

The involvement of women in cooperative governance is instrumental in upholding and strengthening cooperative principles, such as member participation, cooperation among cooperatives and concern for the community. When women actively engage in cooperative governance, they bring invaluable perspectives, skills and experiences to the decision-making process. Their contributions extend beyond promoting gender equality; they

cultivate diversity of thought, fortify governance structures and enhance the quality of decision-making. Research demonstrates that organisations with diverse boards enjoy improved financial performance, heightened innovation and increased member satisfaction.

The significance of having women on credit union boards cannot be understated, as it fosters diversity and inclusion within cooperative institutions. Given that over 40% of credit union members are women, it becomes essential to ensure their voices and viewpoints are represented at the highest levels of decision-making. By including women on credit union boards, institutions are better equipped to address their female members' specific needs and preferences, resulting in more inclusive and tailored financial services.

Furthermore, women board members serve as inspiring role models, encouraging other women to pursue leadership positions within the credit union industry and beyond. Ultimately, cultivating gender diversity on credit union boards benefits the institution, its members and the broader community it serves.

### **3. Barriers, stigma and challenges faced by women in cooperatives**

Despite their significant contributions, women continue to face barriers, stigma and challenges in rising the governance ladder within cooperatives. Deep-rooted gender biases, societal norms and cultural expectations often hinder women's advancement. Limited access to education, lack of mentorship opportunities, and a scarcity of role models exacerbates these challenges.

Additionally, the unequal distribution of household and caregiving responsibilities burdens women more, making it harder for them to engage in cooperative governance fully. Women's economic empowerment is not only a matter of gender equality but also a catalyst for sustainable development and global prosperity.

Women are estimated to make up half of the world's population, yet their economic potential remains largely untapped. Empowering women economically is not only a moral imperative but also an economic necessity. Empowering women to participate fully and equally in the economy benefits individuals, families, communities and societies.

#### **4. Promoting women's engagement in cooperative governance**

To encourage greater women's participation in governance, cooperatives should actively implement measures that foster gender equality. It is essential to prioritize developing policies and practices sensitive to gender issues, ensuring equal opportunities for women to assume leadership roles. Creating mentorship programs, providing leadership training and facilitating networking opportunities can empower women, enhancing their capabilities and enabling them to secure decision-making positions. Cooperatives must also strive to eliminate unconscious biases and discriminatory practices by fostering inclusive cultures and promoting diverse representation.

#### **5. Empowering women for decision-making roles**

Women must also take proactive steps to attain a seat at the decision-making table and have their voices heard. Continuous learning and professional development are crucial for women to enhance their skills, knowledge and confidence. They should actively seek leadership positions, advocate for their abilities and work toward inclusion in governance structures. Women's networks and support systems are pivotal in nurturing their growth, providing mentorship opportunities and fostering collaboration and knowledge-sharing platforms. By empowering women to pursue decision-making roles, cooperatives can benefit from diverse perspectives and contribute to more inclusive and effective governance.

To foster the professional growth of women in the credit union sector, they must find a supportive network that inspires and empowers them. The Global Women Leadership Network (GWLN) is an outstanding organisation within the credit union sector, dedicated to motivating women to develop their skills, find their voices and achieve their full potential. As a global network, GWLN focuses on empowering women leaders in the credit union industry through various means, including education, mentorship and networking opportunities. By cultivating a supportive community, GWLN encourages women to embrace leadership roles and actively contribute to shaping the future of credit unions.

GWLN provides a range of initiatives to support women's growth, including regional forums, international conferences and online resources. These platforms offer women the chance to connect with like-minded individuals, learn from each other's experiences and

gain valuable insights into leadership and governance. GWLN equips women with the necessary tools and knowledge to excel in their careers by facilitating these connections and offering educational resources.

Furthermore, GWLN fosters a sense of solidarity and empowerment, emphasizing the importance of gender diversity in the credit union sector.

Through its efforts, GWLN showcases successful women leaders, offers mentorship programmes and highlights the significance of gender diversity within credit unions. By doing so, GWLN inspires women to step up, take on leadership positions and make meaningful contributions within their organisations and communities. Credit unions can also establish their local chapters, known as 'Sister Societies,' to further promote the values and mission of GWLN at the grassroots level. Overall, GWLN provides a valuable support system for women in the credit union sector, enabling them to thrive and contribute to the industry's advancement.

## **6. Conclusion**

Gender equality in cooperative governance is not only a matter of justice and fairness; it is essential for cooperatives' sustainable growth and success in the Asia-Pacific region. Women have demonstrated their valuable contributions to cooperative governance, and their active participation enhances decision-making processes, promotes diversity and drives positive outcomes. By addressing the barriers, stigma and challenges women face and creating an enabling environment that promotes inclusivity and diversity, cooperatives can unlock.



# Gender equality in practice: Case studies from Committee members

## 1. Empowering women cooperators through micro-finance in India

The Gujarat Mahila Credit Cooperative Society (GMCC) was established in 1999 in Amreli city of Gujarat, India. As a leading cooperative society, GMCC is dedicated to empowering women. It provides support and guidance to women in various areas such as entrepreneurship, micro-credit, health, education and skill development. By offering necessary facilities, GMCC has brought happiness to its women members and worked towards elevating their status in society. Currently, GMCC has 17,000 members, with an active network operating in Amreli, Rajkot, Surat and Gandhinagar in Gujarat.



