

Regional Conference on Women in Decision-Making in Co-operatives Declaration and Platform of Action

PREAMBLE

1. We, women and men leaders, staff and members of co-operative organizations and non-government organizations promoting co-operatives from Asia and Pacific (specifically, Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam), Europe (specifically, Denmark, Finland and Sweden) and North America (specifically, Canada) participating in and contributing to the successful reflection and deliberation in the regional conference on "Women in Decision-Making in Co-operatives" organized by the Asian Women in Co-operative Development Forum and the International Co-operative Alliance Regional Office for Asia and Pacific held in Tagaytay City, Philippines, on May 7-9, 1997,
2. Aware of the gross marginalization of women in the leadership and decision-making structures and processes in co-operatives at all levels: primary, national, regional and global,
3. Determined to increase the number and level of participation of women in the leadership and decision-making structures and processes in co-operatives at all levels,
4. Acknowledging the voices and concerns of our other sisters and brothers in the co-operative movement in the Asia and Pacific and other regions in the world, who share our concern and commitment for increased participation by women in the leadership and decision-making structures and processes in co-operatives,
5. Dedicate ourselves unreservedly to promote and advocate the increased participation of women in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives, agreeing that such goal requires the cooperation and solidarity of all cooperators: leaders, staff—women and men—as we strive to create a more caring and effective leadership in co-operatives into the 21st century.

We reaffirm our beliefs:

6. In the co-operative principles of democratic member control, voluntary and open membership, member economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training and information, co-operation among co-operatives, and concern for community,
7. In the co-operative values of democracy, equality, equity, solidarity, self-help, and self-responsibility,
8. In the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others, on which co-operatives all over the world were and are organized on these bases.

We are convinced that:

9. Women and men have different needs, interests, priorities and styles of leadership and decision-making arising from their specific roles and situations, and that both women's and men's needs can only be adequately and appropriately addressed if women and men are equally represented in the decision-making processes in all structures, including in co-operatives; and that, addressing these needs will result in the progress of these structures;

10. The exclusion of women and the failure to incorporate women's concerns in decision-making and leadership levels and processes in all structures, represents a major loss to society as a whole; and to co-operatives in particular, translates into a loss of half the potential, talent and experience pool that can contribute to the growth and progress of co-operatives;
11. All co-operative members and leaders, women and men, are bound and at the same time, have a role to play in increasing the number and participation of women in decision-making and leadership in co-operatives in all levels: primary, national, regional, and global.

We are aware and recognize that:

12. The gross marginalization of women in decision-making and leadership levels and processes in structures in society, including in co-operatives are due to:
 - cultural beliefs and socialization processes that result in women's subordinate position compared to men and restrict women from being more involved in public life,
 - discrimination (explicit and covert) against women in access to education and training,
 - institutional settings that are governed by male norms, and thus, reflect men's needs and situation more than women's different needs and experience, and,
 - the limited number of women in co-op membership;
13. Women's number and participation in decision-making and leadership structures and processes in co-operatives must be increased for the following reasons:
 - women are more critical of the traditional definition of politics and of the use of power: too centralized, too hierarchical and too autocratic; women leaders will bring in a different kind of leadership in co-ops;
 - if there are more women decision-makers in co-operatives, co-operatives' focus can be enlarged in such a way that women-specific needs will be included; women can influence co-ops to use resources that will help correct gender inequality and inequity not only in co-ops but also in society at large;
14. Efforts have been made to increase the number and participation of women in decision-making and leadership in co-operatives, but these efforts are inadequate, and in some cases, ineffective in achieving this goal as evidenced in the:
 - still marginal number of women in decision-making and leadership positions in co-ops especially in the national, regional, and global levels,
 - in the barriers that continue to keep women from these positions such as co-op practices, standards, and processes in selecting leaders,
 - in the exercise of leadership duties and in the recognition of contributions as leaders;

We are determined to:

15. Amend laws, revise, and where necessary, create structures to increase the membership of women in all types of co-operatives;
16. Create an environment that is conducive partnership between women and men and supportive of increased participation by women in leadership and decision-making in co-operatives at all—levels,—primary, national, regional and global—and other structures in society: family, community and law;
17. Continue our advocacy on gender equality, gender equity, and the empowerment of women in co-operatives by transforming our co-operatives to be sensitive and responsive to the needs of both women and men members;
18. Set up systems and take the immediate steps to provide women with the necessary education, training and experience in order to be effective as leaders;

