



Message from the ICA-Americas President, 2005

Since I assumed the presidency in 2002, our task has been to promote and strengthen integration processes in our continent, both economic and among both trade sectors. With an adequate integration from the start, we will be able to plan priorities and actions more coherently and hence better influence public policies in our countries.

Work with members of the Consultative Council has been intensive, maintaining the discipline of meeting at least once every quarter and a work agenda aimed at improving ICA's action in the region. Parallel to the Consultative Council meetings, seminars have been held at each venue on themes that help consolidate integration and the improved business performance of cooperatives in the region.

Under this same reasoning, as of the Regional Conference of October 2003 in San Juan, Puerto Rico, we began making contact with parliamentarians all over the continent to engage them with the cooperative movement. The III Parliamentarians Meeting took place on July, 2005 in Mexico. This activity was held jointly with the Parliamentarian Commission of Cooperatives Promotion and Social Economy of the Mexican Parliament, with the participation of 34 legislators from eleven countries of the region. One outcome was the formation of the Permanent Commissions of Legislators, which will take charge of following up on agreements and planning and coordinating the organization of upcoming meetings.

Holding these meetings has enabled us to reinforce advocacy and integration actions that the American cooperative movement is deploying in the political sphere. It is important to stress that the goal of these meetings is for the region's cooperative movement to have a bloc of legislators who champion cooperativist ideals, supporting and defending actions for the promotion of cooperativism in the region.

The work carried out by the Program to Strengthen Advocacy for the Cooperative Movement of the Americas in the Regional Integration Processes (PRICA) has integrated national cooperativist movements while making it possible to share experiences at hemispheric fora. The intensive advocacy effort has injected opportunities into the different hemispheric events organized by civil society and the 4th Summit of the Americas. It was there that the necessary support and consensus were obtained for the inclusion of cooperativism in the Declaration of Mar del Plata.

2005 was a special year for the cooperative movement of our region. For the first time in the history of ICA a World Assembly was held in a Latin American city: Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. Our region hosted more than 1400 cooperativists from all over the world, scoring new records in attendance and revenues.

The General Assembly was historic not only because the venue was in our region, but because of the representation obtained in Board elections. For the first time, five of our candidates were elected to the Board, with the Americas achieving the same representation as Europe. Moreover, the Youth representative to the Board also comes from this region, specifically Colombia.

The great responsibility now is responding to the trust deposited in us through our work to strengthen and develop the ICA as an organization representing the global cooperative movement.

It should also be noted that at year end the Board began discussing the need to improve the organization's governance, intensify regionalization and thus effect the changes considered necessary in its structure. This will permit strengthening at the local level, granting greater decision-making power to regional governing bodies while maintaining a global organization with greater force. The definition of functions and responsibilities at all levels, as well as strategic planning, is vitally important in this process of change.

It is essential to strengthen ICA and its regionalization during 2006. A restructured and stronger Alliance will make it easier to tackle the regional and global challenges that face us.

Carlos Palacino Antía
President of ICA Americas



Message from the ICA-Americas Regional Director

2005 was the first year of executing the 2005-2008 Strategic Plan approved by the ICA Americas Regional Assembly in Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 2004.

The initial months were dedicated to formulating the corresponding Operating Plan, timetables and budgets for the same period, which were approved at the March meeting of the Regional Council in Mexico City. It was not possible to carry out the entire operating plan, however, because so few resources were contributed to the Fund for the Strategic Plan's implementation approved by the Assembly in 2004.

With respect to projects, this year saw the conclusion of the "Advocacy and Cooperative Development" project funded by the Swedish Cooperative Centre (SCC) since January 2004. The focus was on the work of second- and third-degree cooperative organizations in relation to governments. In the final months of the year, a new cooperation proposal was presented to the SCC, aimed at strengthening cooperative organizations in the Social Economy of the region. This initiative was approved for the 2006-2008 period.

The Network of Sustainable Forestry Development for the Americas, a project funded by SOCODEVI, ended after five years of action to improve living conditions for cooperativist populations directly and indirectly involved with forest.

