

## **THEMES TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE 33<sup>rd</sup> WORLD COOPERATIVE CONGRESS**

### **OVERARCHING THEME: DEEPENING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY**

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us to an unprecedented level the profound vulnerability of human beings and ecological systems and highlighted the strong interconnectedness between infectious disease transmission, the environment, the economy, entrepreneurship, employment and social protection. At the same time, the crisis provides an unprecedented opportunity to show to the world how cooperatives, through their shared identity based on community needs and democratic entrepreneurship, are one of the fundamental actors in the rethinking of the relationships between the economy, society and the environment, and their interdependency.

The 33rd World Cooperative Congress, which marks, with a one year delay due to the pandemic, the 125th anniversary of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) and the 25th anniversary of the ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity approved by the 31st World Cooperative Congress in 1995 in Manchester, is a unique opportunity for the cooperative movement to rediscover the strength of the cooperative identity in the ongoing crisis and the follow-on post-pandemic phase of history. Cooperatives around the world have a common definition of what they are, a specific commitment to cooperative and ethical values, and clarity on the operational principles that differentiate them from other forms of business.

How does the cooperative movement transform societies? How does the cooperative way of doing business create an innovative pathway to a sustainable future? The Congress will examine the Statement on the Cooperative Identity in general and its implications in terms of education, culture, branding, inclusiveness and partnerships. It will probe into the competitive advantage brought by the cooperative identity — networks, innovation, IT, resilience and long-term business strategy, value chains, and the unique nature of cooperative capital. It will explore how the cooperative identity positively addresses current global issues that demand a resolute response — the crisis resulting from the pandemic, climate action, environment protection, sustainable development, positive peace, income and wealth equality, gender equality, the future of work, international development, community action, and cooperatives' role in the wider social and solidarity economy.

# FIRST THEME: EXAMINING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY

## *Plenary Session 1*

**The cooperative identity unites us to work for the common good. Our values and principles give millions of people control of their own lives, their future, and serve as the strong foundation that sets cooperatives apart from other types of enterprises. How can our business model continue to be relevant in addressing today's global challenges?**

This first part of the Congress examines the cooperative identity in general as defined in the ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity, and from a series of specific angles in particular.

Cooperatives since their inception have been focusing on a double endeavour: a) contributing to meeting people's basic needs and aspirations (production, employment, consumption, health, education, housing credit, insurance etc.); and b) making sure that those same people, in order to meet these needs and aspirations, control democratically and jointly own their common enterprise in full autonomy. These two concepts enshrined in the cooperative definition<sup>1</sup> revolving around the common needs and aspirations of ordinary people, and economic self-management and empowerment, are probably more up-to-date than ever before, and the needs and challenges are even more globally present and perceived. The fact that cooperative members reinforce the cooperative movement through education, training and information (5<sup>th</sup> principle), cooperation among cooperatives (sixth principle) and their concern for their surrounding community (7<sup>th</sup> principle) is conducive to people's empowerment and to sustainable development. All this, based on underlying values<sup>2</sup>, probably provides a stronger correspondence with the ongoing world challenges than ever before.

The complementary sub-themes to be developed along this first part of the Congress in the parallel sessions are fundamental to better understand the essence of the cooperative identity, in particular:

- How it manifests itself through branding, particularly the COOP marque and the dotcoop domain name (1.1)
- Its inclusive character, linked in particular to principle 1 Voluntary and Open Membership, 2 Democratic Member Control, 3 Member Economic Participation and 7 Concern for Community (1.2)
- Its educational character, linked to principle 5 Education, Training and Information (1.3)
- Its cultural character, which appears in the cooperative definition itself (1.4)
- Its relation with governments, which appears in principle 4 Autonomy and Independence (1.5)

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<sup>1</sup> A cooperative is “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise”.

<sup>2</sup> Cooperative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity; as well as ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

## **EXAMINING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY THROUGH A STRONG COOPERATIVE BRAND**

### ***Parallel Session 1.1.***

**Good brand management has been shown to support business growth. In cooperatives, through the COOP marque and the dotcoop domain name, branding is also a reflection of the cooperative identity, with its values and principles, helping to build loyalty and increase the number of members. Cooperative branding can highlight cooperative identity and its components that most resonate with the public, like commitment to members and the community, while giving cooperatives a competitive edge. What is the best way to manage cooperative branding? What are the best examples? And how can we measure its impact?**

Although the COOP marque and the dotcoop domain name, *per se*, do not explain what cooperative identity is, they are ways to express it, and are used to promote it. The promotion of cooperative branding should be ensured together with the promotion of cooperative identity. Are there good examples of adequation between the two elements (cooperative identity and marque + domain)?

The measurement of the cooperative branding is perhaps to be made based on how it can be a channel behind which a follow-on communication-educational work can convey the contents of the cooperative identity.

Which are the tools and solutions to help cooperatives knit efficiently their branding and marketing efforts into one cohesive, trackable system, to maintain and grow cooperatives' mission, impact, and reputation in full adequation with the cooperative identity? In the post-COVID-19 world, how can cooperative members and workforce learn and build together their cooperative brand and experience?

When it comes to brand consistency, cooperatives' visuals say a lot, such as the COOP marque. So, what are the tools to promote cooperative images related to the cooperative identity? How can we track consistency, from the digital to the real economy, and the local community?

## **EXAMINING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY THROUGH INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE**

### ***Parallel Session 1.2.***

**Participation and inclusion of cultural, gender and age diversity are fundamental for a sound cooperative governance, and they are at the heart of our cooperative identity. To keep these characteristics alive, we must continuously question ourselves: Are we inclusive enough? What can we do to keep the cooperative identity appealing to everyone? How do we make sure our governance practices are inclusive and welcoming to all?**

This theme is linked in particular to the cooperative values of democracy, self-responsibility, equality and equity, [mutual] self-help; to the ethical values of openness, social responsibility and caring for others; and to principle 1 Voluntary and Open Membership, 2 Democratic Member Control, 3 Member Economic Participation and 7 Concern for Community.

The endeavour against less discrimination and more inclusion is gaining pace in societies all over the world. It is at the very root of the cooperative experience: the early cooperators consciously included women and people of different opinions as cooperative members with full voting rights. However, it is often not enough to have a single “open door” policy to admit new members in the cooperative and elect new representatives to the cooperative’s governing bodies. Experience shows that gender balance is often not spontaneously obtained nor is youth representation, just by providing the democratic opportunity to vote and be elected. On the other hand, the cooperative, being embedded in a community, should reflect the diversity of the latter. At the same time, though, there are specific types of cooperatives aimed at providing more equality and empowerment to specific groups in the community, like women and youth: far from discriminating, they are instead aimed at promoting the specific economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations of the population seeking more equality and needing more empowerment.

Principled leadership and cooperative values are key to inclusive governance. What are the most inspiring cases from which other cooperatives can learn? How do cooperatives promote inclusive promotion paths for all, and in particular promote community and local development that leaves no one behind?

How do cooperatives best prepare potential board members, elected board members and members in general to understand the process of governance, the skills, and the values that can make the success of the cooperative, of the cooperative business stakeholders and of the community in which the cooperative is active?

There can be tension among various levers and means of control within cooperatives. How do cooperatives and their boards, management, members and workers, resolve tensions and come up with the right solutions for cooperative success? How is this beneficial to inclusion?

In governance, the cognitive dimension plays a key role in completing other resources in building knowledge, which may lead to organizational learning in the evolution of cooperatives’ collective innovation and other capabilities. As we know, many cooperatives are resilient, and are long living entities: How do cooperatives promote and apply this cognitive dimension in building the cooperative capabilities and remain successful in their mission across time?

