

# ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

## ICA ASIA AND PACIFIC COMMITTEE ON WOMEN

HIGHLIGHTS FROM MARCH 2024 - APRIL 2025



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## Message from the Chairperson

Cooperative greetings to all.

Firstly, I would like to express my deepest condolences and heartfelt sympathies to all those in Myanmar and neighbouring countries who have been profoundly affected by the devastating earthquake that occurred on March 28, 2025.



Since its inception, the Committee—together with women cooperators across the region—has been committed to advocating for gender-sensitive laws and policies, and to strengthening women's participation and leadership in cooperatives through capacity-building initiatives. In 2023, the Committee adopted four strategic pillars to guide its activities: (1) Economic Empowerment, (2) Social Empowerment, (3) Knowledge, Education, and Training, and (4) Solidarity.

Each of the four strategic pillars represents a vital dimension of our commitment to advancing gender equality. While each pillar stands as a distinct area of focus, they are inherently interconnected and must be pursued in a coordinated and mutually reinforcing manner. As we move forward this year, let us continue to build on these strategic priorities to deepen our impact and drive meaningful progress.

Looking ahead, 2026 will mark the Fourth Regional Conference on the Status of Women in Cooperatives in the Asia-Pacific region, known as the Tagaytay Conference. In preparation, we will undertake research on legislation and policies that promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

During the ICA-AP Regional Assembly in November 2025, which will be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, members of the Committee will gather for learning and experience-sharing sessions. I warmly invite your active participation and cooperation as we take another important step toward advancing gender equality in cooperatives across the Asia-Pacific Region.

In solidarity,  
Chitose Arai

## IWD 2025 solidarity message by the Chairperson

This year's theme for the International Women's Day (IWD) is "For ALL women and girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment." The theme calls for actions that can unlock equal rights, power and opportunities for all and a feminist future where no one is left behind.

This year, 2025 is very special. We celebrate the International Year of Cooperatives declared for the second time by the United Nations (UN) and observe the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The BPfA is a landmark global policy for gender equality. Endorsed by 189 countries, it remains a comprehensive international blueprint for women's empowerment. The Fourth World Conference, with 17,000 participants, including over 4,000 NGO representatives and ICA members, positively impacted the cooperative movement and served as momentum to shape further perspectives promoting gender equality in cooperatives. The BPfA outlines 12 critical areas that require urgent action to achieve gender equality: poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, economics, power and decision-making, institutional arrangements, human rights, media, environment and the girl child. Over the years, cooperatives have been working in alignment with the priorities of the BPfA to implement its agenda. For example, cooperatives provide women with opportunities for employment and financial inclusion; and provide education, training and information to them to build their knowledge and technical skills.

Since 1998, the ICA-AP Committee on Women has also addressed issues highlighted by the BPfA by discussing challenges and necessary actions, recommending the establishment of gender-sensitive laws and policies, and creating opportunities for capacity building and networking to enhance women's participation and leadership in cooperatives. This is reflected through Committee's strategy which forms the basis of its vision and line of action. In 2023, the Committee redefined its strategy and introduced four broad pillars under which it continues to serve its members and women cooperators at large, in the Asia-Pacific region. These pillars are: 1) Economic empowerment; 2) Social empowerment; 3) Knowledge, education and training; and 4) Solidarity. This new strategy is for five years from 2023 to 2028.

Reflecting on the progress made over 30 years towards gender equality for women and girls, what challenges stand in our way of achieving gender equality? In examining the challenges within cooperatives, women still face patriarchal norms that affect their participation in decision-making. There are issues regarding women's representation in executive positions and board memberships. The implementation and monitoring of gender policies are sometimes inadequate, leading to slow progress towards gender equality within cooperatives. Additionally, the lack of statistics on women's participation complicates efforts to measure progress in gender equality.

Once again, I would like to encourage each of you to continue giving more opportunities to women to participate - especially young women and emerging women leaders to speak-up, to capacitate them to lead and make decisions, as it will strengthen their capacities and sensitize them about their rights. Let us work together to step up our efforts and make 2025 a milestone year by upholding our commitment towards strengthening women's empowerment and promoting gender equality in cooperatives.

I wish you immense success in your celebrations of International Women's Day and International Year of Cooperatives!



## Virtual side event at the NGO CSW69 Forum 2025

On 19th March 2025, ICA-AP and Women's Committee jointly organized a virtual side event at the NGO CSW69 Forum. It was the third such event at the NGO CSW Forum organised by the Regional Office and Women's Committee. Themed, 'Policy Actions Matter: Cooperatives in Asia-Pacific and Their Initiatives to Foster SDG 5: (Gender Equality)', Expert speakers from cooperatives in Australia, India, and the Philippines shared insights into policy initiatives undertaken by cooperatives to promote gender equality and foster women's empowerment. The program was attended by 59 participants across Asia.

The Women's Committee Chairperson, Ms. Chitose Arai, highlighted the theme of this year's International Women's Day, "For All Women and Girls: Rights, Equality, and Empowerment". The theme calls for actions to provide equal rights, power, and opportunities to achieve a feminist future where no one is left behind. She observed that 2025 is a very special year because the UN has declared this year as the second International Year of Cooperatives, and it also marks the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. She added that the Committee has focused on women's capacity development through various programs aligned with the BPfA since its establishment. She outlined four strategic objectives of the Committee – 1) Economic Empowerment, 2) Social Empowerment, 3) Knowledge, Education, and Training, and 4) Solidarity. She provided a brief overview of the parallel event and hoped that the Committee and the entire cooperative movement could create environments where women and girls are not left behind in their communities.

Ms. Ida Suhanya Jesu, Gender and Inclusion Specialist, International Labour Organization (ILO), Sri Lanka, in her keynote address, emphasized the role of cooperatives in advancing gender equality and fostering SDG 5 in the Asia-Pacific region. She highlighted the significance of BPfA as a global framework guiding gender-responsive policies. She shared that the ILO has actively supported cooperatives as vehicles for women's economic empowerment through initiatives like Coop 4 Decent Work and Gender Equality; and Women's Empowerment Strategy. Various countries, including India, Indonesia, and the Philippines have implemented gender-inclusive policies in the cooperative sector and the cooperative model of business with its democratic and inclusive structure, plays a crucial role in promoting financial access, leadership, and skills development for women. However, challenges such as limited access to finance, legal barriers, societal resistance, and climate change continue to hinder progress in achieving gender equality. To address these issues, Ms. Jesu stressed the need for stronger policy support, capacity-building programs, public-private partnerships, inclusive leadership, and the use of digital tools. She concluded by calling for collective action to strengthen policies in cooperatives, ensuring that cooperatives remain a powerful force for gender equality and sustainable development in local communities.

Ms. Priti Patel, Vice Chairperson of the Women's Committee and Gujarat Mahila Credit Cooperative (GMCC), and member of the Women's Committee of the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) presented the role of cooperatives in India in fostering SDG 5. Her presentation highlighted the importance of eliminating discrimination, violence, and economic disparities while promoting women's leadership and equal opportunities. Cooperatives, with their democratic and inclusive structure, play a crucial role in empowering women economically and socially by ensuring equal access to resources, leadership roles, fair wages, and skill development opportunities. Her presentation showcased key examples of successful gender-sensitive cooperatives in India. GMCC provides financial assistance, organizes training seminars, and offers skill development programs to promote women's economic independence. She shared initiatives taken by NCUI, such as Kamadhenu Self-Help Group and Women SHG Cooperative Industrial Society in Goa, to empower rural women through entrepreneurship and self-reliance, contributing to economic stability. Her presentation emphasized the need for further

gender-inclusive policies, financial support, and skill development programs to enhance women's empowerment through cooperatives for fostering economic resilience and gender equity.

