

ICA Africa Co-operative Gender Forum

Lesotho, 12-18 November 2007

INTRODUCTION:

The first ICA Africa Co-operative Gender Forum was held in Maseru, Lesotho, from 12th to 16th November 2007. It gathered more than 200 participants from African countries: Kenya, Lesotho, Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Mauritius, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Malawi and Zambia. Participants came from various sectors of the co-operative movement, government institutions and co-operative training institutions. It was also attended by representatives from partner organizations from Canada (CCA), United Kingdom (Co-operative College, UK) the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Swedish Co-operative Center (SCC)

The Forum was a realization of an idea that was developed last year in Arusha during the 7th ICA Regional Assembly for Africa, at the gender workshop held in conjunction with the Regional Assembly. Indeed the Forum can be traced far back to the 4th ICA regional Assembly held in Cotonou, Benin, in 2002, when a Women's Co-operative Forum was convened for the first time and which recommended the establishment of a pan-African gender Network to facilitate sharing of information and knowledge on the African region's gender concerns.

The Ministry of Trade, Industry, Co-operative and Marketing provided hosting arrangements to the delegates. The Financial support was provided by the SCC and indeed by the various organizations represented through cost sharing and self sponsorship.

REMARKS AT THE OPENING CEREMONY:

The forum was officially opened by the **Honourable Minister** of Trade, Industry, Co-operatives and Marketing in the Kingdom of Lesotho. In his remarks, the Minister underscored the significance of the Gender forum as a milestone in the process of gender integration into co-operatives. He depicted a co-operative movement on the move, facilitated by the improved collaboration with governments and development partners as well as improved collaboration between co-operative organizations in the region.

A positive picture, in terms of gender, was presented in the case of Lesotho. Indeed there is more women participation in co-operative membership and leadership, therefore, the unique gender challenges in Lesotho is to create awareness to the men to come forward and also take their place in the co-operative movement.

In attendance was also the ICA Vice President for Africa, **Mr. Stanley Muchiri** who said in his address that "*This Forum is timely,*" because "*it aims to build on past achievements through the sharing of knowledge and experiences, lobbying and advocacy on gender integration that will lead to enhanced women participation at all levels.*" He highlighted some of the major challenges facing the co-operative movement in Africa which include, low membership, weak financial base, weak and sometimes non functional national federations of co-operatives, and overdependence on external partners.

The Chairperson of the Forum Steering Committee **Esther Gicheru**, explained the context of the Gender forum. She articulated the ICA Gender Equality Policy and gave an account of its development and implementation process which was initiated in 1995 and saw the approval of the ICA strategy for gender integration in year, 2000. Here below are some of the highlights of her presentation:

- At the regional level, ICA has tried as much as possible to create room for gender meetings and exchanges during its Regional Assemblies, and it is within this framework that the first African women co-operators' forum was held in 2000 in Benin as part of the ICA Regional Assembly for Africa events. One of the recommendations of the forum was the establishment of an "African Women Co-operators' Network".
- During the ICA 6th Regional Assembly for Africa held in October 2004 in Praia/Cape Verde, in light of the report on ICA GEC and the new ICA structure in Africa, delegates requested that a forum be organized to gather women co-operators from the two former ICA African Regions.
- At the 7th Regional Assembly held in Arusha (Tanzania) in October 2006, Gender Equality Workshop was organised with ICA Global GEC's support and gathered women participants from ICA member organisations from the continent. It provided an opportunity for sharing updated information on gender mainstreaming activities and experiences within the ICA and in the various organisations represented, and made recommendations towards an improvement of gender integration in the cooperative movement in the continent. It also urged for the organisation of an African Regional Gender Conference/Forum, which the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Co-operatives and Marketing of the Kingdom of Lesotho offered to host.

A Steering Committee put in place by the Regional Assembly met in June 2007 at the Co-operative College of Kenya in Karen, to develop a proposal for the implementation of the proposed African Region Gender Forum, and identified the conference theme, objectives, activities, methodology, participants, and resources.