## **EXAMINING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY THROUGH EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

### ***Parallel Session 1.3.***

**Cooperative Principle #5 provides cooperatives with the basis to prioritise education, training and information for all. It's necessary to make cooperative curricula commonly and readily available at all levels of educational institutions, from elementary and secondary schools to college and university degree programs. What are the best emblematic examples? What have we learned from them? How can they be disseminated faster?**

As mentioned above, this theme is closely linked to the 5<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle Education, Training and Information which states that *“Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of cooperation”*.

The promotion of education has been a cooperative principle and practice since the very beginning of the spread of the idea of cooperation internationally in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It takes into account that cooperatives are associations of people, and not of experts who work for people at large. In other words, a lot depends on cooperatives and their leadership to establish systems that keep cooperative members and staff trained, educated and informed, and ahead in business. Thus, continuing education and training, and free and fair information is crucial for a cooperative to remain viable.

The other aspect of cooperative education is the inclusion of cooperatives in school and university curricula. We often hear about people stumbling upon cooperatives and not learning enough about them, not the least in a scientific way, during school and university. Even adult and continuing adult education seldom cover cooperatives. One of the known examples is the cooperative home schooling established by Nobel Laureate Marie Curie and her peer from the community of science and arts in France, aimed to educate without discrimination on the basis of gender, and on a variety of subjects that the regular school system did not offer at the time.

ILO Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (n° 193) requires cooperatives to be included in the curricula at all levels of national education systems. Cooperatives should encourage and actively participate in developing the curriculum and promoting cooperative education in their national education system. We are a long way to have this policy recommendation implemented all around the world, even though emblematic exceptions (e.g. Argentina, India) should be mentioned. Teaching on cooperatives has not progressed or has even moved backwards in the last few decades in many countries, against an increasingly dominant business model.

Aside the important education and knowledge arms of almost all cooperative apex organisations around the world, several sub-types of cooperatives have emerged in educational spaces. These include schools and universities organized on the cooperative idea with membership from students, teachers, in some cases the state; consumer cooperatives with membership of students/pupils in education spaces; credit cooperatives in schools; tutors cooperatives on internet platforms etc. They provide students and pupils with real life experience in managing a cooperative, thus also a key “live” educational experience.

Education is a common good and opens life opportunities to all. Education is also learning to learn, and how to access and assess knowledge and information. How have cooperatives been a key vector by which education is expanded?

Education is also about values and civic engagement. How do cooperatives experiment and create education opportunities? How do they teach new generations about cooperative values and principles? How do students find a leading voice through children's cooperatives in schools? How can cooperatives promote learning to know, to do, to be, and to live together?

What are the best examples of cooperatives in the world of education, in schools, universities, lifelong skills, children, pedagogy and theory of education? Who are the leading stakeholders: parents, children, teachers, workers?

What should be done in the world of education to communicate better the cooperative model, teach more and better about cooperatives, and build sustainable education policy?

# **EXAMINING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY THROUGH COOPERATIVE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

## ***Parallel Session 1.4.***

**In 2016, UNESCO, via the German cooperative movement, recognized cooperatives as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. UNESCO's decision is an important acknowledgment of the dedication shown by millions of people working in cooperatives all over the world. What is the implication of this honour? How can we promote it to strengthen the pride in, and value of cooperative identity worldwide?**

The notion of cultural heritage has been defined over the years after the UNESCO Conventions covering the topic as well as providing institutional and policy mechanisms for their safeguarding were adopted in 1972. The significance of cultural heritage, and the importance of protecting it, rest on the need to safeguard it for use and enjoyment of future generations. This matches with the grounds on which the concept of sustainable development is founded. Cultural heritage is generally attributed at the national and local level, and covers monuments, physical sites, and, since 2003, intangible cultural heritage - such as traditional practices, knowledges and expressions.

Though found locally, intangible cultural heritage has to be safeguarded at the international level with the spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance [Preamble, and Art. 16 of the Convention to Safeguard immaterial cultural heritage, 2003].

The listing of the “cooperative idea” as UNESCO immaterial cultural heritage beacons a responsibility upon cooperatives worldwide to invigorate a new area of inter-cooperation and promote the intangible culture of cooperation that is nurtured across the world in countless communities of diverse backgrounds and geographies. This culture of cooperation is always linked to a story of people and their enterprise in working towards their common needs.

The UNESCO international listing of the “cooperative idea” as immaterial cultural heritage is of significance for future generations, empowers cooperatives to in turn play a proactive role in promoting the notion of cultural heritage itself.

Realizing that immaterial cultural heritage is a new area of policy making, and a relevant area to advance sustainable development – an effective way forward is for cooperative organizations to partner with state departments and civil society organizations concerned with culture and cultural heritage, to identify the existing cultural heritage sites and practices of communities, and promote the idea of cooperation there with the aim to safeguard the cultural heritage (e.g. promoting cooperation among argan oil producers of Morocco), as well as safeguarding those cooperatives that are organized by persons protecting a cultural heritage (e.g. argan oil producer cooperatives in Morocco).

The 1995 ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity, among other components, added the cultural aspect to the definition of cooperatives. This meant the interplay of culture and cultural needs and aspirations, with universal cooperative values and principles, thus opening an entire spectrum of growth and development of people and communities that is holistic and sustainable.

The huge challenges of COVID-19 are compelling cooperation between diverse actors including the private sector across industry, states and local governments, as well as civil society organizations, among others. This session will elaborate on the notion of the ‘culture of cooperation’ from different perspectives, including:

- Specific inter-cooperation among cooperatives, and the implementation of the democratic standards of governance and control by cooperatives, might help the recovery process yield sustainable results.
- Addressing cultural needs and aspirations of members may bring transformative change among people towards social inclusion and social justice, and facilitate innovation, empowerment, and decent employment in communities.
- Culture, especially traditional knowledge, expression and wisdom as a source of cooperative identity and further interpretation of the values and principles enshrined in the ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity.
- Cooperatives contributing to enhancing the representative list of immaterial cultural heritage by working with states in identifying cooperatives organized by persons protecting traditional knowledge, arts and expressions.



## **EXAMINING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENTS**

### ***Parallel Session 1.5.***

**Many cooperatives have been created through grassroots campaigns. Others have been promoted and supported by governments as part of a country's economic strategy. Others have successfully developed a partnership ecosystem with governments through public policy co-creation and co-management. It has been shown that such approaches can be effective in growing the cooperative movement, especially in rural and marginalised communities. What lessons can we learn from these approaches? How can we encourage more governments to consider these approaches as part of their strategy for a sustainable future for all?**

This session presents the opportunity to deepen the understanding the 4<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle of Autonomy and Independence in the light of today's world. It is no longer sufficient to simply proclaim cooperatives' autonomy and independence as a reaction to several decades of a trend where state-led policy limited such autonomy and independence in a number of countries: in addition, engagement in partnership, on an equal footing, is precisely something to be considered today in the light of the 4<sup>th</sup> principle.

Partnerships can be temporary or permanent and may engage two or multiple stakeholders, such as cooperatives, community organizations, local authorities, and national governments. Partnerships may be promoted:

- 1) As a means for sustainable development across the UN SDGs, such as in financial inclusion, jobs, access to health and education, food and agriculture;
- 2) In the provision of community services;
- 3) In the sharing of resources to eradicate poverty.

