

MINUTES OF THE FIRST MEETING OF COOP-CONNECT FORUM
HELD ON 12.11.2009

The first meeting of COOP-CONNECT – a forum of NCUI was held on “Popularising Cooperative Model of Development Amongst Youth” on 12th November, 2009. This Forum of practitioners/researchers/experts in cooperatives and other diverse fields was recently created by NCUI to strengthen the academic plank of the cooperative sector. There was a panel discussion of experts on this occasion. Shri G.H. Amin, President, NCUI delivered the inaugural address Dr. Daman Prakash, Consultant, IFFCO Foundation and Dr. G.K. Arora, Principal, B.R. Ambedkar College were the two key panelists. Shri JNL Srivastava, Managing Trustee, IFFCO Foundation moderated the discussions. Besides the representatives/officers of NCUI, NCDC, NCHF, NAFCUB etc. the representatives of Nehru Yuva Kendra, Indian Committee for Youth organizations, CRY, Architect India, JNU, Delhi University, Vitasta Publications, Research and Information system etc. were also present on the occasion.

In her opening remarks Smt. Anita Manchanda, Chief Executive, NCUI said that for the first time a forum has been created which comprises of representatives not only from the cooperative sector but also experts from academic institutions, multi-disciplinary institutions and organizations of other types thereby connecting to the cooperative concept. Pointing out that cooperation among cooperatives is an important cooperative principle she argued that there is need for cooperation between cooperatives and those who are not in the cooperative fold and who can be our prospective members. Emphasizing that there is need to connect the youth to the cooperatives she said that if cooperation is taught as a subject in the schools it can tap young minds towards value-based education.

In his initial remarks Shri JNL Srivastava, Managing Trustee, IFFCO Foundation said that COOP-CONNECT has more intellectual flavour as there is focus on academic plank where research and various studies can be undertaken. Expressing happiness over the NCUI initiative for forming this Forum he said that it is good that representatives from other fields are involved with this Forum. Emphasising the importance of cooperatives in the economic demography of the country he pointed out the statistics in this regard. He said that 89% farmers are small and marginal farmers, 94% people are in the unorganised sector and 80-85% of people are self-employed in the organised sector which comprises 6% of the nation. He said that in this type of demography the challenge is to empower people so that the people with small means and self-employed can compete in the market economy. "In this situation cooperative is the only structure which can benefit the economy where resources can be pooled and there is economy of scale" he said. He further said that cooperative is as important as air and water. He suggested that through COOP-CONNECT NCUI can promote good research in various areas. Considering that cooperation is a total subject where any activity can be undertaken he lamented that despite lot of potential the cooperative sector has realised only 5% of its potential. He assured full support of IFFCO Foundation in the COOP-CONNECT endeavours of NCUI.

Dr. Daman Prakash, Consultant, IFFCO Foundation in his paper appreciated the fact that subject of cooperation has been introduced as subject in Department of Economics of the universities in the country. He observed that there are number of students or youth cooperatives in the country which however serve for limited purpose for short duration. Dr. Prakash while highlighting the achievements of the cooperative sector pointed out towards a Global Study carried out by International Cooperative Alliance in which 300 cooperatives who had thriving business were picked up. He said that the study refutes the notion that cooperatives are inefficient, weak and can not survive for long. He said that the study highlights that the total turnover of cooperatives is one trillion US dollars and the cooperative business is 10th largest next only to Canada. He pointed out that the study shows that cooperatives generate 100 million jobs

worldwide. The study also points out that 70% of India's warehousing capacity is in primary agriculture cooperative societies and NCUI has the world's most widespread cooperative education and training programme. Pointing out towards a worrisome trend with regards to negative perception about cooperatives in general public he said that this has to be changed. He suggested that cooperatives should also be involved in transfer of technology and they have to be active in agro-processing areas. Pointing out the case of Swedish study circles run by the students he said that these circles try to solve the problems of the community and also build up opinion in favour of cooperatives. Highlighting the case of a student cooperative he said that Oxford University has printing Press run by Oxford Students Cooperative Union. He concluded that the cooperative sector has not fully discovered potential of student cooperatives. He suggested that NCUI should develop some framework for youth involvement in cooperatives and here IFFCO Foundation may help in development of some concrete Action Plan.

