



International Co-operative Alliance
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Message from the ICA Gender Equality Committee Chair
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"The Gender Agenda: Gaining Momentum!"



Today the International Women's Day is celebrated all over the world and it is the right opportunity to give an even greater emphasis to the fundamental role of women in achieving development, peace and security. There is increasing evidence of the rapid progress of women and their expanding beneficial role in today's world development though there are still huge challenges ahead to insure their strength.

We have reached a turning point in history. It has become urgent to redefine the stereotypes of power and leadership about women to make sure that they enjoy an equal treatment in the decision-making processes and that they are allowed to make a maximum contribution to socio-economic development. The lessons of history are that the negative repercussions of inequality are borne by mankind as a whole, and therefore to achieve women's equality everyone must engage in the process.

A large array of studies assert that there is an essential link between aiming at obtaining equal rights for women and reducing poverty, improving health and education, alleviating the climate change effects and making headway towards more sustainable development. All these objectives are shared by the world co-operative movement, are interdependent and support gender equality and women's empowerment.

Therefore the co-operative business model is an ideal platform to break down the barriers of inequality and is the preferential model to enable women to have access to a participatory democracy, to decision-making bodies, to markets and technology, and above all, to protect them from the injustice of the current dominant development model.

The need for more and better qualified human capital is increasingly growing and women's entrepreneurial potential is still underexploited. One third of entrepreneurs are women but their number is on the increase, more particularly in low-income countries. It is also estimated that more than half of cooperative members are women. These women leaders are often co-operative leaders. Women MPs, judges and activists are promoting change and a distinct way of operating. Governments and civil society are testing new approaches to ensuring that women have wider access to legal procedures, through gender-sensitive legal reforms. We are all aware that with a proper education, knowledge of their rights and decision-making power women are better able to demand what they should be entitled to enjoy.

The Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women was ratified by 186 countries. 125 declared domestic violence illegal; 117 countries have laws on equal pay and 115 countries guarantee women's equal rights to property, and more.

However, we still live in a society which allows lower pay for women. In three quarters of the planet, women are the major victims of poverty, ill-treatment and daily harassment.

The belief of thousands of co-operative members that any discrimination based on gender is a major obstacle to democracy and a sustainable development urges us to promote, defend and seek to enforce women's and girls' rights. To this end we should encourage education processes to empower women, to facilitate their promotion to the

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administrative and management leadership, and to change the statistical data of the representation of men and women.

Currently our societies are confronted with difficult challenges from an economic nature to an environmental one and time might have come to take advantage of these opportunities to show that changes can be shaped in such difficult periods. I invite every single co-operative to give the highest priority in its policies to the equal recognition of rights and opportunities to Women.

ICA recognizes that the Gender Agenda has gained more relevance than ever before and it is our opportunity to seek even more equality for women - by showcasing that our leadership is the most effective model for socio-economic development.

María Eugenia Pérez Zea

Chair

ICA Gender Equality Committee