Ms. Linda Seaborn, Senior Policy Advisor from the Business Council of Cooperatives and Mutuals (BCCM), Australia presented the case of cooperatives and gender in Australia. She highlighted the role of BCCM in fostering gender equality within the cooperatives and mutual enterprises (CME) sector. The BCCM, formed in 2013, represents over 1,800 CMEs across diverse industries, employing 89,000 people and generating \$43.2 billion in revenue (FY22-23). She added that while 8 in 10 Australians are members of a cooperative, gender disparities persist in the CME sector, particularly in leadership roles. A research, conducted by BCCM and Per Capita, on understanding gender diversity and inclusion in the Australian CME sector confirmed that while women are well-represented as employees and members in CMEs, they remain underrepresented in top leadership positions. To address these gaps, she added that their study report has provided key recommendations: embedding flexible work policies, enhancing leadership training and sponsorship for women, and fostering top-down commitment to gender inclusion. She also shared that data from BCCM's National Mutual Economy report (2016–2022) shows significant improvement in gender diversity among cooperative leaders, when compared to ASX (Australian Stock Exchange) listed companies. Her presentation underscored the need for continued structural reforms, cultural shifts, and sustained leadership efforts to ensure gender equality in Australia's CME sector.

Ms. Hermes Vergara, Chairperson, Gender and Development Committee, National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO) and Vice-Chairperson, Oro Integrated Cooperative from the Philippines shared about the Government's CDA-MC 2013-22 Guidelines that mandate cooperatives to integrate Gender and Development (GAD) policies in their plans, budgets, and programs, ensuring gender mainstreaming in decision-making and operations. Key mechanisms under these guidelines include forming GAD Committees, appointing GAD Focal Persons, and implementing education and training programs on gender sensitivity, financial literacy, and leadership, among others. She noted that NATCCO has institutionalized gender equality by allocating a Board seat for a women's representative and dedicating 5% of the Cooperative Education and Training Fund (CETF) to GAD programs. NATCCO's capacity-building efforts have empowered women with entrepreneurial, financial, and leadership skills, leading to increased participation in cooperative governance. Additionally, NATCCO is developing a Gender Mainstreaming Manual to guide member cooperatives in sustaining gender equality initiatives. She emphasized that gender equality is a human issue, not just a women's issue, urging continuous policy actions to drive inclusive cooperative development.

During the open discussion, the participants focused on the critical question of why gender-based policies matter in cooperatives. Some of the key points that accrued from the discussion are:

1. Formal gender-based policy instruments in cooperatives matter because they can be incorporated as guidelines to guide primary cooperatives on how to integrate gender inclusion and equality. Formal policy instruments are required because leaders change but good policies remain and they provide a valuable framework for governance, accountability, and transparency.
2. It is important to have women in gender-based policy-making decisions because their voices and perspectives are critical to making informed and inclusive policies.
3. Good gender-based policies become successful when cooperatives develop guidelines for implementation and train cooperatives on how to implement them. The success of good gender-based policies is guaranteed when they are aimed at the growth and development of women cooperators – members and employees.
4. Good policies should be well-aligned with government policies or national laws. People who are involved in gender-based policy-making should be aware of what they are doing and why

they are doing it because this impacts the final policy product and its implementation success rate.

5. Speakers and participants highlighted the need for and importance of having women-friendly policies in cooperatives in terms of work flexibility and work-life balance so that they are encouraged to assume leadership roles.
6. Fair wages, paternal leaves, child-care facilities, loan facilities, flexible working hours, education, training, and mentorship give women the required confidence and adequate skills to take up leadership roles. Otherwise, they are burdened with dual responsibilities of career development and family care and do not have sufficient time to contribute any longer or take up leadership roles.

Ms. Arai thanked the speakers and noted that this event highlighted the current state and challenges of gender equality in Asian cooperatives that still prevail after 30 years of the BPfA. The presentations and discussions during the open forum have deepened our insights on the role that cooperatives should play in the future to expedite their commitment and actions to SDG 5. She encouraged the participants to create an environment within the cooperatives where women can fully utilize their abilities and strengthen the collective efforts towards gender equality.

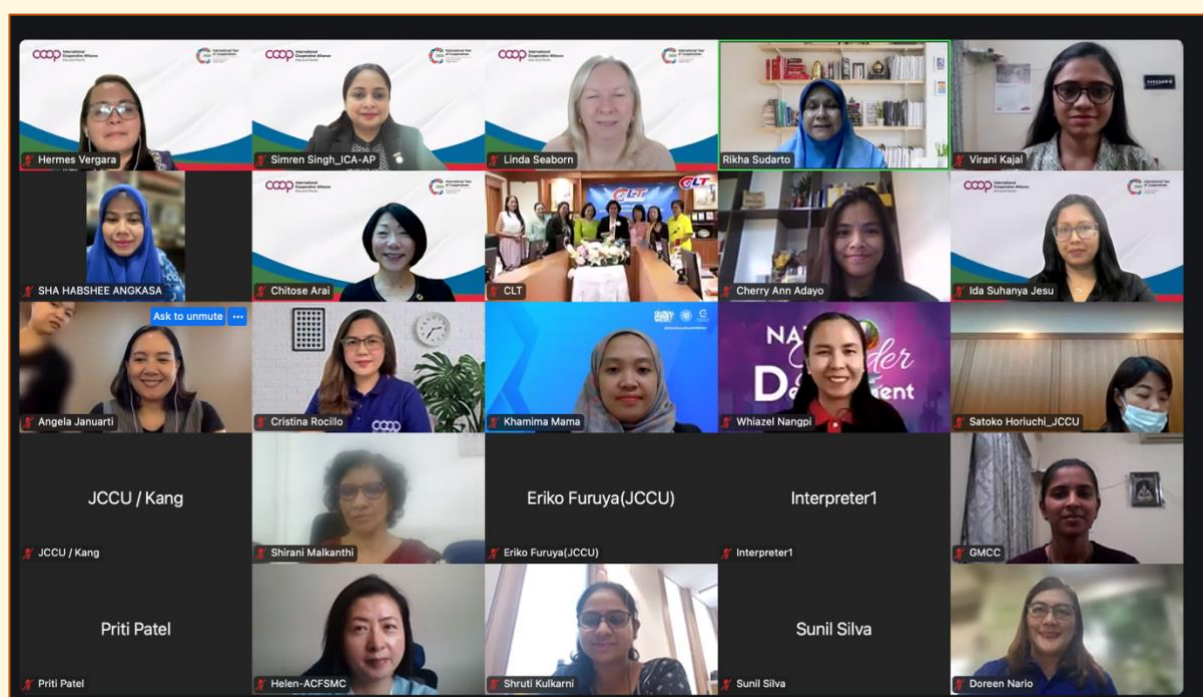


Image 1: Virtual side event at the NGO CSW69 Forum 2025

## Activity updates from 2024

### Participation in the 11th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference, Jordan

The Women's Committee participated in the 11th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference (APCMC) in Dead Sea, Jordan from 28th to 30th April 2024, and presented good case practices on cooperative policies and legislations promoting SDG 5. The presentation was made by the Women's Committee Chairperson Ms. Chitose Arai and case studies from India, Nepal and the Philippines were highlighted during the session.

