



ICA General Assembly

Climate Change: A Call for Co-operatives to play a leading role

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Dear co-operative friends,

Climate change is a reality . Countering it is a must and must be done expeditiously. Further delay in action is not only highly ill-advised but also reckless as the livelihood of billions of people in various parts of the world is at stake.

The tragedy is that decisive action is being undermined by selfishness of a few but influential countries who think that taking action on climate change will harm their economies.

However, the truth of the matter is that, it is the lack of timely action to combat climate change that is the real threat to their economies.

We wish that the vigor in mobilizing funds, sense of urgency and leadership demonstrated by the US government and the collaboration amongst the G20 members that we witnessed in addressing the financial crisis could also be directed at climate change mitigation!

As I reiterate the need for decisive action on climate change, I am very cognizant of the enormity of the undertaking especially in terms of astronomical financial resources and consensus building in a situation of deep vested interests.

I am also sure that most if not all of us at least agree on one thing - that an environmentally healthy and safe world is good for all of us.

With effective leadership, collaboration and commitment, huge amounts of funds can be raised and quickly as *where there is will, there is a way*

The co-operative movement especially through an effective ICA is capable of playing a more crucial and leading role in climate change.

As co-operators, we come from different countries and continents with competing interests and diverse views on climate change and other issues. But unlike countries and other types of organizations, we are bound together by our principles and values which have stood the test of time.

Our ethical values and altruistic behavior form the foundation of successful and sustainable human society. Co-operatives are about people and climate change is one of the biggest threats to mankind. Our response therefore starts with a people perspective.

Co-operative friends,

Climate change has struck all of us and in almost every country, we have examples of its serious consequences.

First, for about 40 years now, the African people have been facing a severe economic, political and social crisis manifested in widespread poverty, hunger, disease, and dehumanization. *(photo)*

With over 80% of the population living in rural areas with agriculture as their source of livelihood, weather is a primary concern and climate change has come to worsen an already very bad situation.

Secondly, the melting of the famed ice caps of Mt Kilimanjaro and Mt Kenya, extensive deforestation, destruction of wetlands and ecosystems, the drying of rivers and lakes, the intensifying cycles of drought and floods, the spread of malaria to highland regions as temperatures rise are clear consequences of climate change and human activity within and outside Africa. *(photo)*

Besides the fact that Africa produces only a tiny proportion of the emissions that are rapidly warming the earth and wreaking havoc on its capacity to produce adequate amounts of food, energy and sustainable water supplies, a solution must be reached by all.

Over the last three years, many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced prolonged and devastating drought resulting to the worst famine situations in decades affecting hundreds of millions of people.

In Kenya, ten million people are living in hunger and are facing starvation. Livestock, the mainstay of many pastoral communities has almost been decimated *(photo next slide)*.

Poverty in Africa that had seen some modest decline over the last decade is now again on the increase because of the global financial crisis and unless quick action is taken on climate change which has more devastating effects, will wipe all the gains made in recent years in poverty reduction.

In view of the fore-going, many people in Africa are now acutely aware of the need for speed, equity and a much more coherent approach in climate change. The continent requires new, massive and sustained financial assistance, green technology transfer, capacity for adaptation and risk management.

However, it is not just doom and gloom and we are all encouraged by the progress towards the Copenhagen forum. Africa will present a consolidated and common position in the forum and it is hoped that the continent will no longer be marginalized on issues of climate change and that concrete actions will be agreed upon.

Thanks to the “Co-operative Europe’s ACT!,” a fantastic co-operative initiative and campaign on climate change by our co-operative friends in Europe. Through their very good and timely effort, the co-operative voice will be heard in Copenhagen.

Co-operatives must be the voice of the voiceless, they must also be the voice of reason especially where selfish and narrow interests threaten to derail the reasonably good progress.

(every man for himself and God for all.....)

Fellow co-operators, we need to ask ourselves the following pertinent questions:

- what responsibilities do we have as community based and member owned organizations?
- what are we doing in climate change mitigation?
- how concerned are we?
- is it right for us to leave our destiny in this very important matter to the politicians only?