GMCC

GMCC enables rural and illiterate women to support themselves through small or large home industries. Some women possess the skills and capabilities but lack financial resources, while others face difficulties in transacting at banks due to limited education. GMCC provides easy loans to women and regularly organises meetings to encourage their independent progress.

GMCC actively participates in the Cooperative Mela organized annually at NCUI HAAT in New Delhi. People from different states showcase innovative products at the fair. GMCC represents Indian spices, food items, handicrafts and other small items produced by its women members. By participating in cooperative fairs, GMCC effectively markets these products, generating substantial profits.

GMCC conducts various training programs for women members every year, including sewing and stitching, mehndi (henna), beauty parlour and computer classes. Women can choose the appropriate class based on their interests. Around 120-125 women have already completed trainings through GMCC and established their own businesses. The primary objective of GMCC is to encourage more women to engage in such activities and acquire valuable skills.

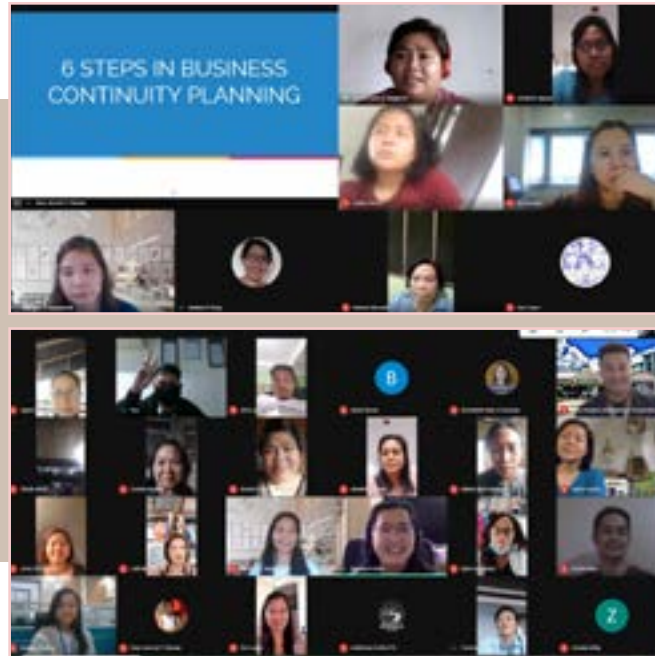
GMCC plays a vital role in creating new opportunities and improving the standard of living for women through small-scale employment. By empowering women and imparting them valuable skills, GMCC helps them establish a new identity for themselves and contribute to the society.

## **2. The 'Great Women Project' for women co-op entrepreneurs in the Philippines**

When the National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO) signed a Memorandum of Agreement as a private sector partner for the Great Women Project 2 (GWP2) with the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW), Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), and the Government of Canada in June 2017, it was operating under the banner, '*harnessing partnerships of cooperatives with multi-stakeholders to upgrade women MSMEs.*' It aimed to assist the growth of women-led Micro-Small-Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) by providing an environment wherein growth of women-led enterprises is made more feasible.

At present, NATCCO network comprises over 875 community-based primary cooperatives. The network was founded in 1977, and has since grown to having as many as 7 million individual members, 65% of whom are women. In the Philippines, women business





owners start out at a disadvantage since they have limited access to resources including funding, strong connection and education, and they frequently experience harassment and discrimination from society. Addressing these barriers and investing in women-owned and led businesses can provide great opportunities and solutions for rising economies.

The GWP2 which completed in December 2021 was an opportunity to link selected 9 women-led cooperatives and one managed cooperative to resources provided by the GWP2. These 9 cooperatives then selected their member-women entrepreneurs (WMEs) and assisted them with capability-building activities. For NATCCO, its role was focused on assisting WMEs in improving their knowledge on financial literacy and business finance.

As a GWP2 private sector partner, NATCCO trained women from both cooperative as well as non-cooperative sectors. Since October 2019, 72 WMEs have been trained using methods such as lecturers and workshops. They were taught basic bookkeeping and accounting language, and each participant prepared their own Cash Flow Statement, Balance Sheet, Income Statement, Profit and Loss Statement, computed their product's break-even point and determined the fair mark-up prices for each product.

Later on, NATCCO thought of ways to optimize the remaining activities by integrating topics that would encourage WMEs, especially the sole proprietors, to explore partnerships or linkages so they can continuously expand their knowhow regarding their enterprises, even beyond the GWP2. NATCCO provided advanced training in grassroots entrepreneurship, financial resiliency and wealth creation, business continuity planning, and internal control and inventory management, all of which were aimed at improving competitiveness, sustainability and entrepreneurial management capacity.

These training provided the participants with crucial elements that empowered them in pursuit of their success. The business continuity planning program in particular offered techniques to guarantee operations' robustness in the face of difficult conditions and unplanned disruptions. The participants developed their personal and financial resilience and learned how to recover, adapt and prosper in the face of any challenge.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were able to continue, support and even grow their businesses. Ms. Elizabeth Aragao learned and stressed that, "PLAN A ka may PLAN B ka pa rin (If you have a Plan A you should have a Plan B)." Ms. Agnes Querubin felt secured being part of the project, "*mahina man ang business, naka-ready pala kami kahit di documented, pag-sasaayos na lang at sa mga tao namin (even if the business is weak, we are ready even if it is not documented, we just need to adjust it and our people).*"

The Great Women Project 2 was a crucial initiative that enabled women to realize what they are capable of, not only in navigating their business landscapes but also in facing any hardships, crisis and even global challenges. Through this project, Filipino women like Elizabeth and Agnes were empowered as they were able to build and support their thriving enterprises, achieve financial independence, contribute to reducing poverty in the country, break barriers and inspire and empower others along the way.