We commit ourselves to:

19. Bring co-operative practice in line with co-operative theory and values by pursuing and creating a kind of leadership in co-operatives that is:
 - consistent with co-operative principles;
 - democratic, participatory, collaborative, consultative and accountable to members;
 - gender responsive where women and men work together for the betterment of family, workplace and society; and
 - responsive to the needs and situation of the disadvantaged.
20. We hereby adopt and commit ourselves as leaders, members, staff, volunteer promoters and organizers of co-operatives to implement the following Platform of Action. We call on the International Co-operative Alliance and its members, other co-operative movements, the Asian Women in Co-operative Development Forum and other networks of gender and co-operatives, non-government organizations and women's organizations promoting co-operatives, to fully commit themselves and contribute to the implementation of this Platform of Action.

Chapter 1

MISSION STATEMENT

1. The Platform of Action is an agenda to increase the participation of women in the leadership and decision-making positions and processes in all types of co-operatives in all regions of the world by increasing their opportunities and capabilities for leadership and decision-making. It aims to facilitate and accelerate the achievement of congruity between co-operative practice and theory, specifically in the area of democratic member control.
2. The Platform of Action is a broad guideline for achieving equality between women and men in the access to power and decision-making in co-operatives with the end in view that such equality of access will result to equitable benefits between men and women as well as to the benefit and progress of co-operatives.
3. Although the implementation of the actions enumerated and described in the Platform of Action are specific to co-operatives, the intention is that the serious and full implementation of the Platform of Action will result to improved gender relations not only in the context of co-operatives, but in the home, workplace and in the wider community.
4. The cooperation of ALL men and women in co-operatives, working together as equal partners, is essential to the successful implementation of this Platform and the achievement of the goals for which this Platform was drawn up. Likewise, the serious, sustained and long-term commitment from leaders, members and staff—women and men—from ALL co-operatives.

Chapter 2

GLOBAL AND REGIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR WOMEN'S ENHANCED PARTICIPATION IN THE LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING IN CO-OPERATIVES AND IN SOCIETY

Global Situation of Women's Participation in Leadership and Decision-Making

5. Women are marginalized in the leadership and decision-making positions and processes in all structures in society in all countries of the world. Such condition has been existing for centuries, so much so that this has been taken to be the norm—the inevitable, incorrigible, unchangeable state of women vis-a-vis men. This state is certainly a shame to humankind, which is comprised of at least 50% women.
6. In 1995, there were only 24 women heads of states. In 1994, women comprised only 5.7% of cabinet ministers. In the same year, there was not a single woman minister in 59 countries. It was only in 16 countries where women comprised 15% of ministers. And only one country, Sweden, had more women ministers than men (52% women to 48% men).¹
7. The **UNDP Human Development Report 1995** stated, "Upholding the equality of rights is not an act of benevolence by those in power. It is needed for the progress of every society." Further, it stated, "The goals of gender equality differ from one country to another, depending on the social, cultural and economic contexts... Fundamental to all these priorities are the

¹ The World's Women 1995. Trends and Statistics.. United Nations, New York, 1995.

equality of access to means of developing basic human capabilities, the equality of opportunity to participate in all aspects of economic, social, and political decision-making, and the equality of reward.... Equality is not a technocratic goal— it is a wholesale political commitment. Gender equality is an essential aspect of human development.”

