

MINUTES OF COOP-CONNECT FORUM MEETING ON SIGNIFICANCE OF INTERNATIONAL DAY & COOPERATIVES HELD ON 6TH JULY 2010

The Coop-Connect Forum of National Cooperative Union of India organized a meeting on the significance of International Cooperative Day on 6th July 2010. The theme of this year's International Day of Cooperatives was "**Cooperative Enterprise Empowers Women**". The Chief Guest on the occasion Dr. Kiran Bedi, the First Lady IPS Officer and currently Founder, Navjyoti Foundation delivered the keynote address. Dr. Chan Ho Choi, Regional Director, International Cooperative Alliance, Regional Office for Asia – Pacific was also one of the key speakers on the occasion. Dr. Chandra Pal Singh, President, NCUI delivered the Presidential address. The other notable speakers present on the occasion were – Dr. Hema Raghavan, Former Principal, Gargi College, Ms Huma Masood, National Programme Officer, Gender and Special Education, UNESCO, Dr. Erna Surjadi, Formerly Regional Advisor – Gender, Women and Health, W.H.O. Regional Office for South East Asia. Shri Vinay Kumar, MD, National Federation of Cooperative Sugar Factories, Shri B.K. Mishra, MD, National Federation of Fishermen's Cooperatives, Shri R.N Pandey, MD, National Federation of Labour Cooperatives, Dr Iqbal Malik, Founder, Vatavaran were among the key personalities present on the occasion. The meeting was attended by the professors/research scholars of various universities who had come to attend the Refresher Course on Cooperation run by National Centre for Cooperative Education, a training wing of NCUI. Besides the officials of national cooperative organizations, the meeting was also attended by representatives of international organizations, and other NGOs

In her opening remarks Ms. Anita Manchanda, Chief Executive, National Cooperative Union of India said that women all over the world are waking up from their age old slumber and find cooperatives as effective institutions for solving their socio – economic problems. She noted that the cooperative enterprises address various issues concerning women and influence the direction of societal change to create a just, social and economic order.

Dr. Chandra Pal Singh, President, National Cooperative Union of India speaking on the occasion said that cooperatives are the best institutions to improve the conditions of women. He further said that cooperative values like self-help, honesty, social responsibility, caring for others etc. play a very important role in women empowerment. He further said that cooperatives can effectively address the socio economic needs of the weaker section of the women community. He said that women have many in-born qualities and skills, which are important for running an economic enterprise. He opined that the Indian Cooperative Movement has a major supportive role in enhancing the capabilities of women and making them economically self-reliant. He noted that in the wake of rising population of women, the number of women cooperatives in India is very less. He highlighted that many successful cases of women cooperatives in India like

SEWA, Lijjat Pappad, Women Cooperative Banks, Women SHGs, etc. He also pointed out the presence of many policy and legal hurdles in the functioning of women cooperatives in the country.

Dr. Kiran Bedi speaking on the occasion said that NCUI's training expertise could be very useful for the Community Colleges of the Navjyoti Foundation, which will soon start functioning. She said that they would like to collaborate with NCUI in this venture. She further said that cooperatives can be a great source of employment generation in the rural areas considering the fact that neither the public sector nor the private sector can solve the problems of rural unemployment. Elaborating on the advantages of forming SHG's of poor people, she said that this can be a wonderful employment strategy. She further emphasized on the need for forming cooperatives in the rural areas or villages where the problem of poverty is rampant.

Dr. Bedi enumerating the advantages of e-connectivity said that this concept must be popularized amongst the youth population and here she felt that the cooperatives can play a very important role. She further felt that the next generations of girls form a very important section of the youth population and in this regard, she said that the cooperatives must organize girls oriented programmes so that the girls can be connected cooperatively. She came up with a firm opinion that the goodwill which she has created for herself and the back-up support and expertise of NCUI may be very useful in forging collaborations for programmes of mutual interest.

Dr. Chan Ho Choi, Regional Director, International Cooperative Alliance Regional Office for Asia-Pacific speaking on the occasion said that the cooperative movement has a long tradition of promoting women's participation, as the cooperatives are democratic institutions. He laid that stress on the need for ensuring active women participation in decision making of cooperatives. He pointed out that in Norway Cooperative Law has been amended to ensure that women have joint membership. He observed that in successful cooperatives there are capable women leaders. He emphasized that in a cooperative form of business enterprise women must be given choice to become leaders. He noted that recently ICA has elected 1st woman, as Chairperson of ICA. Showing the examples of power of women in cooperatives, he said that while in Finland 40% of cooperatives are women cooperatives, in Sweden 80% of cooperatives were created by women. He harped on the need for creating a conducive legal environment so that women can actively participate in the cooperative movement at all levels. In this regard, he felt that more lobbying is required at the Government, and at UN level. He showed appreciation for the support of NCUI in this regard.