### **3. Ngoc Bich Fine Arts and Handicraft Cooperative in Vietnam providing sustainable livelihoods to women**

Soc Trang is a poor province in the southwest of Vietnam. It has a population of 1.2 million, 30% of whom are Khmer. Per capita income in the province is US\$ 600, which is lower than the current national average. The Xuyen District has 60% Khmer population and is one of the poorest. Rice cultivation is the main source of income in the district. In 2002, Huynh Ngoc Bich, seeking to create jobs and help people support themselves

## NGOC BICH COOP



during the off-season, founded a handicrafts cooperative turning local materials like water hyacinth, banana tree fibre, jute and tube grass into products for export to the West. The cooperative has generated jobs for around 4,000 people, mainly women, of which 1,000 are regular labourers, including 360 Khmer.

From nine original members, including four women, Ngoc Bich has now grown to 50 members and generates annual revenues of VND 2 billion. Total capital is VND 7 billion, in which the share capital is VND 1.5 billion in total. The average salary for workers is VND 2 million to 4 million per month.

Bich had tried many different jobs before learning handicrafts in 2000. She became interested after attending a vocational training by the Son Trang Provincial Cooperative Alliance. She quickly mastered several different products, studying new techniques by disassembling new items, studying them and then re-assembling them. In 2002 her cooperative persuaded one of largest handicrafts producers in Ho Chi Minh City, Ba Nhat Handicraft, to place regular orders.

“Our first order was due in ten days. I got the people to work at maximum capacity and we made the delivery in eight days,” she says. “The products were well made and had less faults. Ba Nhat Handicraft was satisfied and agreed to place more orders. We earned the trust of Ba Nhat and they decided to continue buying from us despite the great distance to the city.”

Bich then set out to establish nine new branches across the district and a member Ly Van Vo helped establish a satellite branch in his commune, Gia Hoa. "Previously I raised shrimp, but became bogged down with losses, and finally my debts at the bank amounted to nearly VND 100 million," he says. "But in the past year, thanks to directly working in the cooperative and organising the local residents to produce for Ngoc Bich, I have re-paid nearly all of the debt."

Vo has also organised 10 points of delivery for raw materials and several sites for collection of finished products in 10 other hamlets. There are 500 households in his hamlet, mainly poor farmers, and his branch is providing jobs for around 2,000 people and sometimes 4,000 part time jobs. This has created enormous social benefits. In the area, farmers can only cultivate one rice crop per year, due to a long dry season, and many have no work during this period. They fall prey, youth in particular, to gambling, drinking and fighting. Working for Ngoc Bich, however, they earn VND 100,000 to 200,000 per day.

The Ngoc Bich Cooperative has received consultation support from the Vietnam Cooperative Alliance and the Soc Trang Provincial Cooperative Alliance to find out the markets and produce varieties of products for exports, to help people, especially women, in the local communities for better living.

#### **4. Teachers in Iran following their dreams through cooperative education**

Rah-e-Roshd is the pathway to follow for women who want to fulfill their dreams. Rah-e-Roshd is a manifestation of will and power of a collective endeavor, which gradually led to the establishment of the first Iranian cooperative school. It was a women centered cooperative that offered sustainable jobs to the talented and powerful women, who in turn gave the educational standards of the country a brand-new meaning. In a male dominated world, where men used to be empowered and women were deemed as smart and curious bystanders, it was women who gave life to a dream, and made what must have been created, a reality.

Rah-e-Roshd cooperative is where the needs of individuals take precedence over financial assets. Therefore, the perfect environment was created for women to fully express themselves and actualize their talents and challenge the prevailing patriarchal system. In Rah-e-Roshd, women's outstanding spirit of teamwork, cooperation and desire of creation empowered them to go through a path which later led to the foundation of a cooperative in a kindergarten, which was its dream all along.



Cooperation and collective effort in order to guard and flourish the organisation, which was founded by women themselves, has accelerated the sense of social responsibility in Rah-e-Roshd's most important treasure, which are its employees and students.

Rah-e-Roshd is where no one gets left behind as equality between women and men is its priority, and for that, it has brave women and men to thank.

##### **5. Addressing women's needs first for the wellbeing of the community in Sri Lanka**

The Matara District Cooperative Hospital Society Ltd. is located in Matara district in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. It is a consumer cooperative and provides training for cooperative members and employers and helps develop strategies for the Hospital Cooperative Network in Sri Lanka. The Society was formed to facilitate practical hospital services for the benefit of poor, disadvantaged and marginalized communities in the rural sector.

The families associated with the Cooperative Hospital Society live in remote and difficult areas. They comprise of vulnerable and disadvantaged members, and are severely affected by Tsunami, droughts and floodings, COVID-19 pandemic, and socio-economic conditions and conflict in the country. Many women members and staff in this area face harassment, violence, and / or suffer from the loss of family, unemployment, etc.

## MDCHS



MDCHS targeted 1,000 women with the aim to uplift their lives and ensure that they see and develop a brighter future for themselves. It developed special agendas and programmes for the hospital network so that social counselling, health care, hospitalisation and treatments, relaxation techniques for reducing stress and therapies for mental health issues can be taken up for those women who need them the most.