Dr. G.K. Arora, Principal, B.R. Ambedkar College, Delhi University emphasized that the cooperative model of development has the potential to develop cooperatives into social development enterprises. He argued that the cooperative model must be incorporated in India's under-development through utilizing energies of youth which comprises 50% of the population. He suggested that cooperative institutions should cooperate and create cooperative ideology so as to involve youth in cooperatives. Pointing out towards influence of globalization on unemployed and unorganized section of the population he said that cooperatives provide the only hope. Pointing out that global pressures have to be recognized by cooperatives he said that India needs to market the cooperative system. He further elaborated that marketing can best be done by educating the people. He felt that attempts to popularize cooperative education in the country are still not enough despite the presence of large number of cooperative education and training institutions in the country. Acknowledging that globalised induced pressure have gone to the village level he said that cooperative model of development is the most desirable medium to solve the

problems of poverty and inequality. He said, “How to link cooperatives into development context through youth by providing education is the biggest challenge.” He suggested that NCUI must directly interact with school representatives. He suggested creation of cooperatives in rural areas for students who are not able to pay fee. He further suggested that cooperatives must be active in environment protection and they need to constantly innovate in the wake of declining state support to cooperatives.

Shri G.H. Amin, President, NCUI speaking on the occasion said that NCUI has taken a serious initiative to start COOP-CONNECT a forum where everyone associated with cooperatives and even those who are not directly involved can discuss the topical issues confronting the sector. He felt that connecting oneself to the cooperative concept through deep study and analysis is important. He said, “Connecting the agenda of cooperatives with other organisations who may not be in the cooperative fold is very necessary.” He further said that the cooperative sector has to devise effective strategies so that youth are attracted to the cooperative movement. He said, “It is high time that the school management gives due priority to cooperation as a subject in the schools. Then only school children can take interest in cooperatives.”

In the open house discussion all the participants from cooperatives and other institutions came up with thought-provoking suggestions / views on the subject of popularizing cooperative model of development among youth. Based on the feedback of the participants Shri JNL Srivastava, Managing Trustee, IFFCO Foundation summarized the main points as under :-

1. There needs to be a website dedicated to youth involvement in cooperatives which may contain interesting content like quiz, success stories in cooperatives, different models of cooperatives etc.;
2. NCUI should develop successful youth models and circulate them widely so that there is proper dissemination at all levels;

3. Nehru Yuva Kendra should circulate all its youth schemes to NCUI. NCUI can then take up cooperative component of these schemes and work upon them;
4. Adequate support systems for youth involvement in cooperative have to built up;
5. The cooperatives must connect with other departments like Department of Rural Development, Women and Child Development, large number of Ministries, schools, colleges, universities etc. so that programmes of mutual benefit can be conceptualized and implemented. Ffor example there are number of institutions selling multiple employable skills. These institutions must be sensitized on the presence of cooperative model besides the public and private sector.
6. NCUI should call a meeting for the college principals for forming a cooperative society for the students.
7. The cooperative training efforts for sensitizing youth on cooperatives must be initiated at the grass-root levels. In this context, Junior Training Centres functioning under the aegis of NCCT (NCUI) must be strengthened so that they can take up the task of instructing the children of over 100 schools in each district.
8. There is need for media involvement at wider level. For strong youth involvement there has to be some catalyst. In this regard the bureaucratic hassles have to be removed.
9. NCUI should act as a clearing house of information for youth involvement in cooperatives;
10. NCUI should start working on the major recommendations that have emerged during the meeting and then decide on other issues for COOP-CONNECT meetings;
11. NCUI should start an interactive discussion Forum on youth involvement in cooperatives which can pave the way for other fruitful actions emerging in this field;

12. There can be one or two representatives from schools and colleges to be part of COOP-CONNECT Forum;
13. The cooperative sector should develop a model of youth involvement which takes into account income and employment opportunities of youth.

Dr. T. Paranjothi, Secretary, NCCT expressed vote of thanks on this occasion and Shri Sanjay Verma, Nodal Officer, Coop-Connect coordinated the meeting.