



Cooperatives: an innovative model built on the foundation of gender equality

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"Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change" is the slogan for the United Nations International Women's Day. Cooperative members across the world are calling out to show how cooperatives are an innovative model that builds on a foundation of gender equality.

The 8th March is more than just another business day and a day to celebrate. This year's focus is on the innovative ways nations can stand up for gender equality and the empowerment of women, especially in areas relating to social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure.

International Women's Day is about us raising our voices; remembering victims; commemorating women and children's rights all over the world; and analysing and reassessing women's fight for participation, equal opportunities, and their full development across all spheres of life.

This is an opportunity to jointly construct a dynamic focus through which we can reduce the gaps that exist between men and women, which have historically misrepresented women participation in social transformation processes.

This is why it is essential that we build inclusive, participatory, and integral processes within our governments. Processes aimed at achieving equality across all sectors – established as state policy to give them

momentum – through innovative strategies in which women play a defining role in the construction of the country.

With one of our seven cooperative principles being open membership, gender equality has always been a key feature of the cooperative movement. Cooperativism is leading the way in terms of innovation, because innovation comes from people – and cooperatives, by placing the onus on members themselves to resolve their needs and aspirations, constantly adapt to the demands of a continually-evolving society.

This date is not an excuse for celebrations: **it is an opportunity to acknowledge women's contributions to the development of societies and the world as a whole, through both paid and unpaid work, their skills, and their sensibility.**

It is also an opportune time to rethink what we are doing to narrow the gaps that exclude women and prevent their participation, and deprive the world of female genius.

It is worth considering whether we are helping women tackle the challenges and obstacles we face today, with the aim of leaving a legacy to future generations and working for an ever-more prosperous and inclusive society with solidarity at its core.

We need to join forces to achieve gender equality and sustainable development.

This is the time to change public discourse, to motivate activism, to integrate city-wide procedures with rural communities, and vice-versa.

We call for the advancement of a solidarity-based economy, as a way out of issues of social disparity: achievable thanks to its values and essence of democratic participation, inclusion, the common good, and equality.

This is a call for us to think about life in the interests of women – in other words, what we need to do to ensure public services are available and accessible to women.

This is a task for everyone – both women and men. Once we are in a position to offer decent and inclusive education, do justice, and reject the impunity of those who have committed violence and abuse to women.

We will eliminate all acts of violence, hunger, and poverty, by investing in projects promoting equality.

We can think about urban planning and development in line with policies that benefit the development of all women and girls, with transport systems and public spaces which provide security and guarantee the mobility of women.

It is our job to put an end to the trafficking of women and girls, genital mutilation, child marriage, the gender pay gap, femicide, and sexual abuse and workplace harassment.

We now have the resources to get us closer to, more connected with, and better informed about what is happening in the world. We can draw on globalisation and the relationships we have between countries to think about equality.

Transforming people, processes, and technological tools, is vital to working towards a change in mentality.

We are calling for the unity of governments, member states, communities, and minorities working towards the common good.

We need to confront challenges and generate cross-cutting changes through innovation, taking into account how societies are transforming. The cooperative model is particularly well-suited to resolving these challenges because it has the capacity to fully educate the various actors involved in activities through collective and democratic control.

We have the arduous task of contributing to, and joining, the construction of an ideal future, one that is better for all women and girls.