MDCHS collaborated with state government bodies, schools, civil societies and peer groups to create awareness programs for the affected families and targeted persons. Some programs also included vocational enterprise education; sports; and training and education on techniques to upgrade poor working conditions, reduce stigma, stress and discrimination and reduce the risk of violence and harassment, emotional abuse and social undermining, etc.

After getting involved in its programmes, women reported that they started participating in more productive activities and were able to earn higher incomes. Their decision making at household level and involvement in community affairs have enhanced. Understanding the needs of the women at work and their contexts help in identifying the gaps in society at large. Cooperatives should have a gendered approach in their planning and implementation of work so that development work can be carried out effectively in communities.

## 6. Singapore cooperative movement night: women make magic

The Singapore cooperative movement honoured 56 women for their contributions during the COVID-19 pandemic and for making a difference in the society, at the Cooperative Movement Night organised in 2022. The celebratory event was organised by the Singapore National Co-operative Federation (SNCF).

The guest of honour at the event was Ms. Yeo Wan Ling, a Member of Parliament and Director of U SME, and Women and Family Unit at the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Her work at the NTUC focuses on working with employers and the government to provide an enabling, fair and safe working environment for women. Over 260 cooperators from Singapore attended the event.

SNCF



The theme for the event, 'Women Make Magic' aimed at recognizing and celebrating the contribution of women cooperators in Singapore. Today, more than 80% of those working in Singapore cooperatives are women, many of whom are outstanding individuals who have contributed selflessly to the movement, cared for others and exhibited several of the cooperative values.

The youngest honouree was a 21-year-old, Ms. Brenda Tan, who serves as the Vice-President of a campus cooperative at the Nanyang Technological University. With her team, she led the cooperative retail and café business on campus, despite a drastic drop in footfall during the pandemic because the students were mostly attending classes virtually. Another honouree was Ms. Devi Vijayakumar. As the Lead Data Analyst at NTUC FairPrice Co-operative, Ms. Devi played a crucial role in driving decision-making on stock allocation and deliveries to ensure that there are sufficient supplies of essential products including food in the stores during the peak of the pandemic.

## **7. Australian cooperatives and mutuals lead the way on gender diversity**

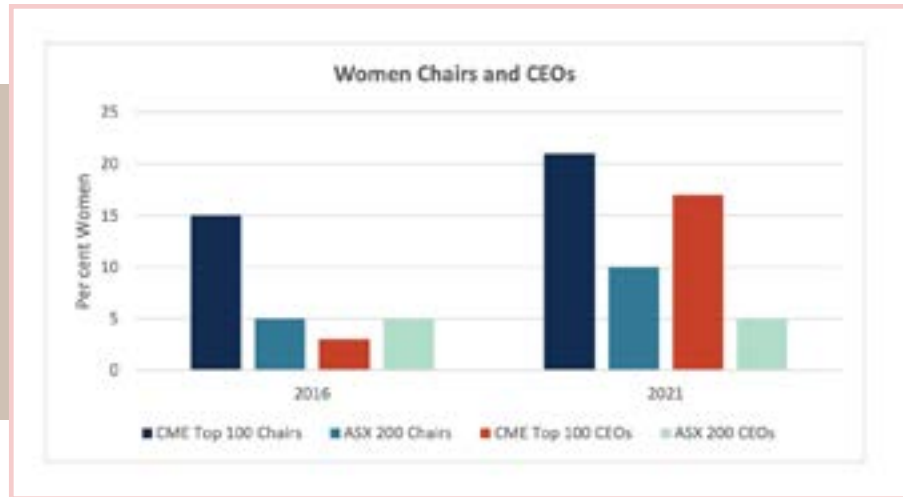
Women comprise 47.9% of the Australian workforce but are under-represented in leadership positions. This under-representation exists in both the corporate and the cooperative and mutuals enterprises (CME) sector. But CMEs in Australia are leading the way in supporting the advancement of women and gender equality by leveraging inclusive technologies, embracing disruptive innovation and ensuring access to education.

In 2017, the Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals (BCCM) published a landmark report on gender inclusion in the CME sector in Australia. In 2022, data collected by the BCCM, as part of the annual National Mutual Economy report revealed significant improvements in gender diversity among chairs and Chief Executives of Australia's Top 100 CMEs.

The data gathered by the BCCM showed that in 2022, 23% of the CEO roles among the Top 100 CMEs were held by women. This was better than the 2021 results of 17% and represented a significant improvement from the 3% result reported in 2016.

The initial report found that in 2016, 5% of the top 200 ASX-listed companies had a woman CEO, remaining the same in 2021 and increasing slightly in 2022 to 7%. In 2016, the highest turnover organisation of the Top 100 CMEs where a woman held the office of CEO was number 49, whereas in 2021 and 2022, that ranking jumped to number 2.





Similarly, the recent survey has demonstrated improvement in the gender diversity of CME board chairs. In 2016, of the Top 100 CMEs, 15% had women chairs; in 2021, this number had increased to 21% and continued to see improvement in 2022, rising to 25%. The ASX-200 also witnessed increased gender inclusion among chairs over this period. However, it was lower than for CMEs, rising from 5 to 10.55% over the 2016-2021 period and retreating to 9.5% in 2022. In 2022, the top-ranked CME to be chaired by a woman was number 4, having climbed from the 2016 position of number 13.

Cooperatives and mutuals play a vital role in advancing the position of women in business and society. They comprise some of Australia's most successful and longest-running companies. The Top 100 CMEs contribute AUD 37.7 billion in turnover to the Australian economy, directly employ over 70,000 people, and have combined membership of more than 33.3 million people. The BCCM celebrates women's achievements in cooperative and mutual businesses.

