



INTERNATIONAL
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ALLIANCE

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Message from the International Co-operative Alliance

“Society and Co-operatives: Concern for Community”

Co-operatives are enterprises that operate under the values of solidarity and social responsibility – they care about their members and their communities. As market leaders or simply responding to the needs of a small local community, co-operatives demonstrate on a daily basis their concern for people whether it be by addressing environmental issues or strengthening the capacities of their communities to better cater to economic, social or cultural needs.

Societies around the world are increasingly confronted with rampant unemployment, environmental degradation, and the need to focus on economic realities and needs at the expense of human values. Co-operatives provide the human face of development. As such they contribute to addressing many of society’s most pressing issues by putting in practice the newest of the seven co-operative principles – concern for community. Co-operatives have a special responsibility to ensure that the development of their communities is sustained.

Ethics and caring for people have guided co-operatives during their over 100 years of existence. Co-operatives concretely contribute to making our society more just and more respectful of human values. Housing co-operatives are physically building communities; they provide people of all income brackets quality housing that in many cases are built with environment-friendly materials. Groups marginalised by society at large also find that housing co-operatives take into consideration their specific needs – needs of single parent families, the disabled, elderly and multi-ethnic communities. Ethical co-operative banking too has become a norm in a number of countries. Co-operative members can contribute to a more just society simply by ensuring that their money is not invested in the arms trade and environmentally unsustainable activities. Environmental concerns also are widespread in consumer co-operatives in all continents as demonstrated by early programmes for recycling and waste disposal in addition to environment and health education for members and customers. Urban renewal and cultural activities are only some of the activities in which insurance co-operatives are investing to provide service to their communities, while issues of safe and healthy food are addressed by agricultural and consumer co-operatives. The building of sustainable communities is also promoted by workers’ co-operatives which create new and decent jobs.

Co-operatives are also focusing increasingly on the social needs of their members. Those that deal with health and day-care are flourishing, even the leisure needs of people are finding expression and support in co-operatives. Co-operatives are sponsoring sporting and cultural events, enhancing not only their members’ lives but all those people that a co-operative touches – its community.

However, concern for community is not limited to local communities. Co-operatives have demonstrated over and over their solidarity. They have raised funds and provided support to the victims of natural disasters in Japan and Central American countries as well as victims of terrorist acts in Kenya and the United States. Thus, the co-operative movement has reiterated its concern for the world community.

If co-operatives are able to be concerned with and have an impact on the community, it is because they are competitive and effective enterprises. Their success in the market allows them to make a difference in people’s economic, social and cultural lives. It is for this reason too that it is in the interest of governments to provide an enabling environment for the development of co-operatives. Government must respect the autonomy of co-operatives as well as understand the Co-operative Principles so that co-operatives can help people help themselves, for co-operatives can and do fulfil peoples’ dreams and aspirations for a better life.

The ICA calls on its members to demonstrate their co-operative difference by putting into practice this important 7th Co-operative Principle – “Concern for Community”!