



ICA Regional Women's Committee

A NEWS BULLETIN OF THE ICA REGIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE FOR ASIA & PACIFIC



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Women in Co-operative Business: Japan



Ms. Fujita, a member displaying the products

From The Editor....

Thanks to UN International Year of Co-operatives-2012, many activities are being held by the cooperatives globally. Women are playing an important role in the success of cooperative business worldwide. The rural women, however, are largely engaged in basic agriculture, weaving and food processing where cooperatives thrive most. A story of women cooperators from Japan is being presented and also the issue includes data on status of women, UNCSW - 2012 focus on rural women and an FAO article on role and importance of cooperatives for empowerment of women. This newsletter contains success story, news, data and various information for keeping the readers well informed.

As usual, we welcome news and views from members.
Savitri Singh

The Co-operative movement in Japan is one of the most developed movements in the region. One of the significant feature of Japanese cooperatives is that a large number of women are involved, especially in agriculture and consumer cooperatives.

Women Food Processing Group of JA Hyogo Minami is one of the successful women groups in the prefecture.

The group started 8 years ago with ten members. The age group of members are 30-70 years. The aim of the group is to increase rice consumption in the prefecture. They start working at 4 am in the morning and supply products to marketing outlets of JA farmer members and JA restaurants. They use locally produced rice to make snacks and bread etc.



Some members of the Women Food Processing Group



Sweet and cute bread

The infrastructure for the workshop is subsidised by the government and the group uses its own resources as well. They pay 13% commission to JA for using JA Direct Farmers Market outlet. The annual turnover is US\$ 400,000 or Japanese Yen 400 million.

Cooperatives: Empowering women farmers, improving food security: FAO

Rural cooperatives and farmers' organizations play a crucial role in the eradication of hunger and poverty. One of the ways they achieve this is through their vocation to empower small agricultural producers, and in particular women farmers.

Empowering women farmers improves food security for all. Women comprise on average 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries and produce the bulk of the world's food crops. While the vast majority of small scale producers experience difficulties accessing resources, socio-cultural norms particularly curtail women producer's access to productive resources including education, land, technologies, information, financial services, and markets.

Their presence in decision-making bodies, especially in leadership positions, also remains weak, and their needs as

farmers are seldom accounted for in policy and resource allocation. As a result, women farmers do not produce to their full capacity.

If women farmers had access to the same opportunities and resources as men farmers, their productivity would rise significantly and the food security of millions of people would be improved.

One challenge that remains is to improve women's participation in co-operatives. The same socio-economic constraints that limit women's access to resources also often challenge their participation in organizations. 2012, declared the International Year of Cooperatives by the United Nations General Assembly, offers a unique window of opportunity for governments and development agencies to reinforce farmers' organizations and to support them to empower the women within their ranks.

For women producers, who are at a greater disadvantage, cooperatives offer networks of mutual support and solidarity that allow them to grow their social capital, improve their self-esteem and self-reliance, acquire a greater voice in decision-making, and collectively negotiate better contract terms, prices and access to a wide range of resources and services including:

- Agricultural resources and assets.
- Markets to commercialize their produce.
- Credit, capital and other financial services.
- Social services.

Numerous examples from around the world demonstrate how women producers are socially and economically empowered through their membership in cooperatives and farmers' organizations, allowing them to produce more, earn better incomes, and raise the living standards and economic and food security of their families and communities.

As part of the FAO Agricultural Commodities Project, the Exposure and Exchange Programme (EEP), one of FAO's initiatives to support women producers, brings together women leaders from the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a highly successful network of partner organizations that has over 1.24 million women members across India, 54% of whom are agricultural workers, and from producer organizations from other part of the world to exchange ideas and improve their organizations' operations. The EEP held in 2011 brought together women leaders from SEWA and from producer organizations from West and Central Africa. Many examples of women farmers' improved productivity were evoked during the meeting.

Reinforcing women's participation and leadership

2012, the International Year of Cooperatives, offers a unique opportunity for the international community to address the challenge of improving women's access and leadership within cooperatives to empower them to improve their lives and that of their families' and

communities', and to support better global food security. Many effective measures can be adopted by governments, international organizations and cooperatives themselves to achieve this.

To this end, a range of recommendations were put forward at the Expert Group Meeting "Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation" held by UN Women and the Rome-based UN agencies-FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in September 2011 in Accra, Ghana.

At the macro and policy level, the measures that governments can adopt include creating legislation and regulatory frameworks that ensure farmers' organizations can operate independently and offer incentives for rural women to join, reserving spaces for women farmer leaders to participate in country and global policy processes, and institutionalizing mechanisms to involve leaders of women farmers' organizations in agricultural and rural policy making.

