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**Message from the International Co-operative Alliance
on the occasion of
World Rural Women's Day
15 October 2003**

Information & Communication Technologies ICTs: A tool for development

On 15 October, women and men around the world celebrate World Rural Women's Day to highlight the special contribution that women make to rural communities. This year the celebrations focus on the information and communication technologies or ICTs as a tool for development.

In today's modern world access to information is key to enabling women and men make informed decisions about nearly everything that touches their lives. Access to ICT whether this is a radio, portable telephone computer with access to Internet, e-mail, or other new technologies determines the level of opportunities available to each of us. Yet women are for the most part unable to take advantage of these technologies thus effectively barring them from the ability to improve their lives. In fact today, women are marginal users of ICT – 25% and in the rural areas this percentage is reduced to nearly zero. This disequilibrium fuels the disparities between women and men. In fact only if there is change to women's limited access to information, land and other essential resources will societies be able to develop to their full capacities.

The International Co-operative Alliance is particularly aware of the power of ICT on the activities of co-operatives and their members and it for this reason that it strongly supports the new top level domain name - .coop. The power of the Internet in communicating the Co-operative Identity as well as enabling co-operatives to find each other, share resources and do business is unprecedented. Enabling women co-operators especially in the rural areas to take advantage of this powerful resource, will contribute to poverty eradication and sustainable development.

ICA encourages its members to make a concerted effort to seek to improve women's access not only to ICT, but land, water, training and education and by doing so make a significant contribution to enabling women to have equal opportunities and promote gender equality.

Ivano Barberini
ICA President

Vanda Giuliano
Chair, ICA Gender Equality Committee