8. The *Beijing Declaration*² stated, “Women’s empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace.”
9. The *Beijing Platform for Action* pointed out, “Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and ensure its democracy and ensure proper functioning. Equality in decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government decision-making is feasible. Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.”
10. Further, the Beijing Platform for Action stated unequivocally that women’s participation in decision-making is a demand for simple justice and democracy.
11. In a study commissioned by the UN, five basic arguments for women’s participation in decision-making and politics were presented:³
 - a) Democracy and egalitarianism - women constitute at least half of any population and should be represented proportionally. The recognition of women’s rights to full citizenship must be reflected in their effective participation at the various levels of political life. There cannot be true democracy where women are virtually excluded from positions of power.
 - b) Legitimacy - women’s underrepresentation can be dangerous for the legitimacy of the democratic system since it distances elected representatives from their electorate and more particularly from the women among their electors.
 - c) Differences in interests - political participation involves articulating, providing and defending interests. Women are conditioned to have different social roles, functions and values. It is reasonable to believe that women are more aware of their own needs and are therefore better able to press for them. Women are more aware, for example, of the need to have proper provision for the care of children and of others who are physically dependent; and to have more protection against sexual violence and harassment. The current composition of the political decision-makers means that women are unable to articulate and defend their own interests.

² With the Beijing Platform for Action, one of two main outputs of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China last September 1995. These two documents serve as guideline for achieving equality between women and men, equitable access to resources between women and men, and to improved situation of millions of women in the world. Although Governments are mainly responsible for implementing the Platform for Action, all actors of civil society, such as co-operatives, have a key role in achieving the goals of the Platform.

³ Women in Politics and Decision-Making in the Late Twentieth Century, United Nations (New York,1995).

- d) Changing politics - if there are enough women politicians, they can change the focus of politics. An initial effect of women entering the political scene was the enlargement of the scope of politics. Issues, such as child care, sexuality and family planning, that once were confined to the private sphere are now seen as political. Some women have come to regard the decision-making process itself as being too centralized, too hierarchical and too technocratic.
- e) Efficient use of human resources - no country can afford not to utilize all its human resources. Women comprise half the world's pool of potential talent and ability. The importance of their fundamental biological and social roles is clear, and though their inputs is often unrecognized, they are major contributors to national economies through their paid and unpaid labor.

Excluding women from positions of power and from elected bodies impoverishes public life and inhibits the development of a just society. In short, without the full participation of women in decision-making, the political process will be less effective than it can and should be, to the detriment of society as a whole.

- 12. The *UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)* established the proportion of at least 30% women in decision-making positions to establish a "critical mass" of women who can effectively influence decision-making processes. This is borne out by the experience of Nordic countries.

Regional (Asia and the Pacific)

Situation of Women's Participation in Leadership and Decision-Making

- 13. Asia is currently the most rapidly growing and dynamic part of the world. While the region is forging ahead at an incredible pace of economic growth, the same unfortunately cannot be claimed for the vast majority of its women. Large numbers continue to suffer poverty, illiteracy, poor health, malnutrition, and low social, economic, and political status. While economic growth in the region has admittedly led to some gains for a significant majority of women, the overall plight of Asian women remains unsatisfactory and unaddressed.⁴
- 14. A *UN ESCAP* survey (for the period, 1985-1993) of women's participation in politics and leadership in Asia and the Pacific showed that women comprise only 11% of total parliamentarians in the region in 1993, which was lower than it was in 1987 at 12%. The survey further showed that there were more women parliamentarians in East Asia at 19% and lowest in the Pacific states at 2%.⁵
- 15. The *UNDP Human Development Report 1996* showed that women's participation in decision-making for the period, 1990 to 1995, in Asian and Pacific countries ranged from 0 to 23.9% or an average of 6.3% among twenty-five countries surveyed.
- 16. Yet, it has been observed that "greater participation in political decision-making has been perceived to be one of the factors that strengthen the process of empowerment.... Equal participation by women in the public sphere can be looked upon as an effective strategy to initiate a process of changing power relations elsewhere in society."

⁴ Women in Development: Issues, Challenges and Strategies in Asia and Pacific, Asian Development Bank (1994).

⁵ Women in Asia and the Pacific 1985-1993, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (United Nations New York, 1994).