She also provided policy-based recommendations for the perusal of policy makers in the cooperative sector -

1. Governments and national organizations of cooperatives should confirm the need for legal systems and policies to realize gender equality in cooperatives, and work to develop legal systems and concrete policies.
2. Legal provisions and policies to promote SDG 5 in cooperatives should be specific, achievable, time-bound and measurable.
3. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of the government and cooperatives and have a systematic action program with a set period, budget, and verification methods to achieve gender equality in cooperatives.
4. Creating mechanisms to monitor and report the progress of implementation and achievements on gender equality measures in cooperatives to higher authorities.
5. Government bodies and cooperatives should work together to visualize the impact of cooperatives on SDG5 through strategic channels such as VNR (Voluntary National Review of the SDGs), economic and social indicators reports, high-level forums such as the G20, and the media.

The [Jordan Declaration](#), an important outcome that accrued from the conference, recognized the importance of inclusivity and diversity for cooperative development and governance through equal participation and inclusion of women; and called for accountability and regular reporting on women's participation in decision making roles. Further, the Jordan Declaration underscored the pivotal role of cooperatives in fostering economic growth, job creation, poverty alleviation, social inclusivity, and environmental sustainability across the Asia-Pacific region. The declaration was supported by all Asia-Pacific cooperative ministers present in person.

Organized by ICA-AP and hosted by the Jordan Co-operative Corporation and the Ministry of Agriculture, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the conference brought together key stakeholders from government bodies, cooperative enterprises, civil society organizations, and international agencies. These included high-level Government officials from 17 countries (Egypt, Fiji, India, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Thailand, and UAE), and around 300 cooperative leaders and renowned experts from 28 countries and senior officials from the African-Asian Rural Development Organization, International Labour Organisation, and Food and Agriculture Organization united in their commitment to advancing the cooperative movement for the betterment of communities.



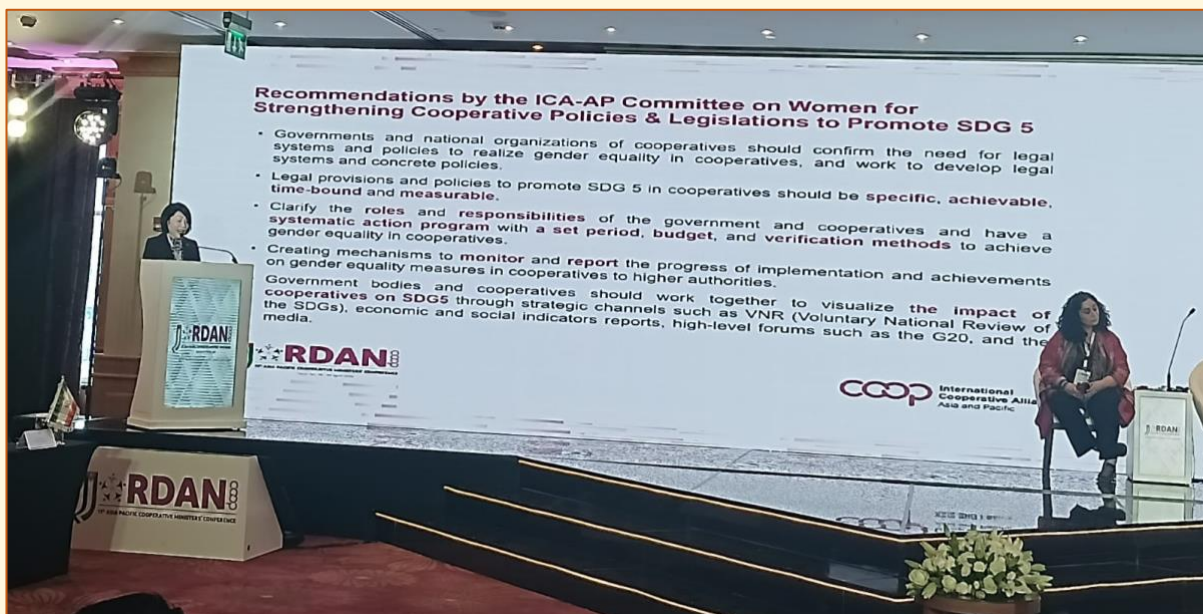


Image 2: Participation in the 11th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference, Jordan, 2024

## Asia-Pacific Women CEOs in Cooperatives Summit, Vietnam

ICA-AP and Women's Committee jointly organized the Asia-Pacific Women CEOs in Cooperatives Summit in Hanoi, Vietnam from 29th to 31st July 2024. Hosted by the Vietnam Cooperative Alliance (VCA), the Asia-Pacific Women CEOs in Cooperatives Summit was themed "Empowering Leadership: Shaping the Future of Women-Led Cooperatives". Women CEOs and leaders from the cooperative movement across Asia-Pacific participated in the Summit to deliberate on empowering women's leadership.

The opening ceremony was attended by the Secretary of the Party Central Committee, Head of the Central External Relations Commission Mr. Le Hoai Trung; Country Director, ILO Country Office for Vietnam Ms. Ingrid Christensen, Executive Director of Cooperative News Ms. Rebecca Harvey (as keynote speaker), ICA-AP President Dr. Chandrapal Singh Yadav; VCA President Mrs. Cao Xuan Thu Van; and nearly 100 delegates representing member organizations, international organizations in Vietnam and central departments, ministries and branches of Vietnam.

Mrs. Van welcomed all the delegates and highlighted that in Vietnam's agricultural sector, about 10% of women are involved in managing 18,340 agricultural cooperatives, with 85% of female workers having stable jobs. The One Commune One Product (OCOP) program, which boosts rural economic development, includes 39% female participants, with around 20% of cooperatives under OCOP being managed by women. These female-led cooperatives create numerous jobs for women and address health and social insurance needs. She noted that the Vietnamese Government has implemented various policies to encourage women's participation in collective economic development and cooperatives.

Secretary Mr. Trung appreciated the international guests coming to Hanoi for this Summit and noted the vital role of the collective economy and cooperatives in the country's development. He praised the Asia-Pacific Women CEOs in Cooperative Summit as a meaningful initiative that aligns well with the 2024 International Day of Cooperatives theme, "Cooperatives build a better future for all." He

expressed hope that the conference would enhance experience sharing among countries to raise community and leadership awareness about women's contributions to the sustainable development of cooperatives.

Ms. Chitose Arai, Chairperson of the Women's Committee, emphasized the committee's goal of strengthening the network of women cooperative leaders in the region through coordination and regional conferences. She highlighted the importance of learning from other countries' experiences to increase women's leadership in cooperatives. She stressed the crucial need for women's participation in management across all fields, especially cooperatives, amid the growing complexity of climate change and natural disasters.

