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## International Women's Day – 8 March 2008

### “Investing in Women for Co-operative Success”

Increasing evidence shows that gender inequality is simply bad economics. Investment in gender equality and women's empowerment is therefore vital for improving economic, social and political conditions. Further, it has a multiplier effect on productivity, efficiency and sustained economic growth according to the United Nations.

It is for this reason that the 2008 theme of International Women's Day focuses on the need to invest in women and girls and calls on actions to increase resources for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Investing in women is not only a socially responsible and economically valuable, but also a necessity for co-operative organisations wishing to increase their creative and innovative abilities, essential resources to compete in the global market.

What is meant by investing in women and girls? It means not only making financial commitments to build capacity and implement gender sensitive programme and policies, but also taking a leadership role in ensuring gender equality progress. It means taking practical actions to remove barriers and create opportunities for women's empowerment and professional growth. It also means addressing the issue of young women and ensuring that they find co-operative services relevant; that they find value in joining or forming their own co-operatives and that they consider participation in co-operative democracy rewarding and worthwhile. We are reminded too that the larger youth issue is of significant importance to the success of the co-operative movement. One person in eight is a girl or young woman age 10–24 and so co-operative education for girls and young women, and gender awareness for all are essential for the continued success of the movement.

- Educated girls contribute to increased economic productivity and improved family nutrition: for every year a girl goes to school beyond the fourth grade, her wages rise 20% and her family size drops by 20%
- A job given to a woman means support for the entire family
- Empowered women are agents for the common good and uplift the well-being of the human family overall
- Women who are empowered to make decisions strengthen family healthcare, reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and promote long-lasting peace both in industrialised and developing countries.

So in celebrating International Women's Day, co-operatives are called to allocate an adequate proportion of financial resources to achieve effective gender equality. They should seek additional resources for new and existing gender programmes and training for women; they should review policies and organizational capacity to empower women and keep gender balance in mind when recruiting staff and electing leadership; and they should address the issue of young women and girls and their participation in the co-operative movement.

The ICA and its Gender Equality Committee are convinced that the co-operative movement has a significant role in making investments of all types to promote gender equality and that we can make a difference. Finally, let us not forget that progress for women is progress for all.

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ICA President

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