Thereafter **Mrs. Gicheru** presented a message from the Chair of the ICA Gender Equality Committee, **Ms. Stephanie Marcone**

The message highlighted the following:

- Filling the gender gap is not only a matter of equity, equality, justice and democracy, but also an element of important innovation, increasing economic performances and well being of populations.
- One of the most innovative factors linked with Africa Renaissance is represented by the active participation and leading role of African women. The results of the 2007 Social Watch Gender Equity Index (GEI) shows that an African Country, Rwanda, ranks third on the list of GEI scores, after Sweden and Finland, thanks to intensive affirmative action efforts. In the meantime, a number of high-income countries rank far down on the list.
- The achievement of gender equity is a challenge to be met by the entire world, more is needed to support equality for the half of the humanity, who has less access to rights (equality under law), to resources (equality of opportunity) and to voice (political and decision-making level).
- There is an urgent need to largely enhance women's empowerment to eradicate poverty with adequate legislations, mechanisms and suitable tools, a wake-up call to governments and all stakeholders, greater accountability and responsibility.
- Cooperatives as socio-economic actors play a relevant role all over the world and are, or could be, a powerful changing agent.

Eugenie Djibo-Zongo outlined the workshop methodology and the expected outputs:

- Establishment of an African Regional Cooperative Gender Committee
- Formation of an Advisory Committee
- Development of a Regional Gender Strategy for African cooperatives

- Production of a forum report covering the issues discussed the recommendations and the way forward.

PRESENTATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Participants listened to interesting country papers and went to discussion groups to reflect on challenges, strategies used and best approach to best practice cases by the various co-operative movements to promote Gender equality. The following issues emerged:

CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

1. Traditional and cultural practices
2. Household work (overload on women)
3. Lack of access to markets, finance, training and skills by cooperators
4. Lack of representative ness in cooperatives
5. In some countries, there are more women participating in cooperatives than men even in leadership positions (e.g. Reference in Lesotho case study)
6. Dual legal frameworks (customary law and common law)
7. Attitude of community towards women and youth
8. Small and in some cases, no budgets allocated to gender mainstreaming
9. Lack of implementation of the law to encourage women to take high positions in cooperatives
10. Illiteracy hinders women from participating in cooperatives
11. Inferiority complex on the part of some women
12. Lack of accessibility to information and laws
13. Government interference in cooperatives
14. HIV/AIDS pandemic
15. Legislation that consider women as minors with limited contractual capacity
16. The tarnished image of cooperatives
17. Inadequate policies, legal frameworks and law enforcement mechanisms.
18. Lack of political good will to enforce laws

STRATEGIES USED TO MAINSTREAM GENDER EQUALITY IN COOPERATIVES

POLICY & LEGISLATION

1. Cooperative legislation has been revised and simplified to encourage:
 - Formation of cooperatives
 - Quotas for women representation in leadership positions
2. Establishments of women cooperatives
3. Policies that promoted gender equality established

4. Affirmative action e.g. By-laws stipulating a certain percentage of women in management committees
5. Carry out a thorough research and gender analysis
6. Desegregation of data to reflect composition and levels of participation by gender,
7. Working with youth
8. Enacting gender policies

PROPOSED STRATEGIES

THE MOST EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN COOPERATIVES

POLICY & LEGISLATION

1. Data desegregation
2. Revision of co-operative laws to encourage women participation
3. Enacting and enforcing gender policies

SPECIFIC GENDER PROGRAMMES

4. Role modeling (e.g. Kenya and Ghana)
5. Formation of smaller groups to suit needs of members (i.e women and youth driven cooperatives)
6. Intervention programs focusing on youth
7. Support woman elected in the leadership
8. Research and analysis programs
9. Networking with other institutions that are gender sensitive
10. Forming partnerships & learning from other organizations promoting gender equality

OTHERS

1. Incentive for well represented cooperatives
2. Women should support each other
 - some women contribute to abuses towards other women
 - election
3. Societies should encourage both spouses to be members of cooperatives in their individual right (e.g. Lesotho)
4. Separate women from youth and children for their needs differ (e.g. ministries responsible for their rights)
5. Consultations with traditional leaders
1. Work in concert with stakeholders.

2. Clear methods on how to mainstream the strategies
3. A realistic strategic gender mainstreaming plan
4. It must have the support of key management staff
5. Appoint a gender focal point person

EDUCATION – TRAINING - SENSITIZATION

1. Member awareness and education
2. Gender and capacity building
3. Education and training on benefits of cooperatives to youth and women to change perceptions
4. Education and training awareness campaigns
5. Building capacity- employee skills
6. Financial support
7. Provision of resources and pilot projects for gender mainstreaming (e.g. Uganda)

KEY ELEMENTS FOR A BEST PRACTICE STRATEGY

POLICY & LEGISLATION

1. Create an enabling environment through suitable policies and legislation

EDUCATION – TRAINING - SENSITIZATION

2. Include cooperatives in school curriculum
3. Training and empowerment for both men and women to support each other
4. Education and training awareness for all generations including youth at primary level
5. Information, dissemination and cross cultural sharing
6. Promotion of women participation in cooperatives

FINANCIAL SUPPORT / RESOURCES

7. Financial and human resource to implement the plan
8. Put in place favorable policies and legal framework for promoting gender equality and ensure enforcement mechanisms are in place

IDENTIFIED COMMON THEMES:

Below is a summary of the identified common themes

Cultural and religious practices,

Conflicting Legal frameworks,

Inadequate access to resources especially by women and youth.