Questions to be asked may include:

- 1) What is the knowledge cooperatives have of partnerships, models and experiences of cooperatives locally and internationally?
- 2) How do cooperatives evaluate sound proposals of partnerships for development?
- 3) How can cooperatives envisage, co-manage, co-construct public policies that make an environment supportive of effective partnerships?
- 4) How do cooperatives build entrepreneurship capacity for partnerships?
- 5) How are partnerships built? Which are the available tools? What are the benefits and risks to cooperatives when sharing resources?
- 6) How is partnership risk evaluated; how to work out eligibility, feasibility, and programming?

## **SECOND THEME: STRENGTHENING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY**

### ***Plenary Session 2***

**Innovation and entrepreneurship are more important than ever in facing today's complex global economy. The people-centred cooperative model nurtures talent, creativity and encourages innovative ideas to create a more humane and inclusive society. How do we make our cooperative identity a competitive advantage in the global market?**

Enterprises today tend to not only sell goods or services, but also a narrative about the community where the good or service is produced, and that also often cover declarations of social and environmental engagement. Under the same logic, cooperatives also have an opportunity to sell more than simply their goods or services, by using their identity. This goes beyond simple marketing, because it constitutes a potent opportunity to also promote the cooperative business model, which in turn is potentially conducive to better competitiveness, leading to a virtuous circle.

Through this second part of the Congress, we should find out which elements of the cooperative identity (based on the Statement on the Cooperative Identity) are conducive to cooperatives' entrepreneurial strength and competitiveness in the globalized economy. These elements deriving from the cooperative identity can both be a) visible to the outside world, such as developing a narrative around characteristics of the cooperative business model that can be attractive to clients and potential clients and society (such as internal democracy, being inserted in an ethical value chain); or b) internal elements that are not necessarily visible to the outside world but are equally important in ensuring cooperatives' entrepreneurial sustainability and competitiveness, such as cooperative-specific ways to build horizontal groups and networks among themselves, develop cooperative-specific financial instruments for their capitalization, adapt to IT tools, or elaborate and implement various types of organizational innovation.

What are the specific elements deriving from the cooperative identity that can increase cooperatives' competitiveness? How can cooperatives make better use of their identity to better market their goods or services? Could this really represent a breakthrough in terms of competitiveness?

The parallel sessions under this second Congress theme will discuss:

- Digitalization (2.1)
- Ethical value chains (2.2)
- Entrepreneurial networks (2.3)
- Cooperative-specific capital formation (2.4)
- Entrepreneurial innovation (2.5).

# **STRENGTHENING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY BY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE DIGITAL AGE**

## ***Parallel Session 2.1.***

**The digital economy is around us. It transforms the world as we know it. From the “new normal” introduced by COVID-19, business models are emerging motivated by positive social impact, sustainable development and inclusion of gender and cultures. However, the digital economy is profoundly disrupting the world of work. What must be done to remain a source of inspiration while respecting members and their common interest? How can cooperatives guarantee a bright future for workers while going digital?**

As we are in the midst of the digital world, which is redefining and disrupting the conventional business models and nature of work, one of the important sub themes is the opportunities and challenges of strengthening cooperative identity by taking advantage of the digital world.

Many of the characteristics of the digital world like voluntarism, collaboration, crowd sourcing, democratization of technology etc., align well with the Statement on the Cooperative Identity. However the presence of cooperatives in leading the digital revolution is low. This session will dwell deep on this paradox and come up with strategies to strengthen the cooperative movement in the digital world.

The deliberations will focus on three aspects:

- a) How do existing cooperatives and cooperative organisations deepen their engagement and identity using digital means?
- b) How do we motivate and enhance the development of youth led technology cooperatives that leads the digital world to adopt the cooperative form of organization?
- c) What is the distinct role cooperatives could play in ensuring a bright future for workers who are getting disrupted due to digital technology and business models?

The first aspect will deliberate on the ways in which existing cooperatives, especially in traditional sectors, could adopt and adapt digital technologies to strengthen their economic and social position. As corporate entities and aggregator platforms make deeper inroads in many economic realms which were traditionally dominated by cooperatives, the need for cooperatives to rediscover the digital world becomes a necessity. The possibility of traditional cooperatives to enhance productivity of their work to remain competitive in the digital world will be deliberated in detail. As the digital world is also about enhanced automation (Industry 4.0), this may mean reduction in human labour, and work against the interest of cooperatives. How do cooperatives enhance their business so that increased productivity leads to overall benefit of members?

While the first aspect focuses on the existing cooperatives, the need for bringing more new age enterprises into the cooperative umbrella forms the key point of discussion in the second aspect. The digital age is characterized by the emergence of several startups and young innovators leveraging technology to develop solutions with exponential growth potential. Many of the digital age products are developed through global collaborations among young innovators and the cooperative model seems to be a natural organizational identity for such collective entrepreneurship models. Unfortunately, barring a few countries, the prevalence of cooperatives in the technology space is rather low. This is surprising as most of the leading universities in the world, from where most of the digital enterprises emerge, have cooperatives playing a significant role in providing student amenities. It is important to deepen the engagement with new age innovators and entrepreneurs to make the cooperative movement stay relevant and grow in the digital age. At a broader level, the possibility of using technology to deepen engagement with underrepresented sections of society in the cooperative movement will also be explored. Development of women led cooperatives by leveraging on technology could be one such example.

The third aspect will deliberate on the ways in which workers and other stakeholders, who are getting increasingly marginalized by technology, remain relevant through the cooperative movement. The need for

reskilling the workers, developing new models like platform cooperatives to enable workers to play a significant role in development, using technology to enhance their reach, using open innovation models by worker cooperatives etc., are some of the areas the deliberations will focus on.

Broadly, the theme of *Strengthening our Cooperative Identity* focuses on issues and opportunities of enhancing and/or creating cooperative identity in the digital world among three types of stakeholders. These could be existing cooperatives workers and others who are getting disrupted and displaced by technology and new age youth and women innovators and startups who are leading the growth in the digital era.

To strengthen the cooperative identity in digital age, the following aspects will be deliberated:

- a) Using digital technology and models to enhance the competitiveness of existing cooperatives
- b) Promoting cooperatives among young innovators and technology companies to create an identity for cooperatives in the digital world akin to the role cooperatives have been playing in the industrialized world.
- c) Create cooperatives as an identity to support the survival and growth of workers (human labour) who are getting increasingly disrupted and displaced by technology in the digital world, by enabling them to play a proactive economic role in the new world.

Education is at the heart of the cooperative movement. One of the leading digital innovations take place in teaching, training and learning digital platforms. How can cooperatives harness the potential of teaching platforms? Should cooperatives teach coding? What are best case examples in the cooperative movement so far?

Cooperative start-ups are an important part of the cooperative movement. How to promote and support them in the evolving digital world? Should the cooperative movement take this up alone or in partnership with public authorities?

Digitalization is changing procurement strategies, mobilising users' experience, new buying channels, reducing administrative processes, real-time supply, stocks and analytics, dynamic workflow from front to back office, and centralizing supplier data. What should be done for cooperatives to remain adaptive and competitive?

In the digital age, data is wealth. How should cooperatives prepare and act in terms of ethics, risk management and analysis, data mining, e-commerce and e-banking, information processing, algorithms, successful management of virtual environments including virtual meetings?