Cooperatives can also be supported to establish quotas for the participation of women in their leadership and to create women-only committees to ensure they can voice their concerns strongly enough to exercise leadership; conduct training activities to sensitize cooperative members to the negative impact of gender inequalities in the home, farm/workplace, and in society as a whole; and to implement training programs that improve women farmers' access to agricultural technologies and allow them to develop their skills. Through their ability to reach marginalized groups, to empower their members economically and socially, and to create sustainable rural employment through equitable business models, cooperatives and farmers' organizations comprise unique platforms to provide women producers with the means to better contribute to global food security. By strengthening support to these organizations and facilitating women's membership, the international community will accomplish great strides towards the eradication of hunger.

Source: Agricultural cooperative: Paving the way for food security and rural development Factsheet. FAO, IFAD, WFP (2011)

CSW 2012

The fifty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 27 February to 9 March 2012. The closing meeting was held on 15 March 2012.

The 2012 session focused on the following key areas:

- **Priority Theme:** The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges
 - **Review Theme:** Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women
 - **Emerging Issue:** Engaging young women and men, girls and boys, to advance gender equality
- The Commission will focus on the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges.

Why Is This Theme Important?

- Rural women constitute one-fourth of the world's population. They are leaders, decision-makers, producers, workers, entrepreneurs and service providers. Their contributions are vital to the well-being of families and communities, and of local and national economies.
- Yet rural women's rights, contributions and priorities have been largely overlooked. Rural women have also been hard hit by the economic and financial crisis, volatile food prices and export-driven agriculture. They need to be fully engaged in efforts to shape a response to these inter-connected crises and in decision-making at all levels.
- Unleashing the potential of rural women will make a major contribution to ending poverty and hunger, and to accelerating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and realizing sustainable development.

Global Data-2012

(Source: <http://www.unwomen.org/how-we-work/csw/csw-56/>)

- 70 percent of the developing world's 1.4 billion extremely poor live in rural areas. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to nearly one-third of these, while South Asia is now home to about half.
- In 2010, 925 million people were chronically hungry, of whom 60 percent were women.
- Agriculture provides a livelihood for 86 percent of rural women and men, and employment for about 1.3 billion smallholder farmers and landless workers, 43 percent of whom are women.
- An estimated two-thirds of the 400 million poor livestock keepers worldwide are women.
- The burden of unpaid care work is substantial. Globally there are 884 million people without safe drinking water, 1.6 billion people without reliable sources of energy, 1 billion people who lack access to roads, 2.6 billion people without satisfactory sanitation facilities, and 2.7 billion people who rely on open fires and traditional cooking stoves. Rural women carry most of the unpaid work burden due to lack of infrastructure and services.
- In rural areas of the developing world, excluding China, 45 percent of women aged 20-24 were married or in union before the age of 18, compared to 22 percent of urban women.

News from Members: KCHSU, Pakistan

Cottage Industries run by women in Rural Areas



An artisan showing his creations to buyers

Historically, economic participation of women in Pakistan had been constrained by lack of access to education, credit, training, market linkages, linkages among researchers, planners, policy makers and the financial sectors. We at KCHSU recognise that access to credit alone is not the solution of women's economic problems but to create women entrepreneurs may help to a great extent. About 60% of poor women run cottage industries from homes as they do cloth printing, embroidery work and stitching. These items are sold in nearby markets.

A group of about ten women can make 100 pieces of hand embroidered short dresses in one month.

In the rural areas of Sind province of Pakistan, women are known for producing very fine handicrafts made on Khadi fabric and Sindi Ajrak, a kind of Sindi traditional fabric.

They work hard and procure raw material to produce embroidered dresses, dress material, traditional caps studded with mirror and many other items.

All these handicrafts produced by these women are purchased by the Karachi Cooperative Housing Society Union Limited (KCHSU) and displayed in ICA Expo-2012 in Manchester.

The women wing of KCHSU approached these women for providing them marketing support and place in urban areas to sell their products.

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Please save your dates: Upcoming Events

- ICA Regional Women's Committee Meeting and Regional Women Forum, study visit and exchange program will be held on 26-27 November, 2012 in Kobe, Japan
- The ICA-AP Workshop on Enhancing the Role of Women in Co-operative Business will be held in Lao on 17-20 December, 2012

Important Announcement

Membership of the Regional Women's Committee is open. Please ask for Nomination Form to savitrisingh@icaroap.coop. Each ICA member from Asia Pacific is entitled to send nominations to the Committee. Membership of the Committee is free.

Highlight

The numbers of women participation at decision making level has slightly improved and there are now quite a few women at the leadership as following:

NATCCO, Philippines :

1. President - Ms. Amneris Gozun Gabriel

2. CEO - Ms. Sylvia Okinlay-Paraguay

VICTO, Philippines :

3. CEO- Ms. Mercedes Castillo

NCF, Singapore :

4. CEO - Ms. Dolly Goh

ICA-Asia Pacific :

5. Ms. Hitomi Tanaka

Vice Chairperson of ICA-Asia Pacific Regional Board