



INTERNATIONAL
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ALLIANCE

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Message of the International Co-operative Alliance

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16th UN International Day of Cooperatives
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“Co-operative Enterprise Empowers Women”

All over the world women are choosing the co-operative form of enterprise to respond to their economic and social needs. Whether it is to reach their entrepreneurial aspirations, to access products and services that they want and need, or to be part of business that has ethical values and principles and provides income-generating opportunities, women are finding that co-operatives are attractive options.

Co-operatives are democratic-ally owned and governed enterprises guided by the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. They put people at the heart of their activities and allow members through democratic decision-making set out how they reach their economic, social and cultural aspiration.



For women, co-operatives have a key role to play as they are able to respond to both women's practical and strategic needs. Whether it be through women only co-operatives or co-operatives made up of women and men, they offer an effective organisational means for women members and employees to raise their living standards by accessing decent work opportunities, savings and credit facilities, health, housing and social services, and education and training. Co-operatives also offer women opportunities for participation in and influence over economic activities. Women gain self-reliance and self-esteem through this participation. Co-operatives also contribute to the improvement of the economic, social and cultural situation of women in other ways including promoting equality and changing institutional biases.

For women entrepreneurs, co-operatives are a particularly attractive form of enterprise. By pooling their capital, women are able to engage in income-generating activities and organise their work in a flexible way that respects the multiple roles that women may have in society. From Burkina Faso, India, Japan, Honduras to the United States, women share similar co-operative experiences – their women-only co-operatives have allowed women to gain self-confidence, bear professional responsibilities, valorise their skills and improve their livelihoods by deriving income for their work and accessing a wide range of services.

Women however, are also finding satisfaction in co-operatives where both women and men participate. As members and employees, women are discovering enterprises that strive to build mutual respect and equal opportunity. However, it must be said that more needs to be done to achieve gender equality. Co-operatives are a reflection of their members and the society in which they operate, and so still mirror the predominant societal and cultural biases. They are nonetheless responding to the challenge of making changes in organisational culture, working methods, education and training opportunities to make women's empowerment a reality. .../..

Women's empowerment has five components: women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of societal change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

The co-operative form of enterprise addresses each of these components and is truly providing empowerment opportunities for women in all parts of the world.

Ms Kumari a successful woman entrepreneur and co-operative member in India summed it up when she related her co-operative experience. She said, 'I would like to thank the women's co-operative bank for making me an empowered woman and allowing me to have my dreams come true'.

On this International Day of Co-operatives, the ICA calls on co-operators to recognise the key contribution women make to economic, social and cultural development throughout the world, to strengthen co-operative commitment to enable women to be empowered in their co-operative enterprises and encourage the participation of women in the Co-operative Movement.