## **STRENGTHENING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY BY SUPPORTING AN ETHICAL VALUE CHAIN MANAGEMENT**

### ***Parallel Session 2.2.***

**All types of organizations need to demonstrate an ethical, strong and resilient value chain that meets the highest standards to fight modern slavery, financial crime and climate change. Cooperative members are demanding more information on the products and services they consume. Regulators are considering stricter enforcement programs with substantial penalties for those who do not comply. How satisfactory are the relationships of cooperatives to current partner organizations in various value chains? Are there more business opportunities within the global Fair-Trade? Are secondary and tertiary cooperatives being used for leveraging the regional and global markets? Are they providing enough support to primary cooperatives and their communities?**

Cooperatives occupy various positions across the value chain ranging from producers, workers, transport, consumers, and recycling. Their uniqueness from other business models is found in their identity (definition, values, and principles) and in their structure deriving from it. They ensure that their members and stakeholders receive a more significant share of the value of their products and are driven by a fairer distribution of value and control to ensure they achieve most of their main goals in eradicating poverty, hunger, and inequality. They maintain a sustainable and ethical performance concerning environmental protection, climate change, human rights, and product safety. However, there is still an untapped opportunity to create a fairer and more sustainable supply chains to promote more equitable outcomes in the society to which cooperatives can contribute.

Under globalization and increased competition in the international markets, cooperatives are faced with the need to connect across the national, regional and international borders, to meet the needs and achieve the objectives of their members. One of their strengths is their adaptability in response to market demand. They maintain their market behaviour and distinguish themselves by honest measurement, high quality, and fair prices. However, cooperatives can become exposed to market demands as they are expected to respond to value chain partners' needs. This has an implication on their functioning as they need to abide by their values and principles as part of their identity, and ensure they are ethical, responsible and sustainable businesses. Fostering and maintaining relationships is critical to ensuring a member-centred, user-driven cooperative. For a cooperative to succeed, it needs to be operated in the spirit of a cooperative, that is, to have meaningful member understanding, engagement, and influence over its direction to ensure that the decision-making process and associated outcomes do not dilute members' own interests and values.

In human rights practices, cooperatives play a significant role in implementing social and ethical responsibility. Besides, as a people-centred business model, cooperatives encourage respecting people, caring about people, and putting people first before profit. Cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. These values are embedded in the cooperative principle of concern for the community. Thus, it is the most proper and effective business model to realize human development and economic and social rights.

The cooperative movement globally commits itself to respect, promote and act diligently to support the fundamental tenets of decent work that promotes:

- Freedom of association and full recognition of the right to collective bargaining.
- The elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour.
- An end to child labour.
- The elimination of discrimination in employment and every form of work.

The panelists will explore how cooperatives experience and build value chain management involving transformation processes in:

- 1) Technology – such as with new technologies to help build and achieve ethical and sustainability reputation, eg with solar and other renewable energy, and social, labour and community engagement.
- 2) Regulations and standards along a triple bottom line (economic, social and environmental), eg green economy, ecological modernization, inclusive communities
- 3) Civil society leadership, eg mobilizing grassroots and communities in the promotion of safety, care, inclusion, and alternative technologies
- 4) Market incentives, whereby cooperatives help build systems and pricing that promote sustainability, eg markets for carbon offsets, fair pricing, etc.

Can and should cooperatives aim at leading transformations towards a chosen direction, by showing:

- 1) How to define what is ethical, sustainable, what is inclusive, along value chains, that can respond to producers and consumers evolving requirements, as well as lead firms in global value chains;
- 2) who controls what and through which forms of governance may be best for cooperatives;
- 3) who gets what and how it is distributed, addressing everyday practices of cooperatives in value chains, as well as making accountable the other stakeholders in the value chain;
- 4) how do cooperatives address market challenges of consolidation and concentration, towards market forms of linkages that allow for inclusion, ethics and sustainability.

## **STRENGTHENING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY BY HAVING A STRONG ENTREPRENEURIAL NETWORK**

### ***Parallel Session 2.3.***

**Innovation and entrepreneurship require the ability to connect to a large support network of people, ideas and financial resources. Successful cooperative partnerships and groupings, both sectoral and cross-sectoral, have developed in many countries over the last decades, based on cooperative Principle #6: cooperation among cooperatives. Can strong global networks of cooperatives be created to increase market shares and enter new ones?**

This topic corresponds first and foremost to the 6<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle of Cooperation among Cooperatives, which states that *“Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures”*.

Business networks are seen to outperform traditional firms working in isolation or individually. They entail cooperation on selected goals or shared missions, which may be strategic or operational.

Many cooperatives have, in various sectors and inter-sectorally, created horizontal business groups or consortia among themselves, often with two or three organisational layers with secondary and tertiary cooperatives, and with a horizontal type of governance which combines the second cooperative principle of Democratic Member Control and the sixth cooperative principle of Cooperation among Cooperatives. Some of the oldest cooperative groups still in existence today were established at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Desjardins in Quebec (Canada) in banking and CCPL in Emilia-Romagna (Italy) in industry, or as early as the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Cooperative Wholesale Society in the UK among consumer cooperatives. Some of these groups have today become top business actors in their respective countries and top actors in local development, like the Mondragon Group in the Basque Country (Spain).

What is the impact of cooperative groups and consortia on the development of the regions in which they are embedded?

What are the best cooperatives' network organizational structures in 2021, and for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

What are the benefits of network structure for cooperatives? Are there any drawbacks or risks and how to handle them?

How do cooperatives build the best local authentic networks from producers to consumers and users that benefit communities and members, such as in food and farming, credit, and marketing?

Can we think of building cooperative branding or cooperative brand equity aligned throughout the network (through brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand association, quality, preference, experience and engagement)?

In terms of inclusion, do or should cooperatives promote social and professional networking among members, workers, users, or potential new cooperators?

## STRENGTHENING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY BY MEETING FUTURE CAPITAL NEEDS

### *Parallel Session 2.4.*

**Based on their identity, cooperative enterprises have a specific capital structure because of their ownership and control system, with limited nominal capital contributed by members, while building long-term reserve funds. As a result, cooperatives strive to find innovative ways to build capital in order to support their development and make sure their capitalization model is taken into consideration by regulators. What should be done to ensure a form of capital management that allows for cooperatives to innovate, be resilient, grow and succeed in their mission?**

This sub-theme corresponds first and foremost to the 3<sup>rd</sup> cooperative principle on member economic participation which states: *“Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.”*

Today, many are rethinking the future of capital, their responsibilities to shareholders and stakeholders, new investment approaches towards a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable economy. The pandemic has altered perceptions and strategies. What will be the key post-pandemic trends to impact the future of capital as many rethink growth, risk and strategy? How should banking, credit cooperatives, as well as all other cooperatives, think of it?

Is the future of capital green? How to harness the changing donors, users, preferences? Policy interventions may have a strong impact on asset values: how should cooperatives prepare for the future?

ESG (Environmental Social and Governance) refers to the three non-financial performance indicators which include ethical, sustainable and corporate government issues to measure the sustainability and ethical impact of an investment in businesses. These criteria are used to screen investments and evaluate future financial performance.

Factors impacting on the preference for cooperative identity include

- access to equity,
- demand for liquidity and
- acquisition of assets.

What are the best examples to take care of these factors? How is capital allocated to support the preference for cooperative identity as well as thinking of a sustainable future?

What are the best experiences in building centres of excellence to support cooperatives' innovation, training, adaptation, and capability to tap the potential of a green / sustainable economy?

What about sustainability -related disclosure, upcoming taxonomies and standards, and new financing instruments such as green bonds?

This session should focus both on:

- Capital in individual cooperatives, distinguishing in turn both members' nominal capital and common reserve funds: what is the intrinsic nature of such capital compared to capital in conventional companies
- Mutualized financial instruments for the development of cooperatives, both banking and non banking ones.