“I have always felt that a politician should be judged by the animosities he excites among his opponents”, (*Winston Churchill*)

Like the UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki - Moon said recently, “We have one planet together, our home. As people, as nations, as species, we all sit in the same boat.” So we all have a responsibility and important role to play.

The co-operative movement with nearly a billion members, through ICA should play a more strategic role in mobilization of communities up to the grass-root level for a strong voice and action on climate change issues.

This is why I challenge co-operators of the world, both at local and international levels, to rise up to the occasion and show better leadership in this extremely important crisis facing mankind. The ICA global network should serve to demonstrate the overriding interdependence of all peoples and nations.

This friends, is the gist of my short presentation!

In matters of environment and climate change, co-operatives in Africa are embarrassingly silent, yet they should be in the fore-front because of their appropriate institutional framework. I will therefore deal with examples from other developing countries and also some from the developed world to demonstrate how co-operatives are responding to climate change. There are interesting examples especially from financial co-operatives:- banks and co-operative and mutual insurers.

Last month 1st- 3rd October, the International Co-operative and Mutual Insurance Federation (ICMIF), a member of ICA family, held its Biannual conference in Toronto-Canada which was attended by nearly 300 delegates from all continents. During the conference a report on “Sustainability for Mutual and Co-operative Insurers” was presented and launched.

ICMIF members’ values align strongly with the objectives of sustainability; that co-operative and mutual insurers have a crucial role to play in addressing current and future socio-economic and environmental challenges.

The report is a collection of case studies of sustainability initiatives undertaken by selected ICMIF vanguards to raise awareness, inspire, guide and encourage other members from all over the world to develop their own sustainability programmes.

The ICMIF members mentioned in this report are; The Co-operators (Canada), Desjardins Financial Security, (Canada), Co-op Seguros (Dominican Republic), Tapiola (Finland), AG2R (France), Maif (France), Macif (France), SNS REAAL (Netherlands), Folksam (Sweden) and the Co-operative Financial Services (UK).

The ICMIF sustainability report takes a perspective that goes beyond environment concerns. It recognizes a much wider “environment” which takes into account other socio-economic challenges.

In particular, it recognizes that access to affordable insurance services is essential for economic stability and security.

It also emphasizes the important role played by mutual/co-operative insurers in providing appropriate and affordable insurance to large segments of the poor who are excluded by the rest of the market.

Some are offering innovative protection solutions like Weather Index –based insurance for agriculture which is connecting well with environmental care.

Being concerned and knowing how some of our progressive co-operatives are responding is not enough. We must act.

“I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do.” (*Leonardo Da Vinci*)

It is in this respect, dear co-operative friends that I think ICA and the co-operative movement at large should play an important and leading role. This is because they are broad-based and cut across many sectors and can therefore be used as a platform for action and networking.

Co-operatives can influence the members and community to take up measures for mitigating the effects of climate change. Empowered with awareness and the right tools, co-operatives and their members can achieve a lot in climate change. This has been effectively demonstrated by the Co-operative Europe’s ACT! Project.

In supporting ACT!, the Environment Manager of Midcounties Co-operative (UK) Mike Pickering explained-

“ACT!(ADDRESSING the CLIMATE THREAT) is a fantastic co-operative campaign.

Firstly, the use of the word “threat” makes the campaign’s urgency apparent and highlights the importance of taking action and joining in.

Secondly, the campaign not only allows your voice to be heard at the highest level but it also encourages you to make a difference in your own life in reducing carbon emissions. The ACT! Campaign achieves the twin goals at a simple level, allowing all co-operators to get involved and make a difference.” This is the advantage of the co-operative structure and model.

Let me give a few examples of areas where I think co-operatives can play an important role in adaptation and mitigation measures in Africa and other developing countries;

Water is a necessity for life. Drinking water needs to be clean. People spend a lot of energy to clean the water mainly by boiling it. To boil water fossil fuel is used.