The Nature of Co-operatives:

17. Historically, co-operatives have fulfilled the socio-economic needs of communities, and have enjoyed success in many countries. Co-operatives are formed by many low-income communities to promote their well-being and to become self-reliant. In Asia and the Pacific, the total number of individual co-operative membership has reached no less than 480 million people by yearend 1995. Assuming that 50% belong to the middle class category and 40% still among the relatively poor, it means that well over 200 million members are still in need of basic services and social infrastructure.
18. Where women are concerned, their subordinate roles continue to prevail. Unless co-operatives take an active part in mainstreaming gender, women continue to have less access and control over resources as compared to men, and they will continue to be marginalized in the co-operative leadership and decision-making processes.
19. Co-operatives are distinct in their "identity" and mode of operations from private enterprises. Co-operation is a practical philosophy based on a society that promotes development by consent and consensus of the people. Co-operatives combine business and moral values. Co-operatives are unique as they possess universal suitability and acceptance to operate under all kinds of economic systems: be they capitalism, socialism, or a system based on mixed economies. Cooperatives combine the merits of all the systems. Co-operatives promote the values of self-help, self-initiative, and self-responsibility which are basic characteristics of capitalism. They adhere to values of equality, equity, solidarity and non-exploitation which are vital ingredients of socialism; co-operatives believe in democratic governance which balances the two systems under one where public and private sectors co-exist.
20. But the central focus of any co-operative movement is always to be in the best interest of **MEMBERS** (read: *Women and Men*) both in the short and long term. Co-operatives exist primarily to serve them, and any measure of effectiveness must be based on how well those needs are served. Co-operatives also become more effective when they give people more control over their lives. Co-operatives give members the opportunity to consume more wisely, and give producers the opportunity to control the production and distribution of their goods; co-operatives give all kinds of people the chance to save, invest, and borrow money in honest, secure, and competitive financial institutions. There is an important kind of dignity in enlarging such kind of empowerment.
21. A co-operative movement must also build a **strong vertically integrated structure**, combining the power of local co-operatives into an integrated system that can wield influence on national, regional and even international levels. Doing so will require vision and a capacity to make difficult decisions. In rare instances, it may even require foregoing local possibilities in favour of a common good. "Acting locally, working globally" became a cliché in the later decades of the twentieth century. Within co-operatives, it must become a reality if full effectiveness is to be achieved—where women and men work together at all levels within the co-operative structures.
22. There is a challenge for more strategic thinking. Thinking strategically means the ability to consider how the membership advantage, the co-operative distinctiveness, the empowerment of people, the combination of resources and the pools of accumulated capital can be most effectively deployed. It is envisioning what can be prudently attempted and collectively accomplished.

23. Co-operatives also confronted other challenges in the nineties as a result of open markets and globalization that demanded a review of ways of doing, a change in understanding and perspective of the old and emerging issues such as the increasing gap between the haves and have-nots, environmental degradation, and the deepening inequality between women and men in all spheres of life, including in co-operatives.
24. Within the context of all the above challenges the INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE conducted and celebrated its Centennial Congress in Manchester in September 1995. It was at the ICA Centennial Congress that the definition of a Co-operative has been accepted by all delegates coming from all over the world. It was at the Centennial Congress that the Co-operative values have been adopted, and Co-operative Principles revised and sharpened. The Co-operative definition, values and principles are put together under what is now called the **“STATEMENT ON THE CO-OPERATIVE IDENTITY.”**
25. The document on “STATEMENT on the CO-OPERATIVE IDENTITY” approved by the ICA’s members in Manchester consists of three parts: the Definition, the Values, and the Co-operative Principles.

Firstly, as there has been no commonly-accepted international definition of a Co-operative (with the exception of a 1966 document issued by the International Labour Office), co-operatives have been described in different ways by different people over the years. The ICA’s definition clearly identifies the main characteristic of any co-operatives in any sector or any country. In short, a co-operative is:

- * an autonomous association of persons
- * who unite voluntarily
- * in order to meet their common needs and aspirations
- * through a business enterprise
- * which they jointly own
- * and democratically control

Secondly, co-operatives are based on values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others.

The *Third* part of the Identity Statement deals with the Co-operative Principles. In the past, the principles were used to define the key characteristics of a co-operative and to describe its basic values. This inevitably led to some confusion, which is why the three elements have now been separated. In reality, the co-operative principles are “*guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.*”

The seven principles are :

- * Voluntary and Open Membership
- * Democratic Member Control
- * Member Economic Participation
- * Autonomy and Independence
- * Education, Training, and Information
- * Co-operation among Co-operatives
- * Concern for Community