## 8. Women driving consumers' climate action in South Korea

Since its establishment in 1997, iCOOP, a federation of consumer cooperatives has valued its members and cooperative associations. iCOOP is led by women who pursue environmental preservation, fair labor and food reliability for their families. iCOOP has set up a business model where members are genuine owners of their cooperative and conduct business with the objective of strengthening the daily lives of members.

iCOOP members actively follow the 7th Cooperative Principle of 'Concern for Community'. Their activities consist of environment preservation, campaigns for public safety, campaigns for the betterment of the society, fund raising, collaborative activities with other community organisations and promoting health and wellness.

Driven by the needs and interests of its members which are mostly women, iCOOP has evolved from promoting 'ethical consumerism' to 'healing and restoring' and 'lifecare movement'. The lifecare movement works for the security of members by creating a trust based healthy society which is deeply related to the health of the planet Earth. With this objective, iCOOP has started a civil society called the 'Consumers' Climate Action' to heal the planet and the lives of women consumer members. The Consumers' Climate Action is a voluntary non-profit civil society comprising of women consumer members, established in 2021. It conducts campaigns with consumers and the public across the country, calls for policies to promote sustainable change and strives to create a social environment that practices carbon neutrality through research, education and campaigns. 4,153 members are part of the Consumers' Climate Action.

Together with iCOOP member cooperatives, the Consumers' Climate Action has launched several pro-environment campaigns such as the Earth Day, Environment Day, No Plastics Promise and Food Waste Reduction Campaigns with signatures from 600,000 people. Other than this, research studies have also been conducted to spread awareness about climate crisis based on data, and public events have been organized to promote sustainable lifestyles. Knowing that microfibers released from washing garments are one of the main causes of water pollution, iCOOP has developed a 'Save the Ocean' product. It is a microfiber filter device for washing machines, which allows individuals to get more involved in reducing ocean plastic pollution. After the successful testing of the microfiber

iCOOP



washing machines, the Consumers' Climate Action held a press conference in front of the National Assembly urging for the passing of the Special Act on Microplastic.

The Consumers' Climate Action has also started a campaign to introduce a 'Climate Action Payment' to realize carbon neutrality by 2050. Many other initiatives are being undertaken as part of collaboration between iCOOP and the Consumers' Climate Action. Having started this new initiative, iCOOP truly believes that cooperatives can go beyond providing education and trainings to its members. Cooperatives could involve and support members, especially women, in a way they can expand their influence as society members, and contribute towards their own and society's betterment.

**Consumer Climate Action's  
Carbon Reduction Policy Proposal**

**Climate Action Payment (CAP)**

Now, we need to go beyond  
"compensation for losses and damages" to  
"compensation for prevention and conversion".

The climate action reward system proposed by Consumer Climate Action is:

- ✓ A carbon reduction policy proposal following the "use-by-date labeling".
- ✓ Rewarding activities that resolve the climate crisis, encouraging people to become leaders in resolving the climate crisis.
- ✓ A force that motivates the government and businesses to focus on protecting people's lives and safety from the climate crisis.

## 9. Co-op Mirai and Co-opdeli Group in Japan promoting women's empowerment in the workplace

Co-op Mirai is the largest consumer cooperative in Japan with approximately 3.7 million members that runs mainly a retail business such as home delivery and store operation. Co-op Mirai is a member of Co-opdeli Group, a business federation of consumer cooperatives in the Kanto and Shinetsu region. Co-op Mirai and Co-opdeli Group aim to be a people-friendly organisation that employees can be proud of, as stated in the 2025 Vision. To this end, they are working to create a workplace where all employees can fully demonstrate their abilities and continue to work for a long time. With a particular focus on women's empowerment, they seek to recruit more women to increase the ratio of female full-time employees, to retain and develop female employees and to improve the ratio of female managers. To step up their efforts, in 2021, female executives proposed and initiated a project for women's empowerment in the workplace.

CO-OP MIRAI  
CO-OPDELI GROUP



The action plan that Co-op Mirai and Co-opdeli Group formulated in accordance with the Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace sets a goal of increasing the ratio of female managers at Co-op Mirai to 13% or more (18% or more at Co-opdeli Group) by 2025. However, the ratio of female managers as of fiscal 2022 is 9.3% at Co-op Mirai (17.7% at Co-opdeli Group), not reaching the target. They face a lack of potential female managers. This fact demonstrates the need to train and increase female managers in a structured way.

Female executives of Co-op Mirai and Co-opdeli Group, who are key members of the project, strive to address these challenges by analyzing the current situation with personnel officers and proposing solutions to the management. To clearly understand the problems and concerns that female employees have faced, they conducted in-depth interviews with some female employees in an environment where their psychological safety was ensured.

Co-op Mirai and Co-opdeli Group have been working to tackle the issues identified with business unit managers, from the following perspectives.

- **Increasing the ratio of female managers**

They began discussions with business unit managers on a regular basis to identify what to do to achieve the goal set in the action plan, such as setting a target of how many more female managers need to be increased, identifying who can be potential female managers, and defining how to train them.

- **Creating opportunities to think about future careers**

In order to meet the needs of female employees who find it challenging to think about their future careers, Co-op Mirai and Co-opdeli Group hold lectures on career development for women and workshops aimed at building a network of female employees to share their problems and concerns. Furthermore, they create a booklet and video to introduce the work of various departments in the organisations, so that female employees can refer to them to develop their skills for their future careers. They also provide opportunities for female employees of various generations to get together and share and discuss concerns about work, childbirth, and childcare.