## **STRENGTHENING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY BY SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURIAL INNOVATION**

### *Parallel Session 2.5.*

**According to their international definition, cooperatives are characterized by being both enterprises and associations, and their true identity can only be acquired if a balance between the two elements is maintained. Therefore, entrepreneurial innovation must embody cooperative values and principles. What are their growth trajectories? How have cooperatives pursued entrepreneurial innovation while embodying cooperative values? What challenges must cooperatives overcome to become successful future businesses?**

Entrepreneurial innovation can be more organizational or more managerial. In both cases, the cooperative identity provides an important potential source of innovation.

Democratic deliberations among cooperative members may sometimes be seen as time wasted but, if properly conducted, it can instead result in being an important investment in the business. Likewise, internal conflict resolution and decision-making in front of crises can provide a level of consensus that, in the end, results in being far less costly than having fully blown out conflicts exacerbated by the crisis.

In terms of new business ideas, democratic debate and brainstorming, if properly conducted (as part of the innovation drive) can lead to business ideas that would not have necessarily sprung up in conventional business. In addition, cooperative members, who generally come from the local community, can more easily take the pulse of the latter in understanding its needs and aspirations than conventional businesses.

Innovation can also focus on better marketing the cooperative identity, for example by putting in value the internal democracy in a client-oriented narrative, showing that the financial capital of the cooperative remains in the local community, that the cooperative is open to all who can qualify with the type of membership it is dedicated to, etc.

How do cooperatives leaders focus on building a sense of community and shared capabilities? How do they create a space where people want to belong?

## **THIRD THEME: COMMITTING TO OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY**

### ***Plenary Session 3***

**Inclusion and humanity are at the core of our identity, making cooperatives a valuable tool in the construction of positive peace. We respond to the needs of refugees, rebuild after natural disasters, look after the most vulnerable, and respond to the ravages of a global pandemic. These crises are constantly threatening an increasingly globalised economy. How can cooperatives work together to bring about positive and lasting change in the world?**

This theme is particularly linked to the cooperative values of [mutual] self-help and self-responsibility and to the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others, and to the 7<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle Concern for Community which states that *“Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members”*.

Some key world challenges are increasingly global in nature, including the five challenges in the follow-on parallel sessions: the environment (3.1), peace and equality (3.2), international (3.3) and community development (3.4), and international crises (3.5). These challenges illustrate the increasingly finite nature of our world.

The cooperative movement, being global in its identity and in its organization, is not only a global actor to be taken into account due to its numerical importance, but also one which is contributing directly to meeting these global challenges through different components of its identity: its capacity to respond to society's rapidly evolving needs and aspirations, including environmental ones, propels it as a gradually important actor also in the environmental field. It tends to generate positive peace and equality through an intrinsic inclusive and democratic character (including conflict resolution) and the fact that the needs and aspirations cooperative meet sometimes associate conflicting groups. In terms of response and resilience to crises, cooperatives have shown such resilience and proactiveness on repeated occasions in the past, and the more these crises are becoming global, the more cooperatives' response to them acquire an increasingly global significance. In the field of international development, the UN through Resolution 56/114 of 2001 recognizes *“that cooperatives, in their various forms, promote the fullest possible participation in the economic and social development of all people, including women, youth, older persons and people with disabilities, and are becoming a major factor of economic and social development”*, while the EU recognized in 2015 cooperatives as being one of the few key actors in the field of international development cooperation.

# **COMMITTING TO OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY FOR THE SURVIVAL OF THE PLANET**

## ***Parallel Session 3.1.***

**The top priority of a majority of institutions on the planet is to act on climate change. The pandemic has highlighted the interdependence between the degradation of the environment and health risks. Cooperatives have been committed to and have been responding to UN Sustainable Development Goals long before these came into being. How does the global cooperative movement fight against climate change? What measures are being taken in cooperative sectors—agriculture, fisheries, consumption, housing, health, banking, insurance, industry and services, etc. to mitigate the adverse effects of the climate crisis and build resilience? How do the different cooperative sectors address the loss of biodiversity? What are the best coping strategies?**

This theme corresponds to SDG 13 Climate Action, 12 Sustainable Consumption and Production, 14 Life Below Water and 15 Life on Land.

To survive, humans need to make peace with the planet, as the Third Global Session of the UN Science-Policy-Business Forum on the Environment (UN-SPBF) 2021 called its final debate, in the face of three planetary crises identified in the UNEP's Medium-Term Strategy: 1) climate change; 2) biodiversity loss; and 3) pollution, such as dealing with marine plastics and building a circular economy.

Sustainable consumption and production form another key process for the planet's survival. The 1994 Oslo Symposium speaks of *"the use of services and related products, which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations."*

Discussions include how to build low-carbon, resource-efficient, inclusive societies in both urban and rural areas, and building nature-positive food systems. What are the best examples among cooperatives to help saving the planet, its biodiversity, and health in general?

The April 2021 meeting of the UN Technical Working Group on Enabling the SDGs through Inclusive, Just energy transitions, proposed re-examining several concepts before finalizing the report, such as: what is "inclusive" and "just" transition; and how women can be incorporated as agents of change, not just beneficiaries. How is the cooperative identity sustaining an inclusive, just, empowering energy transition?

At the Leaders Summit on Climate, President Joe Biden announced the U.S. would double its public climate finance for lower-income countries by 2024 and released a first-ever international climate finance plan. How should cooperatives respond, in developed and less developed countries?

In terms of relation with the cooperative identity, the theme of the environment is linked to the concept of sustainable development (triple bottom line: economic, social and environmental) mentioned in the 7<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle and the concept of community enshrined in the same principle, which includes the global community, as well as to the *"economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations"* of the cooperative definition, which also have environmental implications.

The environmental bottom-line of cooperatives appears less explicitly than the economic and social ones, in spite of enhanced awareness attained in this field recently. It requires explaining that, amidst globalization, "community", as mentioned in the 7<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle, covers the environmental dimension as well.

What practices can be shown as a way forward in different types of cooperatives (both producer ones and users' ones)? How can the cooperative movement resolutely embrace environmental considerations in its commitment to its identity?

## **COMMITTING TO OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY FOR PEACE AND EQUALITY**

### ***Parallel Session 3.2.***

**According to the ICA Declaration on Positive Peace through Cooperatives (2019), peace based on “good contribution in the community, particularly cooperation and integration, reconciliation and equality’ is “positive peace.” Many times, cooperatives have been directly involved in positive peace initiatives without being necessarily recognized for the direct role they have played. Does support for positive peace feature prominently in the global cooperative movement? How do their actions translate into restoring post-conflict peace and stability, conflict prevention, natural disaster recovery and the refugee crisis?**

This theme corresponds to SDG 16 peace and 10 reduced inequalities.

The Declaration on Positive Peace through Cooperatives, approved by the ICA General Assembly held in Kigali in 2019, states that *“Cooperatives are already well recognized for their role after crises, be they financial or economic crises, natural disasters or violent conflicts. However, cooperatives do much more for positive peace: creating jobs and enterprises that are rooted in the territories, dynamic and long-lasting; providing affordable housing and access to credit and savings, insurance and markets; ensuring the survival, recovery, prosperity and preparedness of individual and family livelihoods, communities and local communities, and this whether at sea, on the coast, mountains, urban or rural areas; responding with success to social needs in care, education, health, as well as to sustainability concerns in the areas of energy and patterns of consumption production and distribution. Cooperatives provide new opportunities and long-term paths to create wealth and capital that are not purely financial nor for a reduced number of people”.*

How is the cooperative identity conducive to local positive peace building, and to address or prevent violence in all its forms (gender, structural, cultural, physical, etc.)?

How cooperatives generate equality, which is conducive to positive peace, in particular through the first principle Voluntary and Open Membership through which new members are included equally, and the third principle Member Economic Participation which provides a price adjustment to workers, producers and users, through surplus redistribution?

