



Deputy Secretary-General

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LEVERAGING COOPERATIVES, SAYS DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL LAUNCHING INTERNATIONAL

YEAR, PRODUCES NOT ONLY BETTER BUSINESS, BUT ADVANCES SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Following are UN Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro's remarks at the launch of the International Year of Cooperatives, 31 October, in New York:

Today, we launch the International Year of Cooperatives. We do this as the world witnesses growing discontent over the ongoing effects of the financial and economic crises.

Increasingly, we see demands for a change in the ways we live and work. Increasingly, we see the need for choices and values that are sustainable, responsible, and inclusive.

In confronting these challenges, we can draw strength from the cooperative spirit. The cooperative movement balances both economic viability and social responsibility. They make enormous contributions not only to their members, but to their communities and societies. They help to reduce poverty and create jobs. They promote food security and inclusive finance. They empower youth, women, older persons, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples. Hence, they serve as a significant social safety net.

The International Year of Cooperatives is an opportunity to raise public awareness about cooperatives, to promote their formation, and to encourage Governments to establish policies conducive to their growth. Just as important, it is a chance to underscore the importance of cooperative values.

One of these is sustainability. Cooperatives focus on the long-term. Through their use of local labour and capital, as well as their respect for the environment, cooperatives strengthen local economies while creating a sustainable future.

A second cooperative value is solidarity. Cooperatives typically enjoy a strong community connection, and hold themselves accountable to more than solely their members or clients. For cooperatives, the well-being of the broader community is as crucial as the well-being of its members.

Third, inclusiveness. As self-help organizations, cooperatives are inherently people-centred. They not only meet material needs, but also the human need to participate proactively in improving one's life. Moreover, with democratic decision-making processes and a focus on cultivating member skills and capacities, cooperatives offer a model for harnessing the energies and passions of all.

The International Year of Cooperatives coincides with the observance of the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All and with the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, next June. Let us make the most of this confluence of events.

Cooperatives present us with values and structures that are ideally suited for addressing the challenges we face. We must leverage these advantages to produce not only better businesses, but to advance the broader imperative of sustainable development. In that way, we can live up to the Year's theme: "Cooperative Enterprises Build a Better World".

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