International Year of Cooperatives
Cooperatives Build a Better World

NEDAC COOP CONNECT

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ABOUT NEDAC

Network for the Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in Asia and the Pacific (NEDAC) is a regional forum that unites 30 apex cooperative organizations across eight nations. Established in 1991, NEDAC was created on the recommendation of the 1990 International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), Regional Conference of Cooperative Ministers, with the support of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific" The primary objective is to support agricultural cooperatives in promoting agricultural and rural development.

NETWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Established in 1991 by FAO, ICA and ILO

Message from the Chairman, NEDAC

As we close another remarkable year, I am thrilled to share the inaugural quarterly issue of our newsletter, where we reflect on our achievements and look forward to the opportunities ahead. This year, The Network for the Development of Agricultural Cooperatives in Asia and the Pacific (NEDAC) has made significant strides in fostering international cooperation, empowering agricultural cooperatives, and driving sustainable innovation across diverse regions.

From the successful Europe Study Visit, where we explored pioneering cooperative practices, to impactful workshops in Bangkok that emphasized food security and women's entrepreneurship, 2024 has been a year of learning, growth, and collaboration. Our initiatives continue to inspire, connect, and strengthen cooperative frameworks globally.

This newsletter highlights our key events, inspiring stories, and best practices that showcase the transformative power of cooperative action. As we approach 2025, a year already marked as a celebration of cooperation, we eagerly anticipate many exciting events and collaborations that will drive further progress in our shared mission. All valued members are invited to share their cooperative ideas, innovations, and success stories.

Thank you for your constant support and dedication to our shared mission. On behalf of NEDAC, I welcome you all to Mombasa, Kenya. Together, let's continue our journey of building resilient, innovative, and inclusive cooperatives that inspire and empower cooperative communities worldwide.

Warm regards,
Pankaj Kumar Bansal
Chairman, NEDAC

In this newsletter you can expect:

Upcoming Event

- **General Assembly and Executive Meeting of NEDAC in Mombasa, Kenya in February 2025.**

Strengthening Cooperatives: NEDAC Delegation's European Study Tour Highlights Pathways to Cooperative Development

In October 2024, the Network for the Development of Agricultural Cooperatives (NEDAC) organized a study visit focused on the theme "To Understand the European Model of Banking and Agricultural Cooperatives."

The delegation comprised representatives from several key organizations, including the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) of the Philippines and the Haryana State Cooperative Supply and Marketing Federation Ltd. (HAFED), National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI), International Cooperative Alliance-Asia Pacific | (ICA-AP), National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED), National Fisheries Development Board (NFDB), National Cooperative Development Corporation (NCDC), The Loknete Sunderroaji Solunke Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana Ltd., and Mulkanoor Credit and Marketing Cooperative Society from India. The visit aimed to deepen participants' understanding of European cooperative models in banking and agriculture, fostering cross-regional learning and collaboration.

Through engaging with European cooperative leaders, delegates gained valuable insights into models of economic resilience, social inclusion, and academic collaboration, marking an important step toward strengthening international cooperation in the cooperative sector.

One of the tour's key discussions centered on Italy's social cooperative model, which highlights how cooperatives can foster social inclusion. These cooperatives play a crucial role in providing services such as education, healthcare, and employment for marginalized groups—especially individuals with disabilities, single parents, and long-term unemployed workers. A standout example is the Marcora Law, which empowers workers to take ownership of failing businesses, transforming them into cooperatives. This model preserves jobs, ensures economic resilience, and provides an innovative solution during economic crises.

In Belgium, Cera Cooperative partnered with Katholieke Universiteit (KU) Leuven to advance research and education in cooperative entrepreneurship and sustainability to foster the seeds of cooperation among the younger generation. Their collaboration has led to the establishment of academic chairs and specialized programs focusing on cooperative governance.

During the visit, the delegation toured the European Association of Co-operative Banks (EACB), which represents 27 member institutions and advocates for the interests of cooperative banks in banking and legislative matters. Cooperative banks play a crucial role in regional development by directing 95% of their loans to local households and businesses.

The Italian model, in particular, showcases how these banks reinvest in their communities, strengthening regional economies and promoting sustainable development, especially in the cooperative sector—an approach that could inspire Indian cooperatives.
The delegation also had the opportunity to engage with global cooperative organizations like Rabobank and the International Raiffeisen Union (IRU). Rabobank, with over 125 years of experience in supporting cooperatives worldwide, has played a major role in building resilient economies in the food and agriculture sector.