In addition to the projects, the work of the Regional American Women's Committee (CRAMC) and the Youth Sector was advanced through the Regional Office, which provided the necessary coordination and logistical support for the strengthening and development of these two crosscutting themes that are so important in our cooperative activity.

In the area of communications, this year we were give a significant boost to the dissemination of cooperativist endeavors. Subscriptions to the bulletins have increased, as has the quantity of informational publications prepared by the office and the different projects.

Concerning the projects offices, ICA Americas and the Bolivia Office, in particular, are considered to have the experience and professional capacity to compete and be selected in contracting processes. For this reason, it was recommended that the Bolivia Office be maintained, although it needs to concretize negotiations leading to self-sustainability. The Regional Office of ICA Americas will continue to provide monitoring and follow-up support for this purpose. Elsewhere, the Board of the ICA made the difficult decision to close the Buenos Aires office, which will cease to function as of 2006.

It should be noted that the Regional Conference was not held this year because the ICA General Assembly was celebrated in our region, Office staff worked on dissemination and logistics for the activity in Cartagena, Colombia.

Advocacy and strengthening of the position of the cooperative movement in other fora this year resulted in ICA's prominent presence at the Civil Society Forum and 4th Summit of the Americas, as well as important legislator participation at the III Parliamentarians Meeting.

On behalf of the Regional Office of ICA Americas, I would like to express our deepest appreciation to member organizations, cooperative organizations and cooperativists for their support and trust during the implementation of activities this year. We hope to make further strides on behalf of the cooperative movement in the Americas in 2006.

Manuel Marino
ICA-Americas
Regional Director



REPORT OF THE ICA-AMERICAS REGIONAL OFFICE 2005 PERIOD

SITUATION OF THE REGIONAL OFFICE

During 2005, staff on payroll consisted of six people: the Regional Director, project officer, assistant (also in charge of Membership), accountant, messenger/general services and person providing cleaning and miscellaneous support. As in previous years, there were two half-time consultants, one charged with the Regional Committee of Financial Cooperatives and support for the PRICA Project; and another with the Regional Committee of Women Cooperativists, Network for Human Development and organization of the Youth Meeting of the ICA General Assembly, as well as a full-time consultant for the PRICA PROJECT and a person working three-quarters, in charge of the Communications Center.

This year all of the accounting software functions were used to obtain financial reports rapidly, providing up-to-date information for each meeting of the Consultative Council. Details on all accounting areas can now be obtained just days after the monthly closing, facilitating the generation of reports for Council members.

The Office's financial liquidity improved considerably, showing a much higher balance than forecast in the budget. However, the debt with the Geneva Office remains unresolved, a problem that pre-dates October 2001, when the current Regional Director took office. This poses a serious difficulty when financial statements are analyzed by third parties, and it is urgent that this matter be settled at the world ICA level as soon as possible.

At year end computer equipment was acquired and the meeting room outfitted with adequate furnishings.

This year the ICA General Assembly was held rather than the regional conference, and for the first time the venue was in this region, in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia.

Communication and Information efforts focused on website maintenance and transfer to a different purveyor, along with dissemination of cooperative information. Planning for a new website design began at the end of the year.

Additional efforts centered on database expansion with the incorporation of new addresses on the different mailing lists. Requests increased for subscriptions to the electronic bulletin ACIAMERICAS.COOP - "Promoting cooperative information." Twelve issues were edited, posted on the website and distributed to members, other cooperatives in the region, international donor organizations and others.

The Spanish-language informational brochure was updated, reprinted, and translated into English; and the report on work in 2004 was prepared (in Spanish).

The Communication Area provided distribution and dissemination support in relation to the World Assembly held this year in Cartagena, collaborating with the ICA communications team during the event.

Eleven bulletins on the PRICA Project were prepared and distributed up to March 2005, with coordination to set up and launch systems for the project forums.



Members and other cooperative organizations and institutions connected with cooperativism have appreciated the communication actions undertaken during this period, as they were informed about the activities of ICA and other cooperative organizations and could access various types of documents.

