

Feature Interview

ILO Coop Branch Chief, Hagen Henry, speaks out in favour of collaboration

In *Digest* 54 we reported on the appointment of Hagen Henry to head up the ILO's Co-operative Branch. Since the early 90s, Hagen has been consulting at a national, regional and international level with governmental and non governmental organisations, including the ILO and ICA, in Africa, Asia, Central and South America and Europe on co-operative legislation and also on co-operative policy. Hagen speaks to the *Digest* about how he came to work in the co-operative movement and how collaboration between international organisations, such as ILO and ICA, can strengthen and renew the sector.



Hagen Henry delivering a keynote address at the recent ICA Asia-Pacific Co-operative Minister's Conference

"Co-operatives are a specific form of collaboration... Ultimately, this has improved people's lives and livelihoods through collective self-help."

Hagen Henry

Digest: How did you become involved in the co-operative movement?

HH: My involvement in the co-operative movement occurred really through my teaching and research work. You could also say it was as 'a result of osmosis' since both my father and my father-in-law worked for co-operative organisations and both influenced me indirectly.

During my formal education as a magistrate, my postgraduate studies in development issues and development law, and during my work for the

German Federal Ministry of Economy for eight years, the term 'co-operative' was never used. However, in 1992 Professor Münkner, renowned co-operative expert, suggested that I study co-operative policy and legislation – I instantly accepted.

Another influential personality was the late Professor Paul Trappe, University of Basel, who wrote *Die Entwicklungsfunktion der Genossenschaften*, his well-known work on the development function of co-operatives. From 1993 until 2006, I worked as a freelance consultant on these issues in many countries and for many government and non-government organisations such as ICA and ILO.

Since 1974, I have been involved with developing countries and this has led me to think about the potential for the co-operative model of enterprise to facilitate rapid socioeconomic change. I am a member of three co-operatives – Germany's Volksbank & Raiffeisenbank, Varuboden in Finland, and Switzerland's Migros.

Digest: What does your position at the ILO involve?

HH: I became the Leader, EMP/COOP Team, ILO, in January 2007. EMP/COOP

has three staff and collaborates with a number of field specialists. In addition, it benefits from ICA and ILO sharing the one position, that of ICA Deputy Director-General Maria Elena Chavez.

I perceive co-operatives as part of the overall ILO concern, namely the Decent Work Agenda with its quantitative and qualitative aspects. Our work involves promoting all types of co-operatives as defined by *ILO Recommendation 193: Promotion of Co-operatives* (2002).

This Recommendation is a universal instrument. It addresses the governments of all Member States, their employers' and workers' as well as the co-operative organisations. Co-operatives are now re-positioned from being government-type instruments for the development of national economies (according to superseded *Recommendation 127*) to being a means in the hands of their members to further common interests in a self-help and independent manner (according to *Recommendation 193*). Emphasis shifts respectively from 'curing' or 'fighting fires' to preventing economic and social problems through co-operatives.

Feature Interview Cont.

I see the main task of the unit therefore in contributing to creating and maintaining those conditions which allow co-operatives to compete in their own right as one among many business enterprise types in the global economy and which recognise the social and political benefits that are being derived from the co-operative way of doing business in addition to the economic ones. EMP/COOP's aim is to position and strengthen co-operatives as a major type of business enterprise in the burgeoning 'social economy movement'.

The specific activities of the unit are based on solid research.

Digest: *How can the ICA and ILO help each other to improve the working lives of people around the world?*

HH: While *Recommendation 193* integrates the definition of co-operatives and the co-operative values and principles developed over the years by the ICA, it directs the ICA and ILO towards even closer collaboration than in the past.

Co-operatives are a specific form of collaboration based on a universally recognised set of co-operative values and principles. Ultimately, this has improved people's lives and livelihoods through collective self-help. Since both ICA and ILO share these principles, in 2004 they signed a Memorandum of Understanding and a Common Co-operative Agenda agreeing to collaborate in four important areas (below):

1. Policy dialogues with all stakeholders on the rationale for maintaining the co-operative enterprise model.
2. Decent work by and through co-operatives.
3. Co-operative policy and law.
4. Co-operative training and education.

Co-operatives face disadvantages in a global economy driven more and more by the requirement of large quantities of capital for the production of knowledge. There exist two major challenges.

The first consists in striking a balance between maintaining the conditions under which the advantages of people-centred enterprises, such as co-operatives, can be used in this very production vs. the harmonisation of business legislations entailing from this production pattern. The second challenge is to effectively allow for locally rooted diversity in a business world which tends to favour concentration and delocalisation.

As for my formal education, I would like to emphasise the fourth point (above). Besides providing solid co-operative specific education and training, especially in the fields of management and audit, it is of utmost importance to introduce the subject of co-operatives into the general education curricula, as required by *Recommendation No.193*.

Digest: *How might Global 300 improve the potential of co-operatives to better the working lives of men and women?*

HH: *Recommendation 193* is innovative and recognises co-operatives as a specific enterprise model to be promoted everywhere. In a global economy, economic and legal policies impact differently on developed and developing countries at the same time.

ICA and EMP/COOP will work together mainly on three points (below) so that *Global 300*, including the *Developing 300*, will serve the aim of improving livelihoods:

1. By demonstrating that co-operatives are not all small businesses active mainly in agriculture. Indeed, the co-operative form of doing business is not related to the size of the enterprise. *Global 300* will thus contribute to improving the visibility and 'brand' of co-operatives. Thus, policy dialogue—one of EMP/COOP's main areas—will be greatly furthered.
2. By demonstrating that big co-operatives, too, can be structured and can operate according to co-operative values and principles.
3. By demonstrating that co-operatives are induced, through their structural and operational features, to provide decent work (both quantitatively and qualitatively).

This will have an influence on policymakers and, thus, on the lives of many.



Hagen Henry committed to making a difference for co-operatives at the ILO