How is conflict resolution something many cooperatives have to practice internally through the second cooperative principle of democratic member control?

In which way cooperative values enhance peace? Can the cooperative identity be linked to a culture of everyday peace?

## **COMMITTING TO OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY FOR COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE WORLD**

### ***Parallel Session 3.3.***

**By giving local communities direct control over their destiny, whether in agricultural production, health, housing, education, industry, retail, banking or energy, cooperatives play a decisive role in the world economy. There are lessons to be learned from successes and failures in international cooperative development. What lessons have been learnt from the ICA-EU Partnership programme in cooperative development? How have the values and principles which are part of the cooperative identity been important in this process?**

As per the Statement on the Cooperative Identity, a cooperative is *“an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise”* As a tried and tested model for two centuries and constantly expanding under innovative forms, cooperatives are fundamental development actors as they represent people-centered businesses, which empower citizens to fulfill their economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprise embedded in the community, and therefore enable people around the world to take control of their livelihoods.

When it comes to international cooperative development, it is the term ‘cooperative’ which makes the difference. Anchored and built on the cooperative identity, international cooperative development processes add a fundamental dimension to international development cooperation as we know it today. Using the cooperative model generates multiple benefits, such as building local expertise, creating decent jobs, and providing affordable services as well as learning opportunities. This has propelled cooperatives as being recognized as a crucial development actor for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

UN through Resolution 56/114 of 2001 recognizes *“that cooperatives, in their various forms, promote the fullest possible participation in the economic and social development of all people, including women, youth, older persons and people with disabilities, and are becoming a major factor of economic and social development”*.

Cooperatives enable a locally anchored and inclusive development process thanks to their specific model based on the cooperative identity (definition, values and principles). Furthermore, cooperatives’ actions have a particularly significant impact since they function as efficient networks and encourage worldwide exchanges and partnerships.

The longstanding experience of international cooperative development processes has undeniably revealed two major strengths, namely the impact of cooperatives on their local communities, combined with a collaborative and global approach.

How to highlight better data on cooperatives to inform policy and advocacy? At which levels? How to leverage impact for cooperative support in development of communities across the world? Funding, partnerships, frameworks, consultation processes?

How do cooperatives work and with whom have they worked when they support community driven development? Are there any lessons concerning cooperative identity for the identity of those involved in development work?

This session will analyze the impact of international cooperative development from a collaborative and global approach through the importance to boost such local development processes according to the sixth cooperative principle of Cooperation amongst cooperatives and the second cooperative principle of Democratic member control.

- Cooperation amongst cooperatives: as an international movement founded on the value of [mutual] self-help, there is a high degree of cooperation amongst cooperatives. Strong cooperative networks enable practitioners in different parts of the world to share learning and best practice.
- Democratic member control: members jointly own and govern their cooperatives, and trigger thereby inclusive development leaving no one behind. This fosters democratic participation and decision-making, favoring a process centered on democratic ownership and concern for the community.

The deliberations will focus on the following questions:

- Cooperative model: How does the cooperative model provide an added value in international development processes?
- Sixth principle: why is a collaborative approach in international cooperative development processes a key factor for success? How can cooperative networks support this?
- Second principle: which opportunities and challenges does the cooperative model provide for local communities? How to measure the cooperative impact on a local community?

## **COMMITTING TO OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY FOR STRENGTHENING THE COMMUNITY**

### *Parallel Session 3.4.*

**Cooperative Principle #7: Concern for Community emphasizes the cooperative contribution to local community development, while promoting the economic participation of their members. The cooperative model has the potential to play a key role in communities facing various social problems, such as poverty, inequality and unemployment. It is an excellent model for building circular and autogenous communities by promoting the revitalization of the regional economy, creating jobs and increasing the social and economic participation of members in community development. How can this be enhanced to help communities facing various social issues? How can the cooperative movement help build independent, self-reliant communities that will reinvest their own knowledge and resources back in the community itself?**

Identity is not an entity that resides merely in an individual mind or a cooperator; it is a shared identification with numerous others whom one will or will not meet, like an imagined community.

The use of discourse, especially in a repeatable, institutionalized form, and shared experience and feelings, can be taken as the construction of a shared community, and commitment or engagement with it.

This patterning knits the cooperative identity within the community, as cooperative members and families live in and belong to the community in which the cooperative exists.

Therefore, the community may be strengthened through the cooperative identity, when the members, their families and the extended community, all stakeholders, are able to flourish.

Inclusiveness in cooperatives can lead to all stakeholders being entitled to respect, dignity and acceptance from other members and the community at large.

Cooperatives are said to help build civil society, better community relations and social cohesion, strengthening members' ability to accomplish things that they can only do with others. Cooperatives can further sustain and grow voluntary networks of relationships and interdependence.

The 7<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle Concern for Community has for the first time explicitly highlighted the relation between the cooperative and its surrounding community, thus becoming more than a community of interest, however open it may be. This partly derives from the 1<sup>st</sup> cooperative principle, in as much as cooperative membership includes past, present, future and potential members present in the community, considering that cooperatives are normally guided by long-term entrepreneurial strategies which, in turn, tends to stabilize employment within the cooperative and among supplying and client businesses. This strong relation with the community enshrined in the 7<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle is enhanced by the 6<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle Cooperation among Cooperatives, as more cooperatives join forces in having an impact on the community. Beyond these mechanisms, the 7<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle should reflect a vision of having the cooperative strongly embedded and engaged in the community.

## **COMMITTING TO OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY FOR FACING CRISES WITH STRENGTH**

### ***Parallel Session 3.5.***

**The COVID-19 pandemic is the best example of how disasters often occur unexpectedly and cause social, health and economic harm. Our open democratic system helps us face and overcome health, social and economic crises. Cooperatives have repeatedly shown resilience to crises. What have cooperatives done to emerge from this crisis?**

Resilience is not just facing adversity and get on with it. Resilience is about building cooperative and shared systems that allows us to face a crisis and spring back flourishing again. For that, trust in our cooperative identity and shared values is essential.

Having built mechanisms or tools to control the worst possible risks can also help. Also, human and solidarity support, when efforts are done for something that is larger than our individual selves, make a better knit and hopeful community. Is strength about cooperative courage? How do cooperatives prepare in advance and get stronger in the face of a shock, or a crisis?

How do they respond in the aftershock? We know that many donate food, aid, and other humanitarian aid. How does this related to cooperative identity?

There is public-private – civil society preparedness before any shock may strike. How do cooperatives participate in such process of preparedness? How do cooperatives members respond, is that linked to their connection to cooperatives and / or the cooperative identity and values?

Cooperatives have, in successive crises in the past, reacted with resilience and proactiveness. Is this happening again with the COVID crisis and the recovery from it?



## FOURTH THEME: LIVING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY

### *Plenary Session 4*

**The foundation of our identity drives cooperatives to pursue fundamental positive change in our world such as support for the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. As grassroots organisations led by their members, cooperatives are working strongly to offer effective approaches to sustainable development in the communities in which they are rooted. But how are UN global policies being turned into effective local actions?**

The concept of sustainable development enshrined in the UN Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is linked to the concept of triple-bottom-line, covering economic, social and environmental concerns. It was first elaborated in the 1990s as an attempt to measure business performance<sup>3</sup>, arguing that both social and environmental bottom-lines make a firm sustainable<sup>4</sup>. Cooperatives' type of ownership and control provides a coherent business model with a business perspective that contains the triple-bottom-line.