Political Representation Activities of ICA-Americas

During 2005, the Regional Office and its authorities represented ICA Americas at different activities related to the cooperative movement, mostly in the region. The most important were the following:

With a delegation of the Basque Government of Spain, participation January 24-27 in a visit to the Dominican Republic to define possible areas of cooperation between the Basque Government and the country's cooperative movement. A cooperation agreement was signed between IDECOOP and the Spanish representatives; ICA Americas will provide some technical advising.

- Visit in February to Colombia for coordination of the ICA General Assembly and functions under the responsibility of the Regional Office
- In March, official invitation to attend the inauguration of the new government in Uruguay
- March 14-16, participation in the 2nd Meeting on Central American – Andalusian Social Economy, in El Salvador, at which ICA Americas gave a presentation entitled, “Nature, Fundamentals and Importance of the Social Economy in the Region”
 March 20-23, participation in the Caja Popular Mexicana Assembly and Seminar in León, Mexico, with a lecture on “Cooperatives: Their Contribution to Economic Development”
 At the end of the month, participation in the “2nd Session of Cooperative Opinion” (*Segunda Jornada de Opinión Cooperativa*) in San Andrés, Colombia, organized by Asociación Colombiana de Cooperativas (ASCOOP), to speak on “Markets, Technology and Associativism”
- At the start of June, the ICA Americas Consultative Council attended the Assembly of SOCODEVI in Quebec, Canada
 June 9-12: ICA America was invited to participate in the Seminar/Workshop “Consolidation of the Cooperative Law Project,” organized by CONFENACOO in Lima, Peru. ICA Americas gave a presentation entitled “Cooperative Supervision in Latin America; Experiences, Problems and Challenges”
 June 22-25: participation in the 2nd Meeting of MERCOSUR Cooperatives, an event organized by RECM in Encarnación, Paraguay, as part of the “Border Meetings” (*Encuentros de Frontera*). ICA Americas spoke on “Public Policies, Advocacy and Cooperativism.”
- During July, participation in the 6th International Conference, “Value Added of Savings and Loan Cooperatives,” organized by FEDECECES, El Salvador
 Also, participation in the Congress of the Confederation of Diverse Activities in Mexico, organized in celebration of the 3rd Legislators Meeting, Mexico City
- In September, participation in the Regional Forum with Civil Society: “Creating Jobs to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance,” Buenos Aires, Argentina. ICA Americas attended to advocate for the inclusion of cooperativism in the Declaration of the Summit of Presidents at Mar de Plata, in November.
- October 17-20: presentation at the 2nd MERCOSUR Congress: “Cooperative Training, Promotion and Education”, in Misiones, Argentina, entitled “Cooperative Sector Advocacy in Public Policy Making”



- At the beginning of November, the Regional Director and Delegate of Argentina in the Regional Council and COOPERAR president represented ICA Americas at the 4th Summit of the Americas, whose slogan was “Creating Jobs to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance,” ultimately succeeding in having the theme of cooperativism included in the Declaration of Mar del Plata.
November 24-26: Participation in the Bi-regional European Union-MERCOSUR Parliamentarian Seminar on Social Economy and Cooperatives, held in Uruguay
- In early December and marking the Regional Council meeting in Washington, D.C., ICA America gave a presentation on its work in the region at a meeting with the Inter-American Development Bank
Also, participation in the Seminar/Workshop “Cooperative Integration, NAFTA and its Impact in Mexico,” organized by ICA member organizations of Mexico.

Meetings of Directing Bodies

During 2005, the ICA Americas Consultative Council held meetings in four different countries of the region: in Mexico for the first meeting on March 11th ; in Ottawa, Canada, for the second on June 2nd ; in Cartagena, Colombia, on September 20th , in the framework of the ICA World Assembly, and the last in Washington, D.C., USA, on December 2nd .

At the same time, and taking advantage of the Consultative Council meetings, two seminars were given on different themes: in Mexico these included the Model of National Cooperative Integration, the Model of Financial Cooperative Integration, and the Situation of Cooperativism in Mexico; Vision and Perspectives on the Cooperative Movement in America, and Vision and Outlooks of the Global Cooperative Movement.

