

Managing in solidarity in the exchange of economic goods also ought to be given the status of a fundamental principle in an international context. Fair prices and producer groups from different continents dealing with one another on a partnership basis, at eye level, result in an elimination of economic inequality, whereas technical cooperation often merely treats the symptoms.

Farmers' self-help organisations become the key force in regional development as well as in political participation, both in the countries of the South and here in Central Europe. Only too often, though, development is defined via industrial growth; what is needed is a recollection of "Integrated Rural Regional Development" models, which guided technical cooperation in the 1970s and 1980s.

## “Cooperative enterprises build a better world”

The United Nations has declared 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives. Charles Gould, Director-General of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), describes the opportunities that this has created.

2012, the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives, is a made-to-order opportunity to tell the cooperative story. The message for 2012 begins with the UN slogan for the International Year: Cooperative **enterprises** build a better world. ICA worked extensively with the UN to ensure that the word enterprises was incorporated into the slogan, to reinforce what we believe is a critical component of the branding – that the cooperative is a serious enterprise model: values-based, member-controlled, but an enterprise.

We are living at a time when increasing numbers of people, especially youth, feel disenfranchised, disconnected from the economic and social models that dominate their lives. We feel that our message about the impact and reach of the cooperative model, as a member-controlled model, is a powerful one. The cooperative model is scalable at a time when the world is looking for solutions to global problems. ICA's most recent Global 300 Report, reviewing the performance of the world's 300 largest cooperatives, found that they have an aggregated annual turnover of 1.6 trillion US dollars (USD), the equivalent of the world's ninth largest economy, and remember, this is just the 300 largest cooperatives.

A recent report by Cooperatives UK on Global Business Ownership 2012 found that there are three times as many member owners of cooperatives as individual shareholders worldwide (1 billion cooperators versus 328 million shareholders). The reach and scale is substantial.

ICA's intent is to use the International Year to make more people around the world aware of the successful, values-based cooperative enterprise model. We also recognise that we can use this Year for a legacy opportunity: to create a Global



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Development Fund of USD 50 million to be used for cooperative development. We are looking to the Global 300 cooperatives to provide the first tranche of capital, which would then be leveraged to attract additional funding, and would then be loaned out to intermediary groups with demonstrated capacity in cooperative development.

It is also essential that we have a focused public policy agenda during the International Year, one that we can build on in subsequent years. In her speech to the United Nations opening the International Year, Dame Pauline laid out that agenda, calling for: 1) greater diversification of the global economy; 2) full recognition in public policy and regulation of the specific and unique legal and financial framework of cooperatives; and 3) equal promotion of the cooperative model with the shareholder model.

So the International Year of Cooperatives is an opportunity on many levels. It is first an immediate opportunity to tell the cooperative story to a public – a young public especially – who are hungry for that message, to youth who live and breathe cooperative models in their daily lives, especially through the Internet and social media, but who might not have been introduced to the cooperative as an enterprise model.

It is an opportunity to demonstrate that cooperatives can work together to communicate key messages, and then to use that cost-effective distributive communications platform to disseminate key messages on an ongoing or periodic basis in subsequent years. And it is an opportunity to relaunch the global cooperative brand as a serious enterprise model. In fact, ICA is beginning to work with the concept that the cooperative could be the fastest-growing enterprise model by the end of this decade. Not only do we hope for this future, we see both economic and social changes that lead us to believe that such an opportunity is indeed before us.

A selection of events accompanying the International Year of Cooperatives can be found at: [www.rural21.com](http://www.rural21.com)