Lack of equal opportunities to education services.

The forum further examined the case studies to identify the strategies used to mainstream gender equality in the co-operatives. This led to identification of the Key elements for a best practice strategy of promoting gender equality in co-operatives. Subsequently, the Forum evolved a Gender Strategy framework for the African region as follows:

DRAFT GENDER STRATEGY FRAMEWORK.

The draft is to be refined by consolidating the contributions by the four groups

VISION

1. Equitable gender participation in cooperatives by 2010.
2. Attain equal opportunity for African men and women of all generations
3. People in gender balanced communities who are empowered and have improved their livelihoods by actively participating in coops as members, leaders and employees.
4. Equal opportunities for every member of the communities in Africa by 2012

AIM

1. To have men, women and youth contributing equitably to the economic activities in their community.
2. Reduce income gap between men and women.
3. Remove cultural impediments hindering gender equality /equity in collaboration with all stakeholders.
4. Strengthen capacity of male and female for leadership position.
5. Afford equal education opportunities for all from childhood.
6. To have a situation where women and men are working harmoniously to maximize their potential to ensure efficiency in the performance of their cooperative.
7. Co-operatives as a tool for Economic and Social development reinforced.

PROBLEM

- Inequitable proportion of men, women and youth
- Gender Imbalance / Inequality in our Co-operatives.

TARGETS

- Sensitize 10% of staff in six months
- The minimum of 2% rise in the proportion of men, women youth currently available depending on the case in one year.
- Including gender item in all forums Agenda's in our cooperative societies.
- Income – 40% within 5 years
- Culture – Develop gender Policy and by- laws.
- Leadership Achieve optimal level within 10 years.
- Education- 5 yrs
- Job creation and involvement in income generation activities
- Entrepreneurship development
- Improved leadership

ACTIONS

1. Provision of resources for implementation
2. Education and training
3. Lobbying and advocacy
4. Setting up new generation co-ops that are innovative and appealing to young people e.g. Cyber café, spurs, message, etc
5. Briefing authorities about the problem (gender concern) just after this forum.
6. Develop programs for sensitizing staff and general public.
7. Seeking the resources to support actions
8. Formation of focus groups
9. Carryout awareness campaigns to the public
10. Developing questionnaires for data collection and analysis
11. Establish a reward /recognition system to appreciate performance of good cooperatives. For example recognition/certification
12. Development of women and youth's entrepreneurial skills
13. Setting-up income generating projects
14. Setting up employment Quotas in favor of the disadvantaged.
15. Legislation reforms

MONITORING

1. Assigning staff members a desk with a task related to gender for data collection and analysis.
2. Data collection on gender participation should be done in every 3 months.
3. Feedback to the staff of cooperative society's member to encourage them on any shown importance.
4. Quarterly –Societies
5. Quarterly- Apex
6. Annually – ICA regionally.

Program managers should carry out continuous monitoring of activities to ensure that the actions are leading towards achieving the set objectives.

Responsibility; -government agencies.

- Cooperative movement.
- NGOs.
- Development partners.

- Development of monitoring system with objectives, time frame, indicators etc

The way Forward

The forum adopted the Gender Strategy Framework and discussed the next steps:

1. The Steering Committee which was put in place at the Arusha, regional assembly would continue its work and aim to achieve the following prior to the next regional assembly:

- Continue to collect and analyze data in order to establish a data base on the situation of gender in African co-operatives,
- Finalize the Strategy Framework with the aim to have it adopted by the next Regional assembly to be held in Abuja, Nigeria, in 2008.
- Plan for the next Gender forum to take place in conjunction with the Abuja, regional assembly.
- Identifying and lobbying to potential partners for support,
- Produce the final report of the Maseru Forum.

2. Countries would continue to build their own data base through rapid surveys and fact finding activities; education and sensitization of both women and men; and identification of possible partners at country level.

CONCLUSION

The envisaged adoption of the ICA Africa Gender Strategy in Abuja will mark a beginning of a more coordinated and systematic way of responding to the gender issues and concerns for the African Region.

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