- **Improving a system and creating an environment to allow female employees to continue to work**

Interviews with female employees revealed that many of them have problems and concerns related to their physical conditions that are unique to women. At stores and home delivery centers, it is often difficult for female employees to refrain from taking days off or to request support from others because they feel it would increase the burden on other staff members. In order to promote understanding of the health issues faced by women and to help improve symptoms and reduce concerns about a work-health balance, Co-op Mirai and Co-opdeli Group provide lectures by gynecologists on menstruation, fertility treatment and menopause, as well as online treatment services in collaboration with medical institutions.

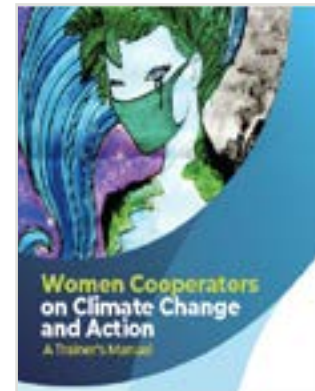
As Co-op Mirai and Co-opdeli Group make active efforts through this project, the ratio of female managers has steadily increased from 8.8% to 9.3% at Co-op Mirai and from 14.5% to 17.7% at Co-opdeli Group in fiscal 2022 compared to fiscal 2020. This initiative has also led to flexibly assigning female employees even with reduced working hours to management positions and increasing the number of potential female managers. Female employees who participated in networking workshops have changed their attitudes, attending other workshops on their own initiative. Workshops for networking among female employees are now under consideration at various business sites. More and more employees, including men, are getting a better understanding of menstruation and other women's health issues as seminars are organised in conjunction with meetings.

**OUR  
PUBLICATIONS**

## TRAINING MANUALS

### 1. **Trainers' manual on climate change and action for women in cooperatives (2023)**

In 2022, the Committee partnered with NATCCO to develop a trainers' manual to conduct training of trainers on climate change and action in cooperatives. The manual has five modules, namely 1) Introduction to climate change; 2) Climate change and its consequences on women and cooperatives; 3) Climate change solutions and the role of cooperatives; 4) Measuring the impact of climate action solutions; and 5) Developing an action plan and communication plan for the climate action program.



### 2. **Resource Guide for training on entrepreneurship development of women and gender equality (2015)**

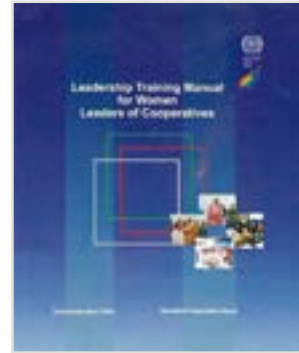
In 2015, a Resource Guide in partnership with ILO COOPNET was developed for advanced training on entrepreneurship development of women and gender equality in cooperatives. It was an improvised version of the leadership training manual for women leaders of cooperatives that was published in 2005. It contains three chapters, namely 1) Statement on the Cooperative Identity (SCI) vis-a-vis market economy perspective; 2) Cooperative governance through gender equality; and 3) Cooperative enterprise and management.





### 3. Leadership training manual for women leaders of cooperatives (2005)

The leadership training manual for women leaders of cooperatives developed in partnership with the ILO COOPNET in 2005 was the first training tool published by the Committee. The manual covers seven modules, namely 1) Gender in cooperatives; 2) Fundamentals of cooperatives; 3) Self transformation; 4) What is expected of a cooperative leaders; 5) Coping with challenges; 6) Cooperative enterprise management; and 7) Commitment to gender equity and equality in cooperatives.



## RESEARCH STUDIES

### 1. Regional study on gender is more than a statistic: status of women in cooperatives through gender-disaggregated data (2017)

The regional study on 'Gender is more than a statistic: status of women in cooperatives through gender-disaggregated data' was the second data study conducted to update the gender disaggregated database in cooperatives and evaluate the progress post Tagaytay conference 2007. Some of the findings of the study revealed that to increase the percentage of women in leadership positions to fair levels in the region, a strong commitment was needed from existing cooperative leadership, good-gendered practices were being shared and advocated by the Committee, and gender sensitization strategies of different types at different levels in cooperatives were being deployed.

### 2. Regional study on engendering database in cooperatives in Asia and Pacific (2005)

The regional study on 'Engendering database in cooperatives in the Asia Pacific' was the first data study conducted to prepare a comprehensive database on gender statistics in cooperatives, to facilitate development programs in the cooperative sector, evaluate progress post-Tagaytay Declaration 1997 and identify gaps in the region vis-a-vis gender equality in cooperatives. Some of the findings of the study revealed that female representation in cooperatives was not insignificant but decision-making and participation of women in the cooperative boards was low, and that there was a clear bias in selecting men for training programs, especially involving professional and technical courses, among others.