Meanwhile, the IRU, representing over 900,000 cooperatives across 100 countries, continues to advocate for cooperative principles based on self-help, self-responsibility, and self-administration. The IRU also promotes regulatory environments that support the growth of cooperatives, emphasizing the potential of cooperative banking as a tool for community-driven development.

The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) shared valuable experiences of European cooperatives in addressing the challenges faced by smallholders and family farmers. These cooperatives are essential in promoting entrepreneurship and creating new economic opportunities in rural regions, advancing the agenda for inclusive growth.

A particularly impactful moment came during the regional workshop hosted by SMART Belgium, Smart is a worker cooperative that hosts professional projects, allowing you to share resources, tools, and security so you can develop your business with peace of mind which is focused on integrated community development.

The workshop allowed delegates to explore the findings of the FAO's study on good practices in integrated community development and territorial approaches in Europe and Central Asia. This session facilitated the exchange of practical experiences and lessons learned on addressing the complex challenges faced by cooperatives, and family farmers through a presentation by ICA.

This tour underscored how innovative practices and global collaboration are transforming the cooperative sector, fostering resilience, and enabling the adoption and sharing of effective strategies worldwide.

NEDAC International Workshop on “Agricultural Cooperatives and Food Security”

The International Workshop on Agricultural Cooperatives and Food Security, jointly organized by the Network for the Development of Agricultural Cooperatives (NEDAC) and the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), took place on July 8–9, 2024, in Bangkok. The event successfully brought together 15 participants from six countries — Australia, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, the Philippines, and Thailand — to explore strategies for strengthening agricultural cooperatives, ensuring food security, promoting innovation, and building resilient farming communities.

The workshop featured insightful presentations from renowned experts in the field. Dr. Krishna R. Salin, Dr. Witsanu Attavanich, and Dr. Ravi Khetarpal shared their expertise on cooperative value chains, agricultural innovation, and the role of cooperatives in ensuring food security. Prof. Jes Sammut and Dr. Debashish Mazumder highlighted successful case studies and advanced technologies, showcasing how these can enhance the effectiveness of agricultural cooperatives.

The event also aimed to promote agricultural innovation, build resilient farming communities to provide the best result solutions and enhance the capacity of cooperatives to meet global food security needs.

Dairy Farming Promotion Organization Visit

Participants visited the Dairy Farming Promotion Organization of Thailand (DPO) during the workshop in Muak Lek, Sara Buri Province. The DPO, a Thai State enterprise under the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, is renowned for its Thai-Denmark brand of dairy products. The visit provided a unique opportunity to witness Thailand’s advanced food security systems.

At the DPO, participants toured the farm and factory, observing the collection of 300-400 tons of raw milk daily from regional cooperatives. They were also introduced to the state-of-the-art technology used in producing and packaging UHT and pasteurized milk. The visit highlighted Thailand’s robust food security.

They provided a platform for knowledge exchange, allowing participants to learn from each other’s experiences and challenges in the agricultural sector.

As the global community faces the pressing challenge of ensuring food security for a growing population, this event served as an important step toward strengthening the role of cooperatives in building a sustainable, food-secure future.

This workshop underlined the critical role of agricultural cooperatives in ensuring food security and fostering sustainable development through innovation and collaboration. Participants left with valuable insights and a shared commitment to advancing food security initiatives in their respective regions.

Know Your Member

Mulkanoor Cooperative Rural Credit & Marketing Society Ltd. Telangana, India

The Mulkanoor Cooperative Rural Credit and Marketing Society Ltd: MCRCMS located in the Karimnagar district of Telangana, is a shining example of how cooperative institutions can transform rural economies. Established in 1956, this farmers' cooperative has consistently demonstrated how collective action, strong governance, and innovative practices can lead to sustainable development. Guided by the visionary ideals of its founder, Sri Aligireddy Kasi Vishwanatha Reddy, and backed by over six decades of impactful operations, Mulkanoor has become a leading example for cooperatives across India, offering invaluable insights into empowering rural economies.

One of the core reasons behind Mulkanoor's success is its diversified approach to economic activities. The cooperative started as a credit society but quickly expanded into a multi-activity organization. Today, it provides a wide range of services, including credit, agricultural inputs, marketing, dairy operations, welfare services, and even a rice mill. By addressing the multiple needs of its members, the cooperative ensures not only financial sustainability but also holistic rural development.