In Canada seminar themes were: Vision and Changes in the Cooperative Movement in America; the Role/Function of ICA Americas; the Canadian Cooperative Movement; Cooperatives in the Health Sector; Canada and Experiences in the Development of International Cooperativism in Canada. In Washington, D.C., instead of a seminar a meeting was held with representatives of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). At the meeting, the Regional Director gave a presentation on the ICA and its work in the region, Council members set out the situation of the cooperative movement in its countries and IDB representatives explained lines of financing available to the cooperative movement.

The Executive Committee and Finance Committee met in Mexico during March, prior to the Regional Council meeting.

In his capacity as ICA Vice-President, the president of ICA Americas participated in two of the meetings of the Board held in New Lanark, Scotland, on May 17-19, and in Cartagena, September 22-23. The Regional Director participated in the Cartagena meeting and in the last meeting of the ICA Board, in Geneva, Switzerland, December 6-7. As part of that event, a working meeting on regionalization was held December 4-5, attended by representatives of the Sectoral Committees as well as Council members.



RELATION WITH COOPERATION AGENCIES AND OTHER NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

International Organizations

In 2005 several international cooperation agencies gave their support to ICA Americas to continue executing projects and activities initiated in previous years, with the same objective of strengthening collaboration between the regional cooperative movement and ICA Americas.

Some of the organizations supporting the development projects and activities carried out by ICA Americas are listed below:

- The Swedish Co-operative Centre (SCC) funded the project, "Cooperative Advocacy and Development"
- The Society for Cooperation for International Development (SOCODEVI) supported the Program to Strengthen Advocacy for the Cooperative Movement of the Americas in Regional Integration Processes (PRICA)

In addition, SOCODEVI supported the PRICA seminar, "*Free Trade: A Challenge for Cooperative Businesses and Integration in America*," held September at the ICA General Assembly in Cartagena de Indias.

Efforts have continually focused on strengthening relations with international cooperation agencies with which ICA has worked for years.

During this year, there was direct contact with the Inter-American Development Bank and the Central American Economic Integration Bank.

A relation of mutual collaboration has been maintained with the International Labour Organization (ILO). On September 8-9, ICA Americas participated in the activity, "Promotion for the Generation of More and Better Jobs through Cooperatives," organized by the Mexican Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare in coordination with the Mexico ILO office. On that occasion, ICA Americas participated as speaker and facilitator at a workshop/conference on ILO Recommendation 193. The objective was to promote the Recommendation as an advocacy tool for public policy benefiting cooperatives.

Member Organizations

One of the most important issues for the cooperative movement in 2005 were the proposed changes in International Accounting Standards, including IAS 32.

ICA carried out intensive lobbying to have the special characteristics of cooperatives taken into consideration, stressing the meaning of the "cooperative act" and the reason for being of these organizations. ICA Americas asked regional cooperative organizations to make a statement to support the position of the world cooperative movement. Furthermore, in November ICA Americas and COOPERAR (Argentina) organized a seminar on the impact of IAS 32 for the cooperative movement. Participation of top representatives of the Latin American cooperative movement was strong at the event, which concluded with the writing of a final Declaration that ICA America's Regional Council supported and approved at its December 2nd meeting in Washington, D.C.



The issue of bilateral or sub-regional free trade treaties, and especially the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) continued to be a topic of discussion and negotiation in almost all of the countries. Central America, in particular, became a center of attention on the continent as the legislatures of several signatory countries approved a free trade treaty with the United States.

The 4th Summit of the Americas, whose slogan was "Creating jobs to fight poverty and strengthen democratic governance," was unable to reach a consensus on the FTAA, and therefore was not included in the final Declaration.

After a great deal of lobbying, ICA Americas' work within the framework of the PRICA Project this year ultimately led to a mention of cooperatives in the final Declaration.

Elsewhere, economic and political crises in some countries of the region continued to make it difficult for many cooperative organizations to pay their ICA membership subscriptions, as was the case of Haiti and Uruguay, for example.