Ms. Christensen highlighted that VCA is actively engaging in international cooperation to enhance the efficiency of cooperatives and elevate the role of women. With around 31,000 cooperatives in Vietnam, their importance in building commodity chains is evident, and VCA plays a crucial role. She noted that the ILO has focused on sustainable socio-economic development, recognizing cooperatives as key to promoting gender equality, protecting workers, and achieving sustainability. Female cooperative leaders are essential for advancing these goals. To support women, solutions are needed for market access, livelihood opportunities, skill improvement, digital transformation, and technology application. This will help women proactively integrate, and confidently make decisions, thereby improving gender equality.

Dr. Yadav praised the development of cooperative models as a key strategy to encourage women's participation in management. He emphasized the need to create better opportunities for cooperatives to grow, which will help attract more female leaders. To achieve this, he noted it's important to shift societal attitudes that hold incorrect views about women. And, it is equally important for cooperatives with women leaders to actively engage with global networks to enhance their influence.

Ms. Harvey, in her keynote speech, highlighted that while men often have easier access to jobs in comparison to women. Whereas, a survey in UK shows that women leaders are making significant contributions to business growth. She emphasized that Co-operative News always promotes the role of female leaders through building a pioneering cooperative network. From here, many female cooperative leaders have confidently demonstrated their ability, intelligence and outstanding capacity to operate cooperatives. She suggested that women should set goals, support each other, and express their abilities to overcome challenges and enhance their management roles.

The opening ceremony also featured an exhibition of cooperative products developed by women-led cooperatives in Vietnam.

Over the next two days, around 60 women CEOs and Leaders participated in several thematic sessions focussing on skills in mentoring, developing future leaders, self-care, stress management, achieving a healthy work-life balance, addressing global challenges like economic volatility and climate change, promoting inclusivity, social justice, community welfare, and enhancing communication skills tailored for women in leadership roles within cooperatives.

Day 2 started with a refreshing ice-breaking activity conducted by Professor Vasanthi Srinivasan, Organizational Behaviour and Human Resources Management at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIM-B), India.

The first session chaired by Ms. Donna Dizon, Vice-President – Administration and Corporate Planning of CLIMBS Life and General Insurance Cooperative; and CEO and Principal of Co-operative College of the Philippines, featured speakers like Ms. Elenita V. San Roque, CEO, Asian Confederation of Credit

Unions (ACCU); Ms. Ruchi Agarwal, CEO, National Insurance VimoSEWA Cooperative Ltd., India; and Ms. Helma Vermuë, Chairwoman, Committee of Women and Business of LTO (the Netherlands Agricultural and Horticultural Association), Netherlands. The speakers shed light on various socio-economic and environmental challenges their organizations face and how they are managing and thriving through business development, new partnerships, enhancing visibility, and adopting technology.

The second session chaired by Ms. Priti Patel, Vice-Chairperson of the Women's Committee & Vice-Chairperson, Gujarat Mahila Credit Cooperative Society, India featured speakers like Ms. Chitra K. Subba, CEO, National Cooperative Federation of Nepal (NCF), Nepal; Ms. Miho Takaura, Managing Director, CO-OP Hiroshima, Japan and Ms. Vu Thi Thu Huong, Vice President, Thai Nguyen Provincial Cooperative Alliance, Vietnam. They highlighted the influence that women leaders have in advocating gender-inclusive cooperative laws and policies and ensuring community welfare with examples from Nepal, Japan, and Vietnam.

An inspiring session on personal development & work-life balance chaired by Ms. Christensen had leaders like Ms. Chitose Arai who is also the Vice-President, Japanese Consumers' Co-operative Union (JCCU), Japan; Ms. Savitri Singh, Deputy CEO, National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI), India and Ms. Lecira Juarez, Managing Director, Asia Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Associations Center for Training and Research in Rural and Agricultural Banking (APRACACENTRAB), the Philippines. They shared their personal journey and insights on the importance of prioritizing self-care and personal growth, stress management, and achieving a healthy work-life balance while juggling multiple roles.

The last session chaired by Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, ICA-AP Regional Director featured panelists like Ms. Samadanie Kiriwandeniya, Managing Director, SANASA International, Sri Lanka; Mr. Ang Hin Kee, CEO, Singapore National Co-operative Federation (SNCF), Singapore; Ms. Qi Wen, CEO, China Supply and Trade Group Co. Ltd., China and Atty. Dulce Bustamante, Executive Director of the Union of Legitimate Service Contracting Cooperatives in the Philippines and Chairperson ICA-AP Committee on Youth. The panelists shared insights on the importance of mentorship and skill advancement for developing future leaders, with a focus on supporting other women in the cooperative sector.

Day 3 focused on self-reflection amongst the Women CEOs and Leaders around purposeful leadership during the training session with Prof. Srinivasan. She discussed concepts like collective insights, leadership signature, changing external context for cooperatives, the importance of self-evaluation and having a personal development plan to succeed at personal and organizational levels.

The Summit also involved a learning visit to a local cooperative, Hong Van Cooperative, which is a successful model in the field of agrotourism and green agriculture in Hanoi. The cooperative has also developed Hong Van commune, a tourist destination for decorative craft villages attracting over 80 thousand visitors annually.

The summit followed up on the 2018 regional workshop themed "Re-imagine and Re-shape: Advancing Women CEOs in Co-operatives," which was a collaborative effort by ICA-AP, ICA-AP Committee on Women, and the All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives (ACFSMC).

The Summit concluded on a high note underscoring the significant progress made in advancing women's leadership in cooperatives, setting a positive tone for future regional and global initiatives.



Image 3: Asia-Pacific Women CEOs in Cooperatives Summit, Vietnam, 2024

## E-Lecture on Emotional Wellness for Women Cooperators: Stress and Anger Management

The Women's Committee organized an online lecture on Emotional Wellness for Women Cooperators on 6th September 2024, in collaboration with Sleepwell Foundation India. It was attended by 27 participants from India, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal and the Philippines.

The lecture focused on stress and anger management as key sub-themes and was conducted by two mental health counsellors Mrs. Neelam Agarwal and Mrs. Parul Khanna Parashar. In part 1, they focused on understanding how stress reflects in the human body and impacts us. The negative impact of stress on our bodies is seen in the form of –

- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Low mood or depression
- Rapid breathing
- Weakened immune system
- High blood pressure
- Tensed muscles
- Fertility problems, among others

As a result of high stress, we develop unhealthy coping mechanisms such as procrastination, avoidance, aggressive behaviour, excessive usage of social media, alcohol dependence, and over consumption of relaxation pills or drugs.



In the second part, they discussed common myths about anger like –

- Anger is always bad
- Venting anger is helpful
- Suppressing anger is the best way to deal with it
- Only aggressive people get angry
- Anger always leads to aggression
- Only men get angry
- Anger is always directed at someone

They further explained that there are three types of anger – aggressive, assertive and passive-aggressive. The counsellors performed a short role-play to explain these types. At the end of the lecture, they discussed strategies to manage stress and anger which include –

- Meditation and physical exercise such as yoga
- Music therapy
- Time management
- Journalling
- Spending time in nature
- Practising personal hobbies
- Consulting a therapist, among others

Throughout the lecture, the counsellors ensured that the participants took an active part through questions and answers.

The counsellors highlighted that while stress and anger affect everyone, it affects women differently. Due to the gendered nature of society, women's symptoms of stress often go unnoticed or are ignored by women themselves. This gets amplified when women are in leadership positions and their capability to handle stress at work is compared to men. Similarly, it is not easy for women leaders to show or express their anger at work as it is seen in a negative light and is not encouraged.