26. The new principle added is that of "Autonomy and Independence," giving emphasis that co-operatives must be controlled and directed by their members. The second new principle is that of "Concern for Community." As locally-rooted, member responsive organizations, co-operatives have a close link with their communities. During recent years, it has become apparent that co-operatives are often playing a leading role in the economic, social, and cultural development of their communities. They have become especially active in the field of community health, community housing, group-lending for micro-enterprises, and in environmental protection.
27. The principle of "Concern for Community" also, in some ways, mandates co-operatives to go beyond the community's and the members' economic needs which co-operatives traditionally addressed, such as need for credit, consumer goods, marketing of products, etc. to the social needs and concerns of the community and of co-ops' members such as greater political participation by women in community and co-ops' affairs, gender equality, childcare, physical safety, etc.
28. The history and nature of co-operatives as can be gleaned from their values and principles, show that co-operatives are democratic and gender-fair institutions, which respect and encourage the participation of all members in all co-op affairs, including in decision-making, regardless of their gender.

Efforts to Promote Gender Equality in Co-operatives

29. In the Declaration passed during the celebration of the ICA Centennial held in Manchester in 1995, it was stated, "There are untapped resources in many memberships, especially among women and young people. Much of the future success of the co-operative movement will depend upon a willingness to recognize true equality between women and men in the deliberations of co-operative organizations; much of the vitality will come from the involvement of young people."
30. In the same document, it was pointed out that one of the many challenges that face co-operatives in the next century is resolving "complex issues of social justice, many of which co-operatives have historically tried to address; it is as important as before that they continue to do so. One of them concerns the unequal position of women around the world. Women are disproportionately evident among the poor; they provide more than their share of labor, paid and unpaid, in most economies; their capacity to control their own lives is often restricted."
31. The importance the ICA and its members placed on the need for gender equality in co-operatives is no less demonstrated in the passing of the Resolution on Gender Equality in Co-operatives during the ICA Centennial Congress held in Manchester last September 1995. The resolution stated, "Gender equality is a global priority of the ICA.... To improve such gender balance co-operatives are requested to set an action plan which should include targets, with a clear idea of what should be achieved and by when."

32. In Asia and Pacific, the ICAROAP had conducted several regional activities for the purpose of bringing to the awareness of its members the issue of gender inequality in co-operatives as well as to identify strategies on how to pursue and achieve in and through co-operatives. These activities were: three regional consultation meetings on gender integration in co-operatives, the first in Colombo in 1992, the second in Tokyo in 1993, and the third in Bangkok in 1996, two sub-regional gender sensitivity training and planning meetings, and the setting up of a protempore Regional Women's committee during the ICAROAP General Assembly in 1996, which the ICAROAP Executive Committee approved in ChiangMai in March 1997.
33. In the Co-operative Ministers' Conference on "Co-operatives in a Changing Socio-Economic Environment" held in ChiangMai last March 1997, the body passed four resolutions on Gender and Development.
34. The Canadian Co-operative Association was catalytic in its approach to gender and co-operative development when it organized a consultation meeting on Women in Development (in the co-operative context) in Kuala Lumpur in 1989 that led to the organizing and conduct of a Leadership Training for Women Leaders in ASEAN countries, which in turn, led to the setting up of the Asian Women in Co-operative Development Forum, then a collaborative informal forum among co-operative organizations to pursue gender equality and the empowerment of women in and through co-operatives.
35. The AWCF has been promoting gender awareness and gender integration in co-operatives since its inception in 1990. Leadership development for women has been one of its four priority thrusts since it was set up. All of its programs and activities are geared towards increasing women's share of power and decision-making in co-operatives.

Women's Participation in Leadership and Decision-Making in Co-operatives: Global and Regional (Asia and Pacific) Situation

36. The picture of women's participation in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives is the same at the global level and in the context of Asia and the Pacific. And the picture is that of low, even marginal representation of women in co-op Boards—lowest at the national level and slightly greater at the primary and chapter/federation levels. The picture is better only in Nordic countries.
37. When women are in the Boards at all, they usually hold the position of Secretary or Treasurer, both doing or implementing positions, rather than a position of decision-making.
38. Several factors have been identified to cause women's limited representation in co-op Boards and in co-op management in all regions of the world:

One, reproductive roles traditionally borne by women reduces women's time for community and voluntary work such as being an elected official in a co-operative;