The cooperative's dairy enterprise is a standout feature, contributing significantly to its success. The Mulkanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy processes milk collected from over 15,000 members, generating employment and additional income for rural families. The focus on women's participation in this initiative highlights the cooperative's commitment to gender inclusivity and empowerment. ***Mulkanoor Women's Cooperative Dairy (MWCD) is India's first women's cooperative dairy, set up and run by women, dealing with milk and milk-based products.***

Another notable feature is the cooperative's ability to adapt to changing times. By leveraging technology for better communication, efficient operations, and digital record-keeping, the cooperative has modernized its processes while maintaining its foundational principles of mutual benefit and collective welfare. The Government of India has also praised the society for its achievements and remarkable journey.

Education and capacity-building are the two concepts that have played a pivotal role in Mulkanoor's success. The cooperative organizes regular training programs for members, enhancing their skills and awareness about modern agricultural practices, financial literacy, and business management.

The impact of the Mulkanoor Cooperative extends beyond its members. It has become a catalyst for rural prosperity in the region, improving incomes, creating employment, and fostering social equity. Its success story exemplifies how cooperatives can drive sustainable rural development by combining traditional values with modern strategies.

The Mulkanoor Cooperative emphasizes member involvement in decision-making, ensuring that the leadership remains accountable and aligned with the needs of its members. Regular audits and performance evaluations further reinforce trust among the members, which is key to the cooperative's long-term viability.

As Indian cooperatives look to strengthen their operations, the Mulkanoor model serves as an inspiration. Its emphasis on inclusivity, innovation, and governance demonstrates the transformative potential of cooperative movements in addressing rural challenges and uplifting communities.

MULKANUR
FULL OF MOTHER'S LOVE

Best Practices

Revolutionizing Rural Development with the Cooperative Model by Cebu Cooperative Development Centre

The First and Largest Digitally-enabled Co-op of Philippines

Transforming Problems into Solutions

In the lush, rolling hills of Cebu, a small farming community faced the harsh realities of poverty, isolation, and limited access to resources. The villagers worked diligently to grow their crops, but they struggled to secure fair prices for their produce and had no savings or access to credit to invest in better tools or sustainable farming practices. They were caught in a cycle of poverty, with little hope for change.

This is where the Cebu Cooperative Development Center (CCDC), founded in 1978, came into the picture. For over four decades, the CCDC has been a driving force in transforming communities like these, turning challenges into opportunities for growth, empowerment, and sustainability.

The idea was simple: work closely with local communities, understand their unique needs, and empower them to make decisions that would lead to sustainable development. This approach was rooted in the belief that true development could only be achieved when people were given the tools, knowledge, and support to manage their resources.

In one rural barangay (village) in Cebu, the CCDC team met with a group of farmers. These farmers had long struggled to make ends meet, often having to sell their produce at rock-bottom prices to middlemen who took advantage of their desperation. The community lacked formal education on cooperative management, financial literacy, and marketing. However, they had a deep sense of unity and a willingness to work together toward a common goal.

The CCDC saw potential whereas others saw only difficulty. They partnered with the farmers, initiating a cooperative development program that would change the trajectory of their lives.

Capacity Building was the first step. Over the next few months, the CCDC brought in experts to train the farmers on managing their cooperatives, keeping records, and budgeting. Workshops focused on financial literacy, teaching members how to save, manage funds, and make wise investments. The farmers were also trained in sustainable farming techniques that would increase their yield while protecting the environment.

The CCDC's commitment to market access provided another critical boost. The cooperative established direct linkages with buyers and distributors, cutting out the middlemen who had long exploited the farmers.

Now, the cooperative members could sell their goods at fair prices, ensuring that the profits stayed within the community.

To address this, CCDC helped establish cooperative banks and credit unions that could provide affordable loans to members. This made it possible for farmers to purchase seeds, tools, and equipment, and for small businesses in the community to expand. Through these financial institutions, members gained access to low-interest loans, and their savings could be pooled and reinvested in community projects.

Through this process, the once-struggling farmers saw their livelihoods improve. Their cooperative became financially stable, and their crops flourished as they adopted eco-friendly, sustainable farming practices.

A key aspect of the CCDC's work was providing financial services. For many cooperatives, access to capital was the greatest hurdle. Without financial resources, they couldn't scale operations, invest in better technologies, or respond to emergencies like natural disasters.

Transforming Indian Agriculture: Innovations by Visionary Farmers

Indian agriculture has witnessed remarkable transformations through the innovative efforts of farmers who have introduced groundbreaking ideas to enhance efficiency, sustainability, and profitability. Here, we spotlight three such innovations that are reshaping the agricultural landscape.