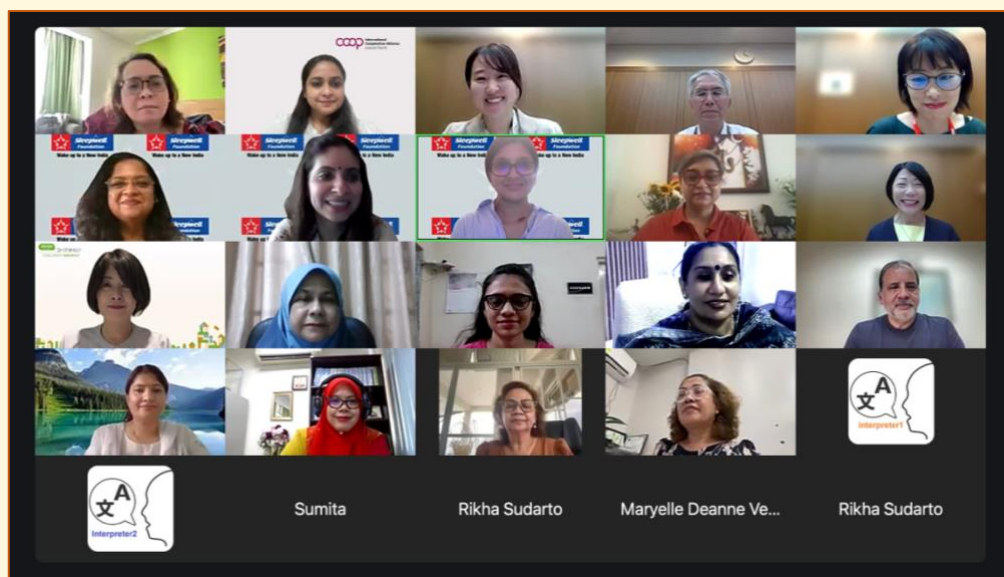


Image 4: E-Lecture on Emotional Wellness for Women Cooperators: Stress and Anger Management, 2024

## Training of Trainers on Climate Change and Action for Women Cooperators, Bhutan

The Women's Committee organized the Training of Trainers (ToT) on Climate Change and Action for Women Cooperators in Thimphu, Bhutan from 21st to 24th October 2024. The ToT was hosted by the Department of Agricultural Marketing and Cooperatives (DAMC) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MoAL) and was conducted in partnership with the National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO, the Philippines).

25 women representing government agencies, cooperatives and the private sector participated in the ToT delivered by two resource persons from NATCCO – Ms. Daisybelle M Cabal (Chief Operating Officer) and Ms. Lasalette M Gumban (Head, Advocacy Unit).

The ToT focused on the following:

- Understanding the link between climate change and cooperative action: Participants explored how cooperatives can play a vital role in building climate resilience, particularly in vulnerable sectors such as agriculture and rural development.
- Promoting environmental sustainability: The training highlighted practices such as sustainable agriculture, resource management, and conservation techniques that could be implemented by cooperatives to mitigate the effects of climate change.
- Building leadership capacity among women: The ToT aimed to empower women to take leadership roles, particularly in environmental advocacy and sustainability projects.
- Practical action planning: Participants were guided to prepare action plans to address specific climate challenges in their regions, using their cooperative structure as a platform for change.

The training sessions helped deepen the understanding of the trainees on how cooperatives can play a key role in tackling climate challenges, and they were encouraged to develop action plans to continue their efforts post-training. The participants' feedback was positive, and they expressed their eagerness to apply what they had learnt in their respective roles. They found the ToT manual and assessment tools helpful for monitoring and documenting the practices followed by cooperatives and farmer groups.

During the interactive sessions, we learnt about different climate-friendly practices followed in Bhutan at the community level. Some of the practices included waste segregation, refusal to use plastic bags, incorporating the 5R policy, maintaining healthy rivers and the environment by avoiding garbage dumping, etc. These examples will be used in future trainings.

The closing ceremony was attended by MoAL Secretary – Mr. Dasho Thinley Namgyel, ICA-AP Regional Director – Mr. Balu Iyer, officers from DAMC – Ms. Tshering Wangmo, Mr. Namgay Wangdi and Mr. Pema Wangchuk. In his remarks, Mr. Namgyel thanked the ICA-AP Women's Committee for organizing the ToT on climate change in Bhutan and observed that the theme is very relevant to the country. He also expressed his appreciation for selecting women as the recipients of the training and noted that when women are educated, the whole nation gets educated. Mr. Iyer, in his remarks, thanked DAMC for hosting the ToT and selecting a rich pool of trainees who participated actively. He also thanked the resource persons from NATCCO for their invaluable contribution to making the program a success. Ms. Wangmo delivered the vote of thanks on behalf of DAMC. The trainees committed to developing action plans to take forward the knowledge they acquired and promote suitable climate-friendly activities that

can be incorporated by cooperatives and farmer groups. The closing ceremony concluded with the awarding of participation certificates to the trainees by Mr. Namgyel.



Image 5: Training of Trainers on Climate Change and Action for Women Cooperators, Bhutan, 2025

## ICA Gender Equality Committee Updates

Message from ICA Gender Equality Committee Chairperson on IWD 2025

[Click here to read the message](#)

Cooperatives on the agenda at the 69th UN Commission on the Status of Women

[Click here to read the article](#)

ICA Gender Equality Committee annual plenary meeting in December 2024

[Click here to read the article](#)



Image 6: ICA Gender Equality Committee Updates



## Member updates

### Building Equality, Empowering Women: Transformative Initiatives by GMCC in India

Gujarat Mahila Credit Cooperative Society Ltd. (GMCC) stands as a trailblazer in championing women's empowerment through an integrated model of financial inclusion, skill enhancement, and community development. The society is devoted to building a nurturing and equitable environment where women can harness their full potential, attain economic self-reliance, and play an active role in shaping their communities. Anchored in the values of equity, inclusivity, and shared growth, the cooperative has launched a range of impactful initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality—not simply as a destination, but as a continuous and evolving commitment to sustainable progress.

- Leadership Development and Capacity Building: A Strong Step for Women Empowerment

In today's times, women should not only play a role as participants but also as leaders. The way to strengthen women's rights and voice is through leadership development and capacity building. GMCC has done important work in this direction. Representation is very important – only then can women influence policy, planning, and governance decisions. GMCC has prioritized special training programs to enhance women's leadership capacity. These programs empower women socially, economically, and morally. The Leadership Development Program organized in January 2025 is a prime example of this. 45 women participated in this program, where they were trained on topics like organizational skills, team management, public speaking, and decision-making skills. Apart from this, GMCC organizes various workshops, seminars, and cooperation meetings from time to time, in which women get guidance in understanding their role, discussing social problems and finding solutions. In this way, GMCC's leadership development work does not limit women's empowerment to a mere promise or slogan, but turns it into reality. Women's leadership is the demand of the hour today – and GMCC is a strong organization supporting the demand.