Despite the difficulties faced by much of the cooperative movement in 2005, its participation in the ICA World Assembly in Colombia was strong, and cooperativism displayed force and dynamism in national economies. A positive environment was created in Cartagena, underscoring once again that cooperatives form part of a global movement tackling common problems in all of the corners of the world, and teamwork, consensus and cooperation is the response ICA has always promoted.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the fact by sending their representatives to participate actively and proactively in all of the workshops, seminars and conferences convened by the organization, the cooperative organizations supported ICA Americas' work in the region.

PROJECTS

Advocacy and Cooperative Development

The main object of the Advocacy and Cooperative Development project was to strengthen the influencing capacity of cooperatives and take advantage of political, social and economic fora at the national and international level.

This project, which was launched in 2004 and concluded this year, encompassed three components: Advocacy, Micro Credit and Associated Work.

Advocacy

With the activities carried out during this year, those participating have reinforced their knowledge about public policy and political, social and economic advocacy. At the same time, many cooperative organizations were made aware of the importance of pushing ILO Recommendation 193 as a tool for negotiation with State agencies.

Five advocacy plans were prepared this year as part of trainer seminars in Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Paraguay and Mexico. The seminar in Paraguay was organized in collaboration with CRAMC and aimed only at women. In Mexico, organizations there followed up and held a new activity in December to promote the integration of Mexican cooperativism.



In addition, at the request of cooperative organizations in Honduras, Ecuador and El Salvador workshops were held to formulate advocacy plans. The Ecuador workshop focused on addressing specific difficulties in drafting a financial law to regulate the different organizations in this area. The issues for Honduras and El Salvador concerned integration of cooperatives in those countries.

In Bolivia, negotiations continued for passage of the law on self-help cooperative housing, as set out in the advocacy plan formulated in the previous year, but the nation's political and social problems affected the approval process already begun in congress. PROCASHA, which is spearheading the process, considers that once the new government is installed negotiation of the law's approval can be reinitiated.

This component also involved support for Red Especializada de Cooperativas del MERCOSUR ("Specialized Network of Cooperatives in MERCOSUR") to hold three Border Meetings in Concordia, Argentina; Encarnación, Paraguay; and Porto Alegre, Brazil; with the participation of cooperatives from Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil.

The project has contributed to improving the proposal and response capacity of cooperative members. Thanks to this year's workshops, 72 cooperativists were trained as advocacy trainers so that they can reproduce the workshops and formulate advocacy plans, with supervision and follow-up support from ICA Americas to ensure they achieve their respective objectives in this area.

Micro Credit

Training of selected cooperatives continued in 2005, following the criteria and eligibility requirements applied during 2004 in savings and credit cooperatives as executors of micro credit programs.

The micro business training program developed in the support guides and technical handbooks for trainers covered such themes as business control, organization, planning, company growth and administrative processes. Emphasis was also on the micro credit regulations and micro lending procedures manual, as support for micro and small businesses in cooperatives chosen for this process in Costa Rica, Bolivia, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico.

Associated Work

Support was provided for an exchange between COOPESILENCIO, in Costa Rica, and RECUPERAR, in Colombia, to share the latter's experience in treatment of residues.

In addition, the network of recycling cooperatives (Red de Cooperativas de Recuperadores de Residuos) connected with the Institute for the Mobilization of Cooperative Funds (Instituto de Movilización de Fondos Cooperativos-IMFC) received support to design a development plan aimed at improving revenues and profitability in the sorting process used in recovering residues.

Due to the problems of this sector and in existing legislation, it was not possible to achieve the integration of associated work cooperatives in any country, which was the project's objective.

295 people participated directly in the activities of the three components, 130 (44%) women and 165 (56%) men.



Program to Strengthen Advocacy for the Cooperative Movement of the Americas in Regional Integration Processes (PRICA)

2005 was the second year of the PRICA Project, which is funded by SOCODEVI and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The objective is to strengthen advocacy for the cooperative movement in regional economic integration processes, in twelve countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

Activities during the period were aimed at improving levels of information about the problems and challenges of trade opening processes and free trade treaties in the region, and to broaden knowledge about integration processes planned for the future.