**OUR TIMELINE  
(1990-2023)**

Year / Month	Event
1990-91	International Cooperative Alliance Asia and Pacific (ICA-AP) initiates activities for gender integration in cooperatives
1990-1991	ICA-AP conducts a series of surveys in member countries in the Asia-Pacific region
1992 April-May	Regional Consultation on Gender Integration and Women in Cooperative Development in Asia and the Pacific, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka
1993 March	Asia-Pacific Conference on Gender Planning in Cooperatives, held in Tokyo, Japan
1995 August	Sub-Regional Workshop on Gender Integration, held in Kuala Lumpur (KL), Malaysia
1996 April	Sub-Regional Workshop on Gender Integration, held in Pune, India
1996 June	2nd ICA-AP Regional Assembly approves a proposal to set up a Regional Women's Committee
1996 September	Regional Consultation Meeting on Gender Integration in Cooperatives, held in Bangkok, Thailand
1997 February	A pro-tem Regional Women's Committee formed
1997 March	Participation in the 4th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference in Chiang Mai, Thailand
1997 May	ICA-AP/AWCF Conference on Women in Decision Making in Cooperatives, held in Tagaytay, Philippines
1997 December	ICA-AP/ILO COOPNET Regional Preparatory Workshop on Cooperative Leadership Training for Women, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1998 October	1st Meeting of the ICA Regional Women's Committee for Asia and the Pacific (ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific) in Seoul, Korea

<b>1998 October</b>	1st Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Women in Leadership, held in Seoul, Korea
<b>1999</b>	Publication of Trainers' Manual: Less Words, More Action: How to increase women's participation in leadership and decision making in coops
<b>1999 October</b>	Participation in the 5th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference in Beijing, China
<b>2000 June</b>	2nd Meeting of the ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific in Singapore
<b>2000 June</b>	2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Transcending Glass Ceilings and Glass Ladders in the New Millennium- Challenges for the Cooperatives, held in Singapore
<b>2001 August</b>	ICA-AP/ILO Validation Workshop for the Cooperative Leadership Development Manual for Women, held in Bangkok, Thailand
<b>2002 April</b>	Participation in the 6th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference in Kathmandu, Nepal
<b>2002 October</b>	1st ICA-AP/ILO COOPNET Trainers' Training Programme for Women Leadership Development, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<b>2003 February</b>	3rd Meeting of the ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific in Cebu, Philippines
<b>2003 February</b>	3rd Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Asian Values and Women's Participation in Cooperatives, held in Cebu, Philippines
<b>2003 June</b>	2nd ICA-AP/ILO COOPNET Trainers' Training Programme on Leadership Development of Women Cooperators, held in Pune, India
<b>2004 February</b>	Participation in the 7th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference in New Delhi, India
<b>2004 March</b>	3rd Trainers' Training Programme for Leadership Development of Women in Cooperatives, held in Bandung, Indonesia
<b>2004 June</b>	4th Trainers' Training Programme for Leadership Development of Women in Cooperatives, held in Isfahan, Iran
<b>2004 November</b>	4th Meeting of the ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific in Chiangmai, Thailand
<b>2004 November</b>	4th Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Women in Re-Engineering of Cooperatives in the Globalizing Economy, held in Chiangmai, Thailand

<b>2005-2006</b>	First study on sex-disaggregated data conducted (the report 'Engendering Database in Cooperatives' released in July 2008)
<b>2005 March</b>	Post Tagaytay Review Project Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand
<b>2005 August</b>	National Training of Trainers for Leadership Development of Women in Cooperatives, held in Polgolla, Sri Lanka
<b>2005 September</b>	Exposure and Networking Programme for Empowerment of Women in Cooperatives, held in Seoul, Korea
<b>2005 December</b>	Publication of the ICA-AP/ILO Leadership Training Manual for Women Leaders of Cooperatives
<b>2006 August</b>	5th Meeting of the ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific in Colombo, Sri Lanka
<b>2006 November</b>	'10 Years Before and After': 2nd Regional Conference on Gender Integration in Cooperatives, held in Tagaytay, Philippines
<b>2006 December</b>	National Training of Trainers for Leadership Development of Women in Cooperatives, held in Hanoi, Vietnam
<b>2007 March</b>	Participation in the 8th Cooperative Ministers' Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<b>2007 October</b>	6th Meeting of the ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific in Singapore
<b>2007 December</b>	Exposure and Networking Programme for Empowerment of Women, held in Pune, India
<b>2008 January</b>	Training Programme on Management Capacity Building of Women for Gender Integration and Cooperative Development, held in Bangkok, Thailand
<b>2008 April-May</b>	Training Programme on Management Capacity Building of Women for Gender Integration and Cooperative Development, held in Kathmandu, Nepal
<b>2008 December</b>	Meeting of the ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific, held in Hanoi, Vietnam
<b>2008 December</b>	5th Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Advantage of Gender Integration in the Economy of Cooperatives in Asia and the Pacific, held in Hanoi, Vietnam
<b>2009 June - July</b>	Management Capacity Building of Women for Cooperative Development, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<b>2009 September</b>	Workshop on Enhancing the Role of Women in Cooperative Business for women and men cooperative leaders, held in Manila, Philippines