- Economic Empowerment Programs

In the modern era, women are constantly trying to make their identity. Various efforts are being made to strengthen their place in the society. One such important step has been taken by GMCC, in which various art-based training classes have been organized for women. Under these training classes, women are guided in activities like resin art, sewing work, painting, and dance classes. By participating in such classes, women can develop their skills and become self-reliant by starting their own small business. The main objective is that women should not be limited to household chores only, but can recognize their own importance and become financially strong. Through these classes, women learn new techniques and increase their self-confidence. In the future, the society is planning to start training in new fields like handicrafts, makeup art, fashion designing, and home catering. The aim of this is to reach out to more and more women and inspire them to move forward in life. Organizing such programs is not just about teaching skills but is the beginning of a new era – where women can shape their future with confidence.



Image 7: Building Equality, Empowering Women: Transformative Initiatives by GMCC in India

### Investing in Her: Women Empowerment through Spiritual Leadership and Service by NATCCO Network's GAD Committee in the Philippines

NATCCO Network's Gender and Development (GAD) Committee, together with the Sister Society Philippine Chapter spearheaded this year's celebration of IWD, conducted online on 7th March 2025, by the NATCCO Network, closely aligned with the international theme, "For ALL Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment," while at the same time concentrating on the Network's specific sub-theme: #AccelerateAction. It was attended by 200 participants from 65 cooperatives nationwide.

The occasion went beyond a simple celebration; it served as a powerful catalyst for integrated leadership formation, acknowledging the inseparable connection of spiritual health, effective leadership, and loving service in empowering women. The day started with a formal opening ceremony, professionally hosted by Dr. Loralie Cabrera, the GAD Committee Visayas Representative. The GAD Committee Mindanao Representative, Atty. Blue Ventosa, led the opening prayer which provided a solemn tone, preceded by the National Anthem and Cooperative Pledge. Our Women Representative to the Board of Directors and GAD Committee Chairperson, Dir. Hermes Vergara, welcomed everyone with a speech which placed the event's relevance in the overall context of women empowerment. Our GAD Focal Person, Ms. Whia Nangpi, gave meaningful context on IWD, mentioning historical events, key issues that confront women today, why it is essential to take collective action, and why invest in bringing a more equal world. Dr. Annabelle Mota, GAD Committee Luzon Representative, introduced the speaker. A very well-received talk was presented by Ms. Angelica De Vera, one that probed into the complexity of spirituality and its healing potential in women's lives.

Ms. De Vera's three-point presentation hit home with the audience: The Inherent Spirituality of All: She passionately made the case that spirituality is not limited to religious practice but is a fundamental aspect of human life, underscoring that an active spiritual life is within reach of everyone, no matter background or belief system. The Significance of an Enthusiastic Spirituality: Ms. De Vera discussed how

the strength of one's spirituality can give women the ability to survive life's issues and make a real impact on their communities. She noted that the strength from within has limitations and that a woman needs to derive strength from a higher force. The metaphor of "running on an empty tank," a symbol for the weight women inevitably bear, resonated especially strongly. Developing a Thriving Spirituality: The talk provided concrete advice for developing a robust spiritual life, including the need to reflect on one's own limitations, seek help from others, and assert personal boundaries. A Lectio Divina exercise gave participants an experiential lesson in these principles. The open discussion that ensued facilitated a rich sharing of ideas and experiences. The activity also included the declaration of the best entry in the NATCCO Network's Gender Mainstreaming Manual Cover Art Contest, an added creative flair to the proceedings for the day, which was presented by Ms. Lasalette Gumban. Atty. Cecille Galleros, current president of the Sister Society Philippine Chapter, made closing remarks full of insights, reiterating the event's key message. The celebration directly addressed the global IWD sub-themes: the call for a digital revolution, the fight against violence, the eradication of poverty, the pursuit of peace and security, the empowerment of women in decision-making roles, and the achievement of climate justice.

The theme of the event, one of spiritual service and leadership, offered a very strong and innovative frame for observing these urgent matters, eventually driving participants to act as forces for positive change both within and beyond their own communities. The celebration of IWD by the NATCCO Network was not an ordinary commemoration but a mighty call to action, an assertion of the resolve of the group to empower women.

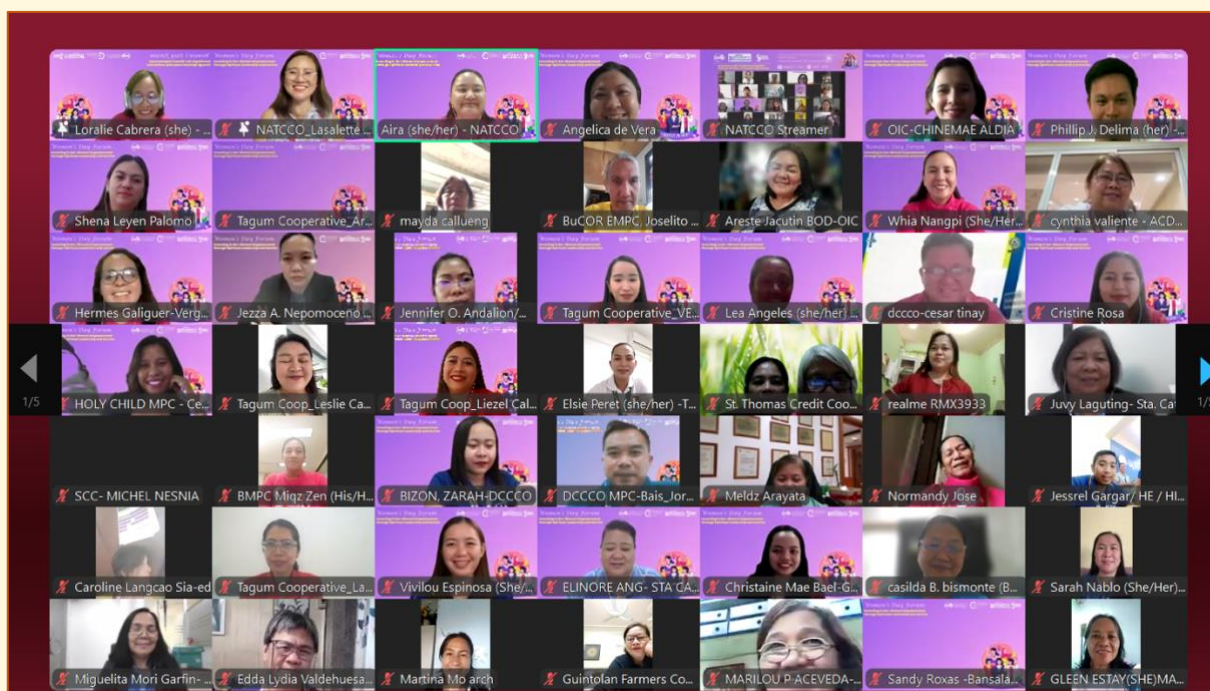


Image 8: Investing in Her: Women Empowerment through Spiritual Leadership and Service by NATCCO Network's GAD Committee in the Philippines

## NATCCO's GAD Summit Aims to Provide Women Opportunities

136 Filipino cooperative leaders convened at the NATCCO GAD Summit from November 13 to 15 2024, pledging to promote opportunities for women and integrate gender equality in their policies, operations, and organizational culture, in alignment with cooperative principles.

The summit, held at the Bai Hotel in Mandaue City, Cebu, gathered leaders (88 women, 46 men, and 2 intersex) from 47 cooperatives across the country. Themed "Intersectionality in Action: Cooperatives Leading the Way in Gender Equality and Social Inclusion," the event highlighted the cooperative sector's commitment to fostering inclusive practices.

Representatives from partner organizations CDA Region 7 Director Cristina Villamil, Atty. Khay Ann Magundayao-Borlado of the Philippine Commission on Women, Ms. Eleni Giakoumopoulos of the Global Women's Leadership Network (GWLN), Ms. Leni San Roque of the Association of Asian Confederation of Credit Unions (AACCU), and Mr. Balu Iyer, Regional Director of ICA-AP expressed their full support for the summit's initiatives.

Gender and social inclusion advocates Ms. Donnabelle Celebrado, Ms. Emelina Santos, and Ms. Jesi Blantukas shared their insights and facilitated discussions on best practices in Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI).

The summit provided cooperatives with a clearer understanding of the transformative direction of GAD. Participants gained valuable insights through shared initiatives and success stories, strengthening their capacity to implement inclusive practices in their organizations.

A key highlight was the re-launch of the Sister Society in the Philippines, led by NATCCO. Since its launch, 243 members from approximately 100 cooperatives have joined the Society. Moving forward, NATCCO's GADWE Unit will consolidate membership data and strategize the Society's initiatives.

Plans for 2025 include creating a social media page and utilizing the hashtag #NATCCOSisterSocietyPH to foster engagement. The GADWE team also announced a search for "GAD Champions" in Cooperative and Individual categories, with scholarship opportunities for awardees.

NATCCO GAD/GE Officer Whia Nangpi emphasized the unique role of cooperatives in promoting gender equality and social inclusion: "One of the most important takeaways from this summit is recognizing how cooperatives, with their principles and values, are well-positioned to drive meaningful change. By mainstreaming gender equality, leveraging data for informed decision-making, fostering dialogue on women's issues, embracing digital technologies, and building strategic partnerships, we are taking inspiring steps closer to achieving our shared vision of gender equity."

The NATCCO GAD Summit 2024 reaffirmed the cooperative movement's dedication to inclusivity and gender equality, setting the stage for impactful actions in the years ahead.





Image 9: NATCCO's GAD Summit Aims to Provide Women Opportunities

## AIMCooP in the Philippines Celebrates Women's Month: Honoring the Strength and Grace of Women

As the calendar turned to March, AIMCooP in the Philippines proudly joined the global community in celebrating Women's Month, a time dedicated to recognizing and honoring the strength, resilience, and contributions of women across the world. This year, AIMCooP curated a series of delightful and empowering activities aimed at celebrating the women within its community, ensuring they feel cherished and appreciated.

Throughout the month, AIMCooP hosted a variety of activities designed to pamper and uplift women. These activities are not only a means of relaxation but also a celebration of the unique essence that each woman brings to the world. Some of the services arranged by AIMCooP to pamper women included manicure, pedicure, haircuts, etc. Women were also given chocolates and other sweet treats.

AIMCooP also conducted community building activities for women to strengthen their connections and bonds, and provide them a supporting network that extends beyond the month of March. This was undertaken with the objective to share experiences, offer support and uplift women.

In addition to the pampering activities, AIMCooP plans to host a series of workshops and discussions focussing on women's empowerment and personal growth. These sessions will cover a range of topics from financial independence to self-care strategies, providing valuable insights and practical advice.

The essence of Women's Month lies in the celebration of togetherness. AIMCooP recognizes that when women come together, they create a powerful force for change. Our activities are designed not only to pamper but also to bring women together in a spirit of camaraderie and mutual support.

AIMCooP is committed to continuing its efforts to empower women throughout the year. We recognize that true empowerment is an ongoing journey, and we are dedicated to providing resources, support, and opportunities that help women thrive.



Image 10: AIMCooP in the Philippines Celebrates Women's Month: Honoring the Strength and Grace of Women

## Empowering Women through Agricultural Innovation: The Story of Al-Huweirneh Farmers' Group in Jericho, Palestine

In the Jordan Valley oasis of Jericho, a remarkable women-led initiative is reshaping traditional agricultural practices and advancing gender equality. The Al-Huweirneh Women Farmers' Group, supported by the Economic and Social Development Center of Palestine (ESDC), exemplifies how targeted interventions can empower women, promote sustainable agriculture, and create transformative change within rural communities.

Comprising an average of seven women - expanding to fifteen during peak seasons like the mallow harvest—the group specializes in cultivating and processing crops such as Al-Huweirneh (which is a local leafy green plants), mallow, and spinach. Their work spans the entire value chain: from land preparation and cultivation to harvesting, food processing, packaging, and marketing. In some agricultural seasons, they collaborate with up to nine male and female laborers, including three local farmers and six seasonal contractors.

Recognizing their potential, ESDC implemented a comprehensive development plan aimed at upgrading the group's production chain. This intervention introduced significant improvements in farming methods, food processing, waste management, and branding. A notable milestone was the registration of their own brand: "Huweirneh Um Ahmad", which has become a symbol of quality and women's entrepreneurial spirit in local markets.

The project introduced innovative, environmentally friendly solutions. A biogas digester was installed, enabling the group to convert agricultural waste into liquid fertilizer and cooking gas—demonstrating a circular economy approach and reducing environmental harm. Additionally, thermal sterilization technology was implemented to combat pests and diseases without relying on chemical inputs.

At the heart of the Al-Huweirneh Women Farmers' Group is "Um Ahmad", the group's leader and its greatest source of inspiration. Every morning at dawn, Um Ahmad takes the wheel of her own tractor and heads to the fields, setting an example of dedication, resilience, and hard work. She leads by doing—working side by side with the other women in land preparation, planting, and harvesting. Her hands-on leadership has not only strengthened the group's unity but has also empowered each member to believe in their capacity to thrive in a traditionally male-dominated sector. Her commitment and passion continue to motivate the women to push boundaries and take pride in their roles as agricultural producers and entrepreneurs.

A breakthrough in packaging and marketing was also achieved. The women received advanced equipment that enhanced product durability and shelf appeal, helping them reach wider markets while maintaining food safety standards.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts, an environmental and social impact study was conducted. This assessment highlighted the positive contributions of the women-led initiative while identifying areas to mitigate risk and amplify benefits, especially in waste reduction and community health.

The success of the Al-Huweirneh group is a powerful testament to what women can achieve when provided with the right tools, training, and recognition. Their journey is not only an example of women's economic empowerment but also a model for sustainable, inclusive rural development across Palestine and beyond.





Image 11: Empowering Women through Agricultural Innovation: The Story of Al-Huweirneh Farmers' Group in Jericho, Palestine

## Driving Change, Empowering Women: Strengthening the Role of Women Cooperatives in Malaysia

Over the past six months, Malaysia's cooperative movement has witnessed a strong resurgence in programs focused on strengthening women's participation, leadership, and resilience. Spearheaded by ANGKASA through its dedicated Women and Human Capital Section, a series of initiatives has been rolled out to enhance skills, foster unity, and elevate the socio-economic standing of women within the cooperative ecosystem. These initiatives mark a significant step forward in driving gender inclusiveness and resilience in line with the goals of the ICA-AP Women's Committee.