Cooperatives explicitly have economic and social bottom-lines, as spelt out in the Statement on the Cooperative Identity, being both associations and enterprises, aimed at meeting the economic and social needs and aspiration of their members, governed by democratic control, supported by information, training and education, dedicating their results to common reserves reinvested towards the entity's long-term purpose and to returns to members based on their transactions with the entity (not on the capital invested), with concern for the surrounding community, and being inspired by values such as equality, equity, solidarity, social responsibility and caring for others.

Cooperatives' fullest contribution to the SDGs requires an adequate policy environment. To this end, the cooperative movement should generate quantitative estimates and qualitative testimonials regarding its contributions to the SDGs, in order to effectively monitor, measure and assess such contributions over the 2015-2030 timespan. The UN Agenda 2030 itself provides quantitatively measurable targets, and the UN Statistical Commission approved in 2017 a revised list of global SDG indicators; annual SDG reports are published and reviewed by the UN High Level Political Forum, and a Global Sustainable Development Report is published every four years. The cooperative movement should closely follow up and actively participate in this process, and develop its own targets and indicators related to the SDGs, communicating progress periodically.

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<sup>3</sup> John Elkington: *Towards the Sustainable Corporation: Win-Win-Win Business Strategies for Sustainable Development* in: California Management Review 36, no. 2 (1994): 90–100

<sup>4</sup> Kleindorfer P. et Al.: *Sustainable Operations Management* in: Production and Operations Management 14 (4), December 2005, pp. 482–492; and Porter M. & Kramer M.: *Strategy and Society: The Link between Competitive Advantage and Corporate Social Responsibility*; in Harvard Business Review, December 2006.

## **LIVING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY WITH REWARDING JOBS**

### ***Parallel Session 4.1.***

**To maintain the cooperative movement's vision of fair and ethical economic development to ensure a bright future and rewarding jobs, more autonomy and active participation for workers, cooperatives must adapt to the changes brought about by computer systems and AI. They demonstrate a high level of innovation in creating new forms of work and working relationships. How will the relationship between unions and cooperatives look like in the future? What lessons can we learn from these new approaches?**

This theme corresponds to SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Cooperatives around the world employ or are the main source of income for more than 279 million people, almost 10% of the total employed population<sup>5</sup>, without counting the jobs and economic activities that have been created through loans granted by credit cooperatives, or through other key inputs provided by insurance cooperatives or electricity cooperatives to millions of producers, nor the indirect jobs generated for providers and clients.

Very high ratios of cooperative employment are found in some regions like Emilia-Romagna, where it is close to 15% of total employment in that region, distributed in virtually all economic sectors. Emilia-Romagna is one of the oldest cooperative clusters in the world and one of the most important industrial districts in Europe, which has managed to maintain its overall competitiveness. The particularly high level of cooperative employment in that region bodes well for the employment potential of the cooperative model elsewhere in the world. Gangwon in South Korea is another example, having reached the ratio of 23% (mainly in agriculture)

Some of the main characteristics of cooperative employment, as per the two successive CICOPA reports on employment (2014 and 2017), are:

- A relatively well-balanced distribution between urban and rural areas (including in sectors other than agriculture) as well as between large cities and small towns.
- Cooperative resilience, including in terms of employment, which have been observed during the global crisis that flared up in 2008. It was found out that such resilience has been reinforced by factors stemming from the cooperative system (networks, groups and mutualized business support institutions etc.).
- A relatively high security of tenure, also impacting on the stability of indirect employment.
- The wage gap is generally more reduced in cooperatives compared to other types of enterprises, sometimes posing a challenge in terms of hiring highly qualified managers.

Some cooperatives have been created to support and strengthen economic activities of self-employed producers or entrepreneurs in the informal economy, through various forms of shared services. Whereas these cooperatives cannot always provide a stable legal status or formal social protection to their members, they contribute to raising and stabilising members' incomes, increasing the performance and competitiveness of members' business, and making members' voices heard collectively and leading them gradually towards formality. Through cooperatives, self-employed producers and entrepreneurs in the informal economy can enjoy various services which were not available to them due to the small size of their business and lack of applicable formal arrangements. In the debates on the problems in the informal economy related to work and employment, several categories of workers who are in vulnerable situations have drawn special attention: these include waste

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<sup>5</sup> Eum HS (2017), *Cooperatives and Employment Second Global Report*: Brussels: CICOPA

pickers, domestic workers, migrant workers, street and market vendors, transport workers, home-based workers and providers of social services. Cooperatives have played a very important role, in the developing and emerging economies in particular, in bringing income-generation opportunities to women, especially through women-only cooperatives.<sup>6</sup> Many studies and reports show that shared service cooperatives among workers and producers can play an important role in organizing, supporting and representing them, by providing them a formal framework through which their economic activities can be recognised as real businesses and members can negotiate with public authorities in order to introduce appropriate social security and protection schemes.

The cooperative system has generated a series of non-standard forms of employment that are based on an effort to implement decent work, such as the status of worker-members in worker cooperatives and social cooperatives, salaried employment for self-employed in business and employment cooperatives, interim work in labour cooperatives with better working conditions than in average interim agencies, etc.<sup>7</sup>, which should not be confused with false cooperatives which are involved in labour intermediation. Cooperatives have been key innovators in the governance of work, providing members, in the case of worker and producer cooperatives, with the double status of workers or producers and of co-owners of their own enterprises. Multi-stakeholder cooperatives, a model now expanding rapidly in several countries, make workers and/or producers share the governance of the enterprise with other stakeholders such as the users. These models in the governance of work provide a strong innovative and experimental character to cooperatives, based on members' participation and democratic control.

Cooperatives have shown the necessary flexibility to modify their production in order to remain or insert themselves in global supply chains provided they receive the appropriate advisory services, while cooperative groups have often been in a stronger position to internationalize and control larger parts of the chains, allowing for the creation of new jobs both in the original location of the enterprise and in new ones.<sup>8</sup> Fair trade cooperatives are another example of cooperative internationalization, based on value chains.

The ICA 2018 General Assembly in Buenos Aires approved a Declaration on Decent Work and against Harassment which "*towards a more inclusive future of work, defends the basic principles of dignity and equality in the new and emerging forms of employment*". Cooperatives have also been included in the 2019 ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work.

After the pandemic, workplaces will likely integrate flexibility. How prepared are cooperatives to such changes? What are the best cases and lessons?

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<sup>6</sup> Like the SEWA cooperatives, see <http://www.sewafederation.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Eum HS (2017), *Cooperatives and Employment Second Global Report*: Brussels: CICOPA, p. 66

<sup>8</sup> Luzarraga JM *La estrategia de multilocalización internacional de la Corporación Mondragon*, *Ekonomiaz* N.º 79, 1st term, 2012, [www.ogasun.ejgn.euskadi.eus/r51.../es/.../downloadPDF](http://www.ogasun.ejgn.euskadi.eus/r51.../es/.../downloadPDF)

## **LIVING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY WITH ACCESSIBLE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

### ***Parallel Session 4.2.***

**There are few issues that unite people around the world more than health care and health-related social services, especially under a global pandemic. Cooperatives have excelled in both fields and offer a unique alternative to the debate between public and private services. What innovative approaches have been implemented to face the growing cost of health care? How are cooperatives meeting the growing needs of both aging populations and vulnerable people? What might a cooperative program reflecting the future of care look like? How can the cooperative movement contribute to making health a priority for all?**

This theme corresponds to SDG 3 Good Health and Well Being.