Two, old stereotypes of women and men where men are traditionally seen as more fit to have a public role (i.e., as leaders) and women to have a private role (i.e., as homemakers);

Three, requirements and processes for entry in leadership and decision-making in co-ops restrict women's access and opportunities for leadership and decision-making therein, e.g., the member must have served a certain number of years in an elected position before she/he can get into the Board or be elected as co-op President or Chairperson, the nomination procedure where the member willing to be elected must nominate her/himself in front of the general

assembly—this practice is not attractive to women, the “old boys network” that is actively at work during election time in co-ops;

Four, practice of leadership and decision-making in co-operatives discriminates against women, e.g., the practice of holding long meetings at night in less than safe places, hierarchical and bureaucratic styles, etc.;

Five, co-op laws and bylaws that restrict women’s membership in co-ops, e.g., laws that stipulate that only land owners or heads of households can be members of co-ops; furthermore, traditional laws and cultural practices that regard women as subordinate to men;

Six, in some co-ops, women are not given the same opportunities as men for basic training and higher education in such areas as finance, technology and management.

39. The co-op movement is filled with many examples of co-ops being ably and effectively led and/or managed by women. From women’s leadership and management, many co-ops have progressed and have improved the lives of peoples all over the world.
40. The benefits that co-operatives get from women’s leadership and management can be multiplied with more women in leadership and decision-making in co-operatives. The need to enhance women’s participation in leadership and decision-making in co-operatives is not only for ethical reasons, but for economic reasons as well.

Chapter 3

PLATFORM OF ACTION TO ENHANCE THE NUMBER AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING IN CO-OPERATIVES IN THE ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION

41. In order to enhance the number and participation of women in the leadership and decision-making structures and processes in co-operatives, we propose the following strategies and actions to be implemented within a period of eight years, from Year 1997 up to Year 2005.

Strategy I: *Instituting gender-sensitive co-op laws, bylaws and policies that promote increased women membership in co-ops and participation in leadership and decision-making therein*

Actions to be taken:

42. By Governments:

- a) Review co-op laws, implementing rules and guidelines from a gender perspective, and amend, if they cause disadvantage to women in becoming members of co-ops;
- b) Review Co-op Laws, implementing rules and guidelines from a gender perspective, and amend or correct, if they cause disadvantage to women in becoming leaders and/or becoming effective in the performance of their duties as co-op leaders;

43. By all types of co-operatives at all levels: primary, national, regional, and global:

- a) Review their (co-op) bylaws and other policies from a gender perspective, and amend, if they cause disadvantage to women in becoming members of co-ops; promote joint membership in primary level co-operatives of couples in a household;

- b) Undertake pro-active efforts to increase the number of women members in their co-ops;
- c) Review their (co-op) bylaws, other policies and practices from a gender perspective, and amend or correct, if they cause disadvantage to women in becoming leaders and/or in becoming effective in the performance of their duties as co-op leaders;
- d) Undertake pro-active efforts to increase the number and participation of women in the leadership and decision-making structures and processes in co-operatives;

44. *By all co-operatives, governments, non-government organizations:*

- a) Support ICAROAP in its efforts to pursue legislation and government policies that are more gender-responsive, with particular emphasis on the resolutions adopted by the Fourth Asia Pacific Conference of Co-operative Ministers held in Chiangmai, Thailand, from March 19 to 22, 1997;
- b) Support the role of the ICA Regional Women's Committee for Asia and the Pacific in its efforts to promote gender-responsive policies in co-operatives;
- c) Support the Asian Women in Co-operative Development Forum (AWCF) in its efforts to advocate gender-responsive policies in co-operatives and provide services in helping co-operatives become gender-responsive.

Strategy II: Building capability of co-ops on women leadership development

Actions to be taken:

45. *By primary level co-operatives:*

- a) Conduct Gender Sensitivity Training (GST)⁶ for women and men co-op members, leaders, and staff;
- b) Allocate technical, material, human, and financial resources for the training of the Education Committee on women leadership development in co-ops;
- c) Ensure and monitor the equal access by women and men members and staff to all types of training opportunities and resources for their personal and professional advancement;

46. *By national level co-operative organizations:*

- a) Initiate, promote and conduct GST for women and men co-op members, leaders and staff;
- b) Develop and allocate technical, material, human, and financial resources for the training of national trainers on women leaders at all levels;

⁶ Also referred to as Gender Awareness Seminar/Training, it serves as an introduction and provides a basic orientation to the participants on gender, gender issues, and how they affect social and economic development and political life, in general. When conducted in the co-op context, GST shows how gender issues affect co-operative development, in particular.