- Symposium Koperasi Wanita 2024 (Women's Cooperatives Symposium 2024): A Landmark Gathering of Women Cooperatives

One of the most notable highlights was the successful organization of the Symposium Koperasi Wanita, held on 7–8 November 2024 at Summit Hotel USJ, Subang Jaya. This two-day national symposium saw the participation of 319 attendees, representing 111 women cooperatives, showcasing the depth of engagement and enthusiasm among grassroots women leaders. The symposium featured 25 cooperative booths and 8 exhibition stalls, promoting local products and services while serving as a vibrant marketplace for exchange, innovation, and networking. This



setup gave women entrepreneurs an invaluable platform to market their goods, connect with potential collaborators, and share success stories.

The objectives of the symposium were multifaceted:

1. To strengthen the bonds between cooperatives and their members
2. To raise awareness of the importance of women's involvement in cooperative leadership
3. To upgrade women members' capabilities and knowledge through training and knowledge
4. To expand the cooperative network at regional and national levels
5. To identify exemplary women cooperative models
6. To produce and submit a resolution to relevant authorities advocating for stronger empowerment policies for women

These goals were addressed through keynote sessions, panel discussions, workshops, and dialogue forums with prominent figures from the cooperative movement, government, and academia. Participants were also involved in crafting a unified resolution reflecting the aspirations and challenges faced by women cooperatives in Malaysia, with a focus on policy support, capacity building, and digital inclusion.



Image 12: Simposium Koperasi Wanita 2024 (Women's Cooperatives Symposium 2024)

- Ongoing Capacity Building through Kursus Pemantapan Jatidiri Koperasi

Another major initiative rolled out consistently throughout the period was the Kursus Pemantapan Jatidiri Koperasi (Cooperative Identity Strengthening Course), conducted both online and in physical formats. This monthly course is aimed at deepening members' understanding of cooperative principles, enhancing governance, and nurturing responsible and visionary leadership within cooperatives. From late 2024 to early 2025, a total of 35 training programs were successfully conducted, involving 771 cooperatives and reaching 1,553 cooperative members across Malaysia. Of these: 9 programs were

held online, attended by 350 participants; and 26 physical sessions were carried out with an impressive 1,203 participants.

These programs were crucial in ensuring that knowledge dissemination remains inclusive and accessible, especially for cooperators in remote or underserved areas. The physical sessions provided in-depth face-to-face engagement, while the online courses ensured continuous learning amid logistical constraints.

The momentum generated by these activities has been deeply encouraging. Participants have reported increased confidence in taking up leadership roles, improved understanding of cooperative governance, and renewed motivation to contribute to their cooperative's growth. Equally important, the programs helped spotlight successful cooperative-led business models, offering inspiration to others across the country.

These achievements reflect the commitment of ANGKASA and the Women and Human Capital Section to the broader goals of gender equity, sustainable economic participation, and the cooperative values of solidarity and self-help. The efforts align seamlessly with ICA-AP's vision of an inclusive, resilient cooperative movement driven by empowered women.

Moving forward, ANGKASA remains steadfast in its mission to build a robust support system for women cooperators — one that prioritizes education, policy advocacy, technological integration, and market access. With continued collaboration between national and regional partners, the future holds strong promise for women-led cooperatives to become powerful agents of economic transformation and community resilience.

## **Teacher Talk: The Voice of Teachers with Maternal Instincts in a Cooperative School in Iran**

One of the needs of today's societies is understanding the surrounding events and finding ways to empathize with the world. In this journey, education is not just a means for transferring knowledge—it is a space for nurturing thoughtful, open-minded human beings connected to life. At Rah-e Roshd Cooperative Educational Complex (RCEC), we have introduced Teacher Talk, grounded in cooperative values and inspired by the TED model—a platform that celebrates the storytelling power of teachers, spotlighting narrative, lived experience, and the human core of education. The second Teacher Talk event was held on November 22, 2024.

### A Patchwork of Teaching Stories: Maternal Narratives from Cooperative Schools

The mothers of our mothers were storytellers. Not only by the cradle at night, but also while baking bread, spinning thread, or sitting silently in evening gatherings. They told stories to lull, to calm, to instill courage. They created a warm and safe world with words, even if life outside those stories was harsh and unforgiving.

Perhaps those very stories found their way into our hearts as teachers. We—women grown by such narratives—now stand in classrooms filled with questions, childhood loneliness, and eyes longing to be seen. For us, education isn't just content delivery; it's about listening, breathing together, and sharing in the inner worlds of our students.

### Teacher Talk: Born from the Need to Be Heard

Out of this very need, Teacher Talk was born—a space for sharing triumphs and failures, for bringing silenced experiences into the light. Teachers here take the stage not to lecture on theories, but to speak of messy classrooms, moments that shook them, silent or screaming children, and of themselves, lost and found again.

Teacher Talk is inspired by TED, but it speaks our language as teachers—a maternal language that doesn't hide or ignore failure, but admits it with honesty and transforms it into steps toward growth.

### A School with Maternal Leadership: Where Stories Come Alive

At Rah-e Roshd cooperative school, where maternal leadership flows through every decision, education is more than just knowledge transfer. It creates a home for conversation, empathy, and trust. Here, storytelling is the common language of the school community. Through a maternal lens, storytelling becomes a bridge between experience and learning—a bridge that turns education into a living, human process.

### Stories from Inside the Classroom

In Teacher Talk, teachers share stories grounded in real challenges:

- A teacher who failed to reconnect with her students after COVID-19. This failure pushed her to redefine what it means to be a teacher, bridging the islands of isolation among her students through a fresh perspective rooted in the past.
- Another teacher, once a victim of a controlling family, unknowingly repeated that pattern. Until one day, rejecting a student's drawing of a tree with a pink trunk became a turning point, awakening her to let go of control and honor the right to choose.

### Maternal Storytelling: A Path to Experience-Based Education

Studies show that storytelling deepens learning because the human brain resonates with narratives. But teacher storytelling goes even further: when a teacher recounts an experience, they reflect, reconstruct, and find meaning. This is “professional reflection”—a process that breathes life into education, pulling it out of rigid molds. Maternalizing educational storytelling is an antidote to today's lifeless standardization. These stories, rich in individuality, emotion, and cultural context, turn the classroom into a stage for life itself.

### A Patchwork of Women's Voices

In a world where education has been reduced to numbers and competition, Teacher Talk weaves sensitivity, care, and attention to human connection into the fabric of the educational system. Each story here is a piece of a colourful patchwork—a quilt made from vibrant voices that capture the beauty and wounds of teaching.

Let us lay this patchwork on the ground of education. So that anyone who steps upon it feels the warmth of shared experiences, the softness of empathy, and the light of stories that teach and keep us alive.



Image 13: Teacher Talk: The Voice of Teachers with Maternal Instincts in a Cooperative School in Iran



## Upcoming events 2025

1. Online workshop for Committee members in collaboration with Sleepwell Foundation, India: “From Awareness to Action: Recognizing Violence Against Women and Building Coping Capacities”, June 20, 2025
2. ToT on Climate Change and Action for Women Cooperators, Indonesia, July 7-10, 2025
3. Committee Statutory meeting, Colombo Sri Lanka, November 25, 2025
4. Joint seminar with ICA-AP Trade and Business Committee to celebrate International Year of Cooperatives, Colombo Sri Lanka, November 25, 2025



International  
Cooperative Alliance  
Asia and Pacific  
Committee on Women

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN  
COOPERATIVES IN ASIA-PACIFIC SINCE 1998



**International Year  
of Cooperatives**

Cooperatives Build  
a Better World