1. The Tree Scooter Revolution

Ganapathi Bhat, a farmer from Mangaluru, has revolutionized areca nut harvesting with his ingenious ***"tree scooter."*** Addressing challenges such as labor shortages and inefficiencies, this motorized device enables farmers to scale up areca palm trees quickly and safely. Equipped with a harness, seat, and belt, the scooter grips the tree trunk securely, allowing for a dramatic increase in productivity—up to 300 trees harvested daily, three times the traditional rate. The innovation also saves farmers significant labor costs, making it a game-changer for areca nut cultivation.

2. Thriving in the Desert: Kutch's Dragon Fruit Farming

In the arid landscapes of Kutch, **Haresh Thacker** has introduced innovative farming methods to grow dragon fruit, mangoes, and off-season vegetables. Leveraging a Vietnam-inspired technique, Thacker's dragon fruit orchards span 50 acres and thrive on minimal water. His high-density planting methods for mango trees, combined with advanced drip irrigation and climate-control technologies, further enhance yield. These sustainable approaches not only defy the harsh climatic conditions but also position Kutch as an unlikely hub for high-value horticulture.

3. The Annapurna Rice Library: Preserving Agricultural Heritage

Mahan Chandra Borah from Assam is safeguarding India's rich legacy of indigenous rice varieties through his '**Annapurna Rice Library.'** This initiative, born out of his passion for protecting vanishing crops, has conserved over 500 rice seed varieties. Borah's library operates on a sharing model, where farmers can access and grow these seeds organically. Beyond preservation, Borah conducts awareness sessions in schools, inspiring the next generation to appreciate and protect agricultural biodiversity.

These farmer-led innovations underline the importance of creativity and resilience in overcoming agricultural challenges. By adopting and scaling such ideas, India can continue its journey toward sustainable and prosperous farming practices.

Country's Profile: Iran

Overview of Cooperatives in Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran boasts a rich history of cooperative practices, rooted in traditional collective farming and modernized through institutional frameworks. With the integration of cooperatives into the country's constitutional framework after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the sector has been established as a key pillar of the Iranian economy alongside the public and private sectors.

Historical Development

- The cooperative movement in Iran began in 1935 with the registration of the first cooperative under the Trade Law of 1932.
- Post-1962 land reforms mandated farmers to join cooperatives, leading to the establishment of over 8,000 rural cooperatives.
- By 1984, the Iran Central Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC) was established as the apex body for cooperative governance.
- Significant milestones include the Cooperative Act of 1991 and the formation of the Ministry of Cooperatives, which later merged with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in 2011.

Key Statistics (as of 2016)

- Number of Active Cooperatives: 93,584
- Membership: 9,348,364 members (11.7% of the population), with 14% women and 33% youth members.
- Employment: 1,737,426 employees.
- Economic Contribution: Cooperatives contribute 2.6% to the Gross Value Added (GVA) of Iran, with over 92% of this contribution coming from non-financial cooperatives.

Sectoral Distribution

- The largest sectors by cooperative presence include the agriculture and food industry (22,186 cooperatives), construction (9,895 cooperatives), and other services (29,008 cooperatives).
- Employment is concentrated in construction (359,628 employees), agriculture and food industry (228,352 employees), and other services (588,983 employees).

Key Cooperative Organizations

- Iran Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC): The apex body representing cooperatives domestically and internationally.
- Central Organization for Rural Cooperatives (CORC): Established in 1963 to promote rural cooperatives.
- Pishgaman Cooperative Union (PCU): A multi-stakeholder cooperative focusing on IT and telecommunications.
- Taavon Insurance Company (TIC): The first cooperative insurance provider in Iran.
- Central Union Of Rural And Agricultural Cooperatives of Iran (CURACI): CURACI was established in 1990. now with 5,000,000 members and covers the trade and agriculture cooperatives.

Modern Trends

- Since 2008, cooperatives in Iran can register online, enhancing accessibility and transparency.
- The introduction of a satellite account for cooperatives by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) in 2011 enables more accurate economic assessments.
- In 2020, the government and CORC launched the Seed Agricultural Cooperative of the Capital to boost the quantity and quality of seeds in agricultural cooperatives. The Central organization for rural cooperative (CORC) also announced the development of a National Union of Rural Women Cooperatives.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the cooperative movement in Iran faces challenges such as limited financial resources and modernization needs, its integration into the national economic framework provides a robust platform for growth. Efforts to increase the cooperative economy's share to 25% underscore the government's commitment to this sector.

Conclusion

Iran's cooperative movement illustrates a blend of tradition and innovation, offering significant contributions to the economy and rural development. Its strong institutional backing and diverse sectoral presence make it a vital component of the country's socio-economic fabric.

*Source ICA website, may be vary

Thank you for reading!

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