Dr. Hema Raghvan, Former Principal of Gargi College speaking on the occasion said that empowered women can make a significant contribution to the cooperative movement. She felt that empowerment of women goes alongside

with the empowerment of men. She said that the men and women should come together for the growth of cooperative movement in the country. Elaborating on the benefits of micro finance for cooperatives, she said that cooperative societies of women must be formed in the villages. Dr. Raghavan in her presentation touched upon a vital point related to the concept of caregivers. Pointing out that as the concept of caregivers is not developed in India, she emphasized on the need for forming cooperative societies of caregivers in which women can play an important role. She also came up an important observation that cooperatives through music or any other art form should make the youth sensitive to the beauty around so that the values of humanity, compassion, care etc. can be nurtured.

Ms. Huma Masood, National Programme Officer, Gender and Special Needs Education, UNESCO speaking on the occasion assured full support of UNESCO in forging effective collaboration with NCUI. Listing on the benefits of cooperatives, she said that cooperatives have a high degree of penetration and are close to the society more than any other institution. Emphasizing that the cooperatives can not live in isolation, she said that they should work for building strong linkages. She felt that NCUI should connect to all UN bodies and it should document best practices in cooperatives so that this can be replicated elsewhere.

Ms. Masood also called upon NCUI to connect with Sakshar Bharat, a new literacy campaign in rural areas and Janshiksha Sansthans. She called upon the cooperatives to formulate a cooperative model which can work as a strong alternative so that it can be presented to the UPA Government. She also felt that cooperative should create more awareness in the society through various innovative measures. She called upon the Coop-Connect Forum of NCUI to be active so that it can reach everyone.

Dr Erna Surjadi, Formerly Regional Advisor, Gender, Women and Health, WHO Regional Office for South East Asia came up with her presentation entitled '**Women Empowerment and Health Equity-A Gender Perspective**'. She said that women empowerment is not only individual movement but should also be institutional. She felt that women empowerment must be built as a unit of activity which covers terms of bargaining power and legitimacy of women's rights. 'This should be supported by human resources and financial budget', she said. Emphasising on the need for gender mainstreaming in health/policy and need of health system reforms, she said that women are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and there is need for active intervention policies in this regard. Reflecting on the gender perspective as far as WHO is concerned, improving health of women of all ages and to contribute to achievement of health equity remain the crucial issues in this regard.

In the open-house discussion which followed after the presentations, the participants came up with many questions. Ms Mallika Kumar, Associate Professor, Shri Ram College of Commerce suggested the need for strong marketing of cooperatives. Some of the university professors present on the occasion called for making the cooperative movement strong through active participation of women. Dr T.Paranjothi, Secretary, National Council for Cooperative Training proposed vote of thanks on the occasion. Sanjay Verma, Nodal Officer, COOP-CONNECT coordinated the meeting.

After the end of the meeting the following key observations/ recommendations / action points emerged :

- Cooperative values play an important role in women empowerment
- Considering the size of women population the number of women cooperatives is very less in India
- NCUI may collaborate with the community colleges set up by Dr Kiran Bedi's Navjyoti Foundation by offering its training expertise.
- As cooperatives are great source of employment generation they should be formed in the rural areas of the country so as to solve the problem of rural unemployment.
- The concept of e-connectivity should be popularized amongst the youth in the villages of the country in which the cooperatives can play an important role.
- Women cooperatives should be formed in large numbers all over the country.
- Women should be given chances to emerge as leaders in the functioning of the cooperative movement.
- In the market economy increasing participation of women in the cooperatives can provide a competitive edge to them.
- A conducive legal atmosphere should be created so that women can actively participate in the affairs of cooperatives.
- Strong lobbying is required at the level of Government, and UN for active women participation in the cooperative movement.
- Men & women should come together to play an important role in the cooperative movement.

- Cooperative societies of caregivers should be formed in the country in which women can play an active role.
- Cooperative enterprises should work hard to make the youth sensitive to the beauty around through music, art or any other form of art so that the values of humanity, compassion, care etc. can be cultivated.
- The cooperative sector should formulate a working model and present it to the UPA Government so that it can act as a strong economic alternative..
- Cooperatives have a high degree of penetration and are more close to the society than any other institution.
- Cooperative institutions should document their best practices which need to be replicated elsewhere.
- NCUI should connect with all the UN agencies, Sakshar Bharat, Janshiksha Sansthans so that effective linkages can be formed which can benefit the cooperative sector.
- Efforts should be made so that Coop-Connect reaches everybody and their should be strong awakening in the society through cooperatives.
- There is need for gender-mainstreaming policy and need for health system reforms
- As women are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS there is need for a active intervention policies in this regard.