Thanks to this large-scale advocacy effort and subsequent presence at various hemispheric events organized by civil society and at the 4th Summit of the Americas, it was possible to generate the necessary support and consensus for inclusion of cooperativism in the Declaration of Mar del Plata (item 52 in the section pertaining to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises as a force for growth in employment):

“52. We are committed to the fight against poverty and inequality and we recognize the contribution to the economy and to the creation of decent work by productive organizations, in accordance with each nation's characteristics, such as cooperatives and other production units.”

Elsewhere, during 2005 twelve national committees were formed, and ten of these implemented their communication strategies.

By December of this year, national studies and seminars contemplated in the program had been conducted in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Paraguay and Uruguay; those for Brazil, Guatemala and Mexico remained pending.

As part of the communication strategy, 10 bulletins with the main conclusions of the national studies were written and disseminated, an electronic forum was set up on the PRICA website and press conferences were held on the concerted positions of Bolivia, El Salvador, Paraguay, Dominican Republic and Uruguay on the free trade treaty.

A seminar was held at the hemispheric level, entitled “Free Trade: A Challenge for Cooperative Enterprises and Integration in America.” The seminar took place in September in the frame of the ICA World Assembly in Cartagena de Indias. The purpose of the activity was to identify the challenges and problems of integration processes. More than 500 cooperativist representatives from the region listened to the country positions adopted after making the studies and reaching consensus on the issue, as well as the problems and challenges each country was facing at that moment.

It is worth emphasizing that as part of the project activities, some countries have included regional integration in the agendas of their national cooperative congresses since they already have the technical studies giving a fairly clear panorama of the cooperative situation and economic environment. They have also improved their capacity to influence government policies, even making public statements and press bulletins on the meaning of cooperativism. These actions were complemented with presentations in the legislative bodies.



OTHER ACTIVITIES

Coordination of the Regional Committee of Financial Cooperatives of the Americas

The Regional Committee of Financial Cooperatives met in March with the participation of representatives from Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico and Canada. The purpose of this meeting concerned the technical contents of the proposed strategic plan with respect to mission, vision, strengths, opportunities and weaknesses. Also submitted was a macro analysis, prepared by a consultant, serving as the foundation for the plan's SWOT analysis.

The final version of the document was charged to the ICA Americas Regional Office and the representative of Coopemex of Costa Rica, and then sent to Committee members for their review and approval.

The Regional Committee met on the occasion of the ICA World Assembly in Cartagena, and was also attended by the President of the World Banking Committee.

American Regional Women Cooperativists Committee (*Comité Regional Americano de Mujeres Cooperativistas* - CRAMC)

In 2005 a program was promoted in the countries of the Americas concerning seminars entitled, "Gender Equity in our American Situations," in which information was gathered and analyzed regarding the specific conditions and advances in gender equity in the cooperative movement as input for decision making to promote this theme within the cooperative movement. The seminars are also designed to disseminate CRAMC's role as an organization uniting women cooperativists within the structure of ICA Americas. They were held in the frame of the ICA Americas Consultative Council meetings in Canada and Mexico and meetings with cooperative organizations in Paraguay and Argentina.

Promotion and dissemination continued for the proposal on Gender Equity Certification presented during the 12th Regional Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in November, 2004. ICA Americas and the Committee consider this proposal an important mechanism enabling cooperativism to apply and identify measures for gender equity, as well as objectively measure progress.

CRAMC consolidated its organizational condition, holding four meetings of the Board of Directors, also within the framework of the Consultative Councils, and participated in the world meetings convoked by the World Gender Equity Committee in Geneva and during the World Assembly in Cartagena.

Network for Human Resource Development

The Network for Human Resource Development maintained its dynamism, essentially through the Internet. Information was provided on activities, strategies and projects related to cooperative education being carried out in the American region. The objective is to promote activities in the educational sphere, share and give feedback on actions that can be used as models among the organizations.

Work has also been carried out on the proposal for a platform that would fuel and foster education cooperatives. The cooperative model would be the crosscutting theme in developing the content, methodology and administrative structure of the educational centers, comprised of parents, teachers and even students.