In Kenya, a new technical innovation known as Solvaten which using the sun in the water cleaning process has been tested and has shown good results in reducing use of fossil fuel and at the same time reducing carbon emissions. This is a simple tool the size and shape of a small suit-case.

Another example is in a dry province in the northwest of China where 17,000 solar cookers are produced and sold at a reduced price to the poor rural population. The distribution of solar cookers allows the rural population to give up cooking with climate-

damaging coal, and to efficiently use affordable energy. Every year about 35,000 tons of CO₂ emissions will be saved. In addition, this project promotes and increases the consciousness for climate protection among the villagers.

In Nepal, in order to protect the local ecosystems, 7,500 small biogas plants are being constructed and installed for farmers and their families. These biogas plants reduce the demand for non-sustainable firewood and thus diminish CO₂ emissions as a consequence of deforestation.

The project includes a comprehensive concept for the rural development and improvement of the local living conditions.

In India, several new biomass gasification plants for electrical generation are being implemented. Many rural communities in India have no established power supply. In such regions, biological waste from agriculture is recycled for production of clean electricity. This can be replicated on massive scale using co-operatives among rural populations in developing countries.

In India, IFFCO TOKIO a co-operative insurer, is offering innovative microinsurance protection solutions like Weather Index based insurance for agriculture which is promoting better agricultural practices and environmental care.

In Kenya, the World Bank is carrying out a pilot project for carbon credit with a coffee farmers' co-operative society to promote environmentally friendly agricultural practices.

This involves inter-cropping coffee and indigenous trees and use of manure instead of chemical fertilizers. If the pilot is successful it will be replicated to cover larger area and other crops.

Dear Cooperative Colleagues;

I strongly believe that ICA could become the focal point for clean technologies using renewable and sustainable energies. It could act as a resource centre and improve accessibility of these technologies to many of its members who may otherwise not even be aware about them.

In a suburb outside of Cochabamba in Bolivia, a group of women are developing their own housing cooperative. They intend to use sun collectors for heating water and would be happy to learn from other cooperatives with experience in this area. This demonstrates the need for information resource and sharing facilities.

If it becomes known that ICA, representing 232 member organizations (and many other co-operatives indirectly) operating in all types of sectors and from 89 countries is providing such services on behalf of its membership, this will attract the interest of many external agencies seeking for collaboration.

For example, the World Bank's Clean Technology Fund could be channeled through the co-operative network. An amount to the tune of \$1.1 billion is ear-marked for Africa to facilitate investments in clean energy and building climate resilience.

Co-operatives should operationalise effectively the 5th Principle of Education, Training and Information in creation and promotion of awareness in climate change. In creation of awareness and education of members, a good example to learn from is the Co-operators Group in Canada and their collaboration with The Natural Step.

The Natural Step, an organization in Canada, has developed an e-learning tool which is being used in all parts of the world. It can be used individually but also in groups and can easily be adopted. Nissan, the car manufacturer of Japan adopted it and have used it in training of 20,000 of their employees.

Again, many co-operators may find it difficult and perhaps too expensive to obtain such an e-learning tool. ICA could arrange for a global license and provide such service to its membership. As a movement we provide a wide range of services to our membership and generally have a good track record.

Thanks to our size, and with the involvement of so many dedicated people that work together in co-operatives we could become a strong agent for finding and implementing remedies to the climate change threat and the global objective for a more sustainable world.

Fellow co-operators, I wish to conclude by saying that what we do today about the threat of climate change will in large measure determine our sustainability. Our task is not to accept change passively or be followers, but to lead the change and manage it creatively. For the health of our enterprises, for the good of the societies we serve, and for the well-being of the future generations, we really can do no less.

Failure to achieve this will be a serious indictment on our part and posterity will judge us harshly.

“I have offended God and mankind because my work didn’t reach the quality I should have.” (*Leonardo Da Vinci*)

Thank you and remember “we are better together”