<b>2010 May</b>	Workshop on Enhancing Role of Women in Cooperative Business, held in Tehran, Iran
<b>2010 September</b>	Meeting of the ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific in Beijing, China
<b>2010 September</b>	6th Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Cooperatives: The Sector for Empowerment of Women and Youth, held in Beijing, China
<b>2010 October</b>	Training of Trainers Programme on Management Capacity Building of Women for Cooperative Development, held in Yangon, Myanmar
<b>2011 October</b>	Workshop on Enhancing the Role of Women in Co-operative Business, held in Jakarta, Indonesia
<b>2011 December</b>	Training of Trainers Programme on Management Capacity Building of Women for Co-operative Development, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka
<b>2012 November</b>	Meeting of the ICA-RWC for Asia & Pacific in Kobe, Japan (The name of the Committee is renamed as the ICA Committee on Women for Asia and the Pacific [ICA-AP Women's Committee])
<b>2012 November</b>	7th Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Women in Cooperatives Build a Secured Society, held in Kobe, Japan
<b>2013 February, April</b>	The first draft of 'Resource Guide for Advanced Training of Co-operatives on Entrepreneurship Development of Women and Gender Equality' was pilot-tested at workshops held in Tokyo, Japan and in Pune, India
<b>2013 June</b>	Regional Workshop on Enhancing the Role of Women in Cooperative Business for women and men cooperative leaders, held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
<b>2013 October</b>	Training for Management Capacity Building of Women for Cooperative Development, held in Tehran, Iran
<b>2014 July</b>	Training of Trainers on Building Capacity of Women for Management of Cooperative Business, held in Dhaka, Bangladesh
<b>2014 September</b>	Meeting of the ICA-AP Women's Committee held in Bali, Indonesia
<b>2014 September</b>	8th Asia-Pacific Regional Women Forum on Gender Mainstreaming in Cooperatives for Sustainable Development, held in Bali, Indonesia
<b>2014 December</b>	Workshop on Enhancing the Role of Women in Cooperative Business, held in Hanoi, Vietnam
<b>2015-2016</b>	Second study on sex-disaggregated data conducted (the report 'Gender is more than a Statistic' released in January 2017)

<b>2015 March</b>	Publication of the Resource Guide for Advanced Training of Co-operatives on Entrepreneurship Development of Women and Gender Equality
<b>2015 May</b>	Training of Trainers for Management Capacity Building of Women for Co-operative Development, held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
<b>2015 September</b>	Workshop on Enhancing the Role of Women in Cooperative Business, held in Ramallah, Palestine
<b>2016 February</b>	'Tagaytay+20' the 3rd Regional Conference on Status of Women in Co-operatives in Asia-Pacific held in Clark City, Pampanga, Philippines
<b>2016 April</b>	Training of Trainers Programme on Building Management Capacity of Women for Co-operative Development, held in Udaipur, India
<b>2016 September</b>	Regional Workshop on Enhancing Role of Women in Cooperative Business, held in Gurye-gun, Korea
<b>2016 November</b>	Meeting of the ICA-AP Women's Committee held in New Delhi, India Gender Equality Strategy 2017-2020 approved
<b>2016 November</b>	9th Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Women in Co-operatives: The Power to Act for a Sustainable Future, held in New Delhi, India
<b>2017 March</b>	Seminar on Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in Cooperatives, held in Kobe, Japan
<b>2017 April</b>	Participation in the 10th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference held in Hanoi, Vietnam
<b>2017 August</b>	Training of Trainers for Building Capacity of Women for Cooperative Development, held in Thimphu, Bhutan
<b>2017 December</b>	Regional Workshop on Enhancing the Role of Women in Cooperative Business, held in Kathmandu, Nepal
<b>2018 April</b>	Regional Workshop on Re-Work, Re-Imagine and Re-Shape: Advancing Women CEOs in Cooperatives, held in Guiyang, China
<b>2018 November</b>	10th Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Strengthening Resilience by Empowering Women in Co-operatives, held in Tehran, Iran
<b>2018 December</b>	Meeting of the ICA-AP Women's Committee in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
<b>2018 December</b>	Workshop on Data Collection and Monitoring: Tracking Progress on Gender Equality in Cooperatives, held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

<b>2019 March</b>	Participation in the 63rd UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York
<b>2019 August</b>	International Workshop on Enhancing Gender Equality in Cooperative Business, held in New Delhi, India
<b>2019 November</b>	Training of Trainers on Management Capacity Building of Women and Gender Integration in Cooperative Development, held in Colombo, Sri Lanka
<b>2020 September</b>	Regional Webinar on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women Cooperators in Asia and Pacific
<b>2020 September</b>	Training of Trainers on Digital Financial Inclusion for Women Cooperators, held in Chennai, India
<b>2021 August</b>	Regional Webinar on Opportunities for Women Cooperators in Asia-Pacific Post COVID-19
<b>2021 October</b>	Meeting of the ICA-AP Women's Committee held online
<b>2021 November</b>	11th Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum on Why does the Cooperative Identity matter to Women?, held in Seoul, Korea, and online
<b>2022 March</b>	NGO Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 66 Forum Virtual Side Event on Women in Cooperatives: Combating Climate Change Together
<b>2022 July</b>	Orientation Workshop with Committee Members, held online
<b>2022 November</b>	Workshop on Climate Change and Review of the Training Manual, held in Quezon City, Philippines, and online
<b>2022 November</b>	Meeting of the ICA-AP Women's Committee held in Quezon City, Philippines, and online
<b>2023 March</b>	Virtual Lecture on DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality
<b>2023 May</b>	Pilot Training of Trainers on Climate Change and Action for Women Cooperators, held in Hanoi, Vietnam
<b>2023 September</b>	25th Anniversary Celebration in Tokyo, Japan Release of 25th anniversary special booklet
<b>2023 November</b>	12th Asia-Pacific Regional Women's Forum (theme to be confirmed) in Manila, Philippines
<b>2023 November</b>	Meeting of the ICA-AP Women's Committee in Manila, Philippines Release of the Trainers' Manual on Climate Change and Action for Women Cooperators New Gender Equality Strategy approved





# Get in Touch



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