Participation and support were coordinated to develop a portal called the “Virtual Center of Cooperative Learning” (a global ICA project) and construct a Spanish version with the support of ICA Americas and network participants. This would also be a vehicle for contributing information and collaboration through the Internet as a resource for cooperatives, cooperative educators and researchers, and a means to consolidate the cooperative model.

ICA General Assembly

2005 was the first year a General Assembly of the ICA was held on the American continent. In 110 years of history, Colombia became the first Latin American country to host a World Assembly.

More than 1400 cooperativists from all over the world congregated at the Assembly for an extensive program of meetings, seminars and thematic forums. The main theme bringing cooperativists together in Cartagena was “Cooperative Values; A Competitive Advantage in a Global Economy,” part of the ICA campaign to eradicate poverty, one of the United Nations Millennium Goals.

Among its activities, the Youth Meeting held elections to select a new representative to the ICA Board. On this occasion a Colombian activist was chosen as representative.

As a result of Assembly elections, ICA Americas obtained five new representatives to the Board: the delegates of Canada, the United States, Mexico, Paraguay and Brazil

While the Regional Conference was not held this year because of the General Assembly, the Regional Office collaborated in convocation of the Assembly and office staff supported logistics during the actual activity.

Youth Meeting and Cooperative Youth Network

In the framework of the September ICA World Assembly in Cartagena, the Regional Office coordinated activities and prepared materials for the Youth Meeting. Attending were 92 persons aged 15 to 35, from thirteen countries: Colombia, Great Britain, Canada, France, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Portugal, Peru, Russia, South Africa, the United States and Brazil.

In addition to selecting the Youth delegate to the ICA Board, participants decided to continue the exchange of information among youth organizations directly or indirectly related to cooperativism, and execute activities for actions that benefit and consolidate cooperativist youth. These include the 3rd Youth Meeting to take place in Lima, Peru, at the next ICA Americas Regional Conference in 2006.

Cooperativist youth groups in Colombia and Argentina were contacted and experiences gathered for the Institute of Cooperative Studies in Colombia. These were published in a book presented during the Youth Meeting in Cartagena.

Also, to establish more permanent activities aimed at Youth, it was proposed that a platform be created to foster and develop youth volunteer programs facilitating the incorporation of youth in the cooperative movement through formation, recreation and business management activities.

III Parliamentarians Meeting

The 3rd Meeting of Legislators of America was celebrated on July 14 and 15, with the participation of 34 legislators from 11 countries of America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras,



Mexico, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic). This event was sponsored by the Regional Office for the Americas, with extremely important support from the Mexican legislature's Commission for the Promotion of Cooperatives and the Social Economy.

For two days the legislators shared visions and experiences about the development of the cooperative sector in the region, and took stock of results since the 2nd Meeting of Legislators held the year before in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

A document presenting each of the topics was prepared for the 3rd Meeting, facilitating the development of the themes proposed for the four panels:

- Prevailing trends in cooperative legislation at the continental level and their debate in national legislatures
- The cooperative movement in the American Continent, public policy and ILO Recommendation 193 on the promotion of cooperatives
- Cooperativism and local development
- Cooperative Tributary Regimen: a policy aimed at promoting cooperativism in America

A final declaration was drafted based on conclusions generated at each of the working panels, and signed by all of the participating legislators. The document recognizes cooperatives as an essential instrument for economic and social development, and expresses the need for all governments to have or strengthen agencies specializing in oversight and control of cooperative entities, with technical capacity and sufficient human and economic resources for adequately fulfilling their responsibilities.

The Permanent Commission of Legislators was also formed at this meeting, in charge of agreements made and to plan and coordinate the organization of upcoming meetings. The commission was comprised of one person each, representing legislators from Paraguay, Costa Rica, Colombia and Mexico, along with the ICA Americas Regional Director.

Workshop: Impact of IAS 32 on Cooperatives

An international seminar was held November 21-22 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, entitled, "Impact of the New International Accounting Standards on Cooperatives," in coordination with COOPERAR. The event took place in the Department of Economic Sciences at Universidad de Buenos Aires and was attended by representatives of organizations from Honduras, Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.