Health and related social services are particularly illustrative of cooperatives' contribution to the community at large and not only to members. The 7<sup>th</sup> cooperative principle of concern for community acquires a particularly important place in the case of cooperatives dedicated to health and related social services, which are also closely linked to the 1<sup>st</sup> cooperative principle of Voluntary and Open Membership, as many of them are multistakeholder, reflecting a will to integrate both the patients and the medical personnel into the same cooperative or cooperative group.

What are the most inspiring cases to share? Can we identify factors, indicators, that can support claims that these are inspiring cases, or why?

What will be the most defining trends in the health and social services sector in the next 20 to 30 years? Can we harness the cooperative identity to be part or to lead those trends?

What would be the most important lessons learned in terms of cooperative identity in the past 20 years, for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## **LIVING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY WITH ENHANCED FOOD SECURITY**

### ***Parallel Session 4.3.***

**The relationship between food production and consumption is being tested in many ways—climate change, drought, flooding, refugee displacement, and rural depopulation. Particularly acute is the disruption of the chains of production and distribution. This, however, has provided a renewed role to cooperatives engaged in agricultural production. How do cooperatives address new ways to ensure production in food systems? How does this contribute to building sustainable, ethical and inclusive value chains?**

This theme corresponds to SDG 2 Zero Hunger and 12 Responsible Consumption and Production.

In spite of cooperative growth in all sectors of the economy, agricultural cooperatives still remain by far the largest part of the cooperative movement in terms of members. Given the vital importance of food production and distribution for the survival of human beings, and cooperatives' important market shares in many countries of the world, the pandemic has highlighted problems of global food distribution and therefore security. On the other hand an increasing portion of human beings want organic and natural products.

How does the sector connect to the cooperative identity (definition, values and principles)? In particular to the 1<sup>st</sup> cooperative principle (particularly voluntary and open membership in a given geographical extension) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> (particularly surplus redistribution and reserves), as well as the 6<sup>th</sup> (particularly secondary cooperatives)?

What are the most inspiring cases to share? Can we identify factors, indicators, that can support claims that these are inspiring cases, or why?

What will be the most defining trends in food supply by agricultural cooperatives in the next 20 to 30 years? Can we harness the cooperative identity to be part or to lead those trends?

What would be the most important lessons learned in terms of cooperative identity in connection to food security in the past 20 years, for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## **LIVING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY WITH AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND ENERGY**

### *Parallel Session 4.4.*

**There is a close relationship between affordable energy and affordable housing at all levels of society. Cooperatives serve their members more effectively by sharing their skills and knowledge, and housing and energy cooperatives can make a huge difference. What innovations result from partnerships between housing cooperatives and energy cooperatives? How can we promote these ways of doing things?**

This theme corresponds to SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy and 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities.

How do the housing and energy sectors connect to the cooperative identity (definition, values and principles), and in particular with the 7<sup>th</sup> principle, in particular its sustainable development component, and the definition (needs and aspirations)?

What are the most inspiring cases to share? Can we identify factors, indicators, that can support claims that these are inspiring cases, or why?

What will be the most defining trends in the housing and energy sector in the next 20 to 30 years? Can we harness the cooperative identity to be part or to lead those trends?

What would be the most important lessons learned in terms of cooperative identity in connexion to housing and energy in the past 20 years, for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## **LIVING OUR COOPERATIVE IDENTITY WITHIN THE SOCIAL AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY**

### ***Parallel Session 4.5.***

**Cooperatives and other social and solidarity economy actors working with local governments in delivering services within society constitute an engine to improve local and territorial development. It is recognized that the social and solidarity economy (SSE) create wealth in urban and rural areas and contributes to sustainable local and territorial development. What are the best practices in such partnerships? How do we develop policies and programs that are favourable to the social and solidarity economy?**

This theme corresponds to SDG 17 partnerships.

Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) is a concept that encompasses organizations and enterprises that have explicit economic and social (and often environmental) objectives. SSE includes cooperatives, mutual associations, women's self-help groups, community forestry groups, social provisioning organizations or 'proximity services', fair trade organizations, associations of informal sector workers, social enterprises, and community currency and alternative finance schemes.

SSE is an important pathway to transforming the world for the better and is a critical driver in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is present in all sectors of the economy ranging from production to finance, including distribution, exchange, consumption, and governance.

At national level, it is observed that a growing number of countries are adopting actions to advance SSE through policy frameworks. In the last decades, several countries have adopted policy and legal frameworks on SSE, such as France, Portugal, Mexico, Philippines, Spain, Mali, Ecuador, Djibouti, Uruguay, Brazil, and Canada (Quebec province). Ministries or departments of cooperatives and SSE have been established in Colombia, France, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Luxembourg. National and local SSE programs have been launched in India, Nicaragua, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Colombia, and Uganda. Policies are being developed and adopted in Italy, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Tanzania, occupied Palestinian territories, Ghana, Cameroon, Trinidad & Tobago, South Africa, and Tunisia. Moreover, the growing interest in SSE is reflected in recent texts adopted in international fora.

The 2021 UN Secretary-General Report on 'socially just transition towards sustainable development' recognizes SSE as an alternative model of growth, aimed at finding a new balance between economic efficiency and social and environmental resilience. The ILO Centenary Declaration on the Future of Work, adopted in June 2019, calls for promoting an enabling environment including for the SSE. The Governing Body of the ILO placed on the agenda for the 110th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) in 2022 an item related to "*Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) for a human-centred future of work*" for general discussion. This is a promising step towards advancing the international debate on SSE and recognizing the role of SSE in promoting decent work.

Meanwhile, the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE) is leading a process of submitting a UN Resolution on SSE through the support of the key governments during the UN General Assembly in September 2021. A resolution on SSE would allow a focused exchange with member States, guiding UN agencies on priority areas of work on SSE and documenting its contributions to sustainable development. It would contribute to improved policy making and implementation, particularly in countries and societies farthest behind, leading to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and realizing the SDGs. In support of the proposed UN resolution on SSE, ICA published a [position paper](#) entitled "cooperatives as a key constituent of the social and solidarity economy".

The ICA is establishing an international SSE Coalition together with other global SSE actors, namely GSEF, SSEIF AIM and ICMIF, with a Charter which singles out the SSE's main characteristics. As we can see below, these cover a significant part of the Statement on the Cooperative Identity.

Statement on the Cooperative Identity	Characteristics of SSE as per the SSE Coalition Charter
<p>Definition: a cooperative is “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Primacy of the person and the social mission over capital;</li> <li>- Protection of common or joint ownership;</li> </ul>
<p>Values: cooperative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity; as well as ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others</p>	<p>Defense and implementation of the values of solidarity and responsibility;</p>
<p>1<sup>st</sup> principle Voluntary and open membership: Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination</p>	<p>Voluntary and open membership;</p>
<p>2<sup>nd</sup> principle democratic member control: Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and cooperatives at other levels are also organized in a democratic manner</p>	<p>Democratic control by members</p>
<p>3<sup>rd</sup> principle Member economic participation: Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the cooperative.</p> <p>Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their cooperative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership</p>	<p>Limited distribution of surpluses by the reinvestment of the surplus: surpluses are intended primarily to strengthen the sustainability and development of the business project (strengthening of common capital, investments, discounts for members, experimentation, social innovation, sustainable development, etc.)</p>
<p>4<sup>th</sup> principle Autonomy and independence: Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their cooperative autonomy</p>	<p>Autonomy of management and independence from public authorities;</p>
<p>5<sup>th</sup> principle Education, training and information: Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of cooperation</p>	
<p>6<sup>th</sup> principle Cooperation among cooperatives: Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures</p>	
<p>7<sup>th</sup> principle Concern for community: Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members</p>	<p>Conjunction of the interests of members, the common interest of communities and the general interest;</p>