- c) Ensure and monitor the equal access by women and men members and staff of affiliates/ members to all types of training opportunities and resources for their personal and professional advancement;

47. *By all co-operative organizations at all levels: primary, national, regional (ICAROAP), global, and gender & co-operative networks such as the AWCF:*

- a) Promote awareness among members as voters on the need and importance for women to be in the leadership and decision-making structures at all levels in co-operatives;
- b) Support the quota system as a means to ensure and facilitate the increase in the number and level of women's participation in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives;

Strategy III: Building capability of women for leadership and decision-making in co-ops

Actions to be taken:

48. *By primary level co-operatives:*

- a) Conduct Gender Sensitivity Training for women members and leaders;
- b) Allocate resources for and provide training opportunities to women members to enable them to get into leadership positions in co-ops; likewise, to be effective and efficient in the performance of their duties as co-op leaders;
- c) Provide equal opportunities for women and men staff of co-ops in promotion and other opportunities for career advancement in a co-op organization/employer;
- d) Educate young cooperators about gender issues and promote awareness of the need and importance for women to be in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives;
- e) Establish a network of women leaders in the primary level that bring the women's agenda (empowerment of women, support in carrying out multiple roles, equitable sharing of power in co-operatives) to the co-operative movement, build solidarity at all levels, build consensus on common issues and exercise influence on decision-making processes in co-operatives at all levels;

49 *By national level co-operative organizations:*

- a) Develop and allocate technical, material, human, and financial resources for leadership skills training of women members at all levels;
- b) Develop and allocate technical, material, human and financial resources for management skills training of women co-op managers, other women co-op staff, and women elected leaders;
- c) Develop a management and leadership development program for women and men members and leaders that emphasize the new model of leadership and management that is consistent with co-op values and principles and is characterized by caring and compassion, consultation, democratic style, high regard for ethics, cooperation and collectivism;

- d) Develop and promote a gender-sensitive human resource development for co-operatives among affiliates/members;
- e) Develop and promote a gender-sensitive youth development program for co-operatives among affiliates/members;
- f) Document and publish stories about the efforts of co-operatives in enhancing women's participation in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives and disseminate to the media, governments and general public;
- g) Establish a network of women leaders at the national level that brings the women's agenda (empowerment of women, support in carrying out multiple roles, equitable sharing of power in co-operatives) to the co-operative movement, builds solidarity at all levels, builds consensus on common issues and exercises influence on decision-making in co-operatives at all levels;

50. *By the ICAROAP and AWCF:*

- a) Develop, publish and disseminate curriculum and materials for a Leadership Development Program for Women in Co-operatives;
- b) Organize and conduct regional fora at least once a year on issues related to equitable sharing of power and decision-making between women and men in co-operatives;
- c) Organize and conduct regional exchange programs and exposure visits for women leaders of co-operatives on co-operative operations and other programs relevant to the enhancement of women's participation in leadership and decision-making in co-operatives;
- d) Assist members in their respective leadership development programs for women in co-operatives;
- e) Advocate at the international level issues concerning women in leadership and decision-making in co-operatives;
- f) Document and publish stories of women leaders in co-ops who could be good role models for other women as well as men leaders in co-operatives highlighting women leaders' unique contributions to the progress of co-operatives;
- g) Document and publish cases of co-operatives that are successful in enhancing the participation of women in leadership and decision-making in co-operatives;
- h) Document and publish stories about the efforts of co-operative organizations in enhancing women's participation in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives at the regional and international levels to the media, governments and the general public;
- i) Establish a network of women leaders in the primary, national, regional and global levels that bring the women's agenda (empowerment of women, support in carrying out multiple roles, equitable sharing of power in co-operatives) to the co-operative movement, build solidarity at all levels, build consensus on