The program included several presentations on the theme, including one on the nature of International Accounting Standard 32 by a specialist from the Commission on Scientific and Technical Studies of the Federación Argentina de Consejos Profesionales de Ciencias Económicas. In addition, specialists on cooperative law presented an analysis from the juridical perspective.

As a result of the presentations and group work, a Declaration was signed on IAS 32, later approved and endorsed by the ICA Americas Consultative Council. The Declaration and other documents were sent to the working group on this issue formed by ICA at the world level.



International Seminar, “Cooperative management based on emotional intelligence: generating successful work teams and strategies

On November 23, ICA Americas held an international seminar on how to generate successful work teams and strategies.

Themes addressed in this activity focused mainly on techniques to lead work teams, implant changes in the organization and decision making to execute strategies, of great interest to everyone attending the event.

The participating representatives from organizations in Costa Rica, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Honduras considered the event of high quality and great interest for cooperative organizations.

Social Balance Workshop

In May 2005, a workshop on Social Balance was given in Quito, Ecuador with the participation of 28 cooperativists from various cooperative sectors in the country, sponsored by COOPSEGUROS and with logistical support from COLAC-Ecuador and CEDECOOP.

A program developed by ICA Americas was employed for the workshop, consisting of methodology to measure fulfillment of cooperative principles. This purely practical methodology consists of inputting the respective data, allowing participants to obtain certain results that are then analyzed to evaluate compliance with cooperative principles.

With the tool, planning processes can be initiated in different areas to strengthen application of cooperative principles and values.

Project Offices

Due to the political conditions in Bolivia, it was considered advantageous to keep the country Projects Office active in 2005 and enable ICA Americas to support various initiatives for the defense and strengthening of the cooperative movement. The person responsible for the Office pledged to continue identifying sources of funding to make it self-financing, and develop proposals to meet the needs of Bolivia’s cooperative movement in a strategic manner.

From the financial viewpoint, a series of proposals were negotiated in 2005 with different organizations to promote the sale of services by the Office. Thanks to this effort, approval was secured for a project covering an important part of fixed operating costs, with support from the Swedish Cooperative Center and the Federation of Savings and Credit Cooperatives of Cochabamba.

The Bolivia Projects Office is considered to have accumulated the experience and professional capacity needed for competing and winning different contracting processes, with support from the Regional Office. For this reason, it was recommended that the Office be maintained as long as it is carrying out negotiations for its self-sustainability. Follow-up and monitoring by the ACI-Americas office should continue unchanged.

At the June 2 meeting in Canada, the Regional Council decided not to continue support for the Projects Office in Buenos Aires. Among other reasons, the office is not considered to be representing the interests of ACI Americas. At the December 6-7 meeting in Geneva, the ICA Board decided this office should no longer be part of ICA, informing the office of this decision on February 20, 2006.



MEMBERSHIP

The Regional Office of ICA Americas began 2005 with 61 member organizations, two of them associate members, continuing to represent 19 countries of the Americas: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and the United States.

New Members

Over the course of the year, the ICA Board approved four new member organizations:

ALIANZA Cooperativa de Ahorro y Préstamo, Mexico

CUNA Mutual Group, United States

Land O'Lakes International Development Division, United States

Instituto Panameño Autónomo Cooperativo (IDECOOP) Dominican Republic (associate member)

Withdrawals

At the Cartagena, Colombia meeting in September, the Board approved the following organizations' request for withdrawal:

Centro de Estudios y Capacitación Cooperativa R.L. (CENECOOP), Costa Rica, **Cooperativa Medalla Milagrosa**, Paraguay and **Red Financiera Cooperativa CONFIAR**, Uruguay

Cancelled Memberships

At its last meeting held in Geneva, Switzerland, in December, the Board agreed to terminate the membership of **Cooperativa de Vivienda y Consumo Nuestro Hogar**, in Mexico, given its two consecutive years of arrears in membership payments.

Unfortunately, while there were significantly more new members compared to other years, after terminations and withdrawals the final total for 2005 was 61, the same number as in 2004.