



Global Office:

Alliance Coopérative
Internationale – AISBL
Avenue Milcamps 105
1030 Brussels
Belgium
VAT: BE 535 539 869
T: +32.2.743.10.30
F: +32.2.743.10.39
ica@ica.coop
www.ica.coop

Regional Offices:

Africa
Nairobi – Kenya
www.icaafrica.coop

Americas
San José – Costa Rica
www.aciamericas.coop

Asia and Pacific
New Delhi – India
www.icaoap.coop

Europe
Brussels – Belgium
www.coopseurope.coop

**Sectoral
Organisations:**

Agriculture (ICAO)
www.icao.org

Banking (ICBA)
www.icba.coop

Consumers (CCW)
www.ccw.coop

Fisheries (ICFO)
www.icfo.coop

Health (IHCO)
www.ihco.coop

Housing
www.ichousing.coop

Insurance (ICMIF)
www.icmif.org

Industry and Services
(CICOPA)
www.cicopa.coop

Statement

93rd International Co-operative Day of the International Co-operative Alliance 21st UN International Day of Co-operatives

4 July 2015

Choose co-operative, choose equality

Equality is a fundamental value that ensures that all people can reap the benefits of economic and social development. Yet, we live in a world that remains rife with inequalities: according to recent data 0.7% of the world population holds 44% of all the wealth, while 70% only holds 3%. Everywhere there are still people discriminated against based on their gender, age, religion, or socio-economic condition among other factors.

Equality has been, since the beginning, a core value of the co-operative movement. By building co-operatives, people all over the world have chosen a democratic model of business that fosters equality.

As early as 1846 Eliza Brierley became the first woman to join, as a member, The Rochdale Equitable Pioneers Society at a time when women did not normally own property. But the Rochdale Pioneers rules of 1844 saw no difference between male and female members, setting a standard that was later adopted by co-operatives across the world.

Today, there are more than 2.6 million co-operatives with over 1 billion members – three times more than direct shareholders of investor-owned companies. Furthermore, 250 million people are employed by or organise their livelihood

through these co-operatives. The largest 300 co-operatives have combined annual revenues of USD 2.2 trillion – the equivalent of the GDP of the 7th largest economy in the world – and the movement is growing fast, particularly in emerging nations such as Brazil, India and China.

In a co-operative, equality means three things:

1. Membership is open and voluntary – without discrimination on any grounds – and each member has one vote, guaranteeing that the structure and control of the co-operative is equal. Unlike investor-owned companies, in a co-operative equality is a benefit of membership and is not linked to the financial capacity of the individual.
2. A co-operative works to satisfy the needs and aspirations of its members and for the sustainable development of society at large. The role of co-operatives in lifting millions of people out of poverty is undeniable – co-operatives distribute the wealth they create in a fairer and more equal way. As just one example, a co-operative project in Senegal has improved food security for 1 million individuals across 60 rural communities, improving household income by 250% and reducing the instances of underweight children by 35%.
3. While performing their activities, co-operatives offer all individuals – producers, workers, consumers – the opportunity to: pursue their economic needs and aspirations; become better integrated into society; and have access to goods, services and benefits that they would not otherwise have. This culture of equality also allows co-operatives to reflect the diversity of the people they serve.

Whether by developing gender equality; giving opportunities to young people; integrating minorities in the labour market; helping the transition from informal to formal economies; reducing the wage gap; giving economic power to the poor; allowing equal access to fundamental resources like water, energy, education, financial services, and many others, co-operative enterprises demonstrate on a daily basis that there is a choice that can shift the paradigm and can mainstream equality in economic and social development.

Across all sectors of the economy there are examples of co-operatives that make equality possible: credit unions that share their financial benefits directly with their members through higher returns on savings, lower rates on loans, and fewer, lower fees; health co-operatives that provide affordable and accessible health plans to marginalised populations; electrical co-operatives that serve rural areas, ensuring basic access to energy in places where others would not consider service provision and business development; retail consumer-owned co-operatives providing access to affordable, high-quality, and sustainable food such as organic or Fair Trade products; co-operative and mutual insurers that help disadvantaged populations protect themselves against basic risks thus allowing them to perform their activities in a safer, more confident way.

In a context where global challenges such as climate change and food security will increase inequality because they will disproportionately affect the ones that are already in dire situations, the world needs more equality, not less. By diversifying the global economy through the promotion and development of co-operatives, people, governments and society can help change this.

As businesses based on the principle of equality, we call on governments to promote national action and innovation to redress inequalities and we call on the United Nations and the international community to build equality into the heart of its on-going work to set a Post-2015 Development agenda, including a framework to address the challenges and risks of climate change, that takes into account the role and contribution of co-operative enterprises.

The International Co-operative Alliance calls on the co-operative movement to take this opportunity to showcase and promote the different ways co-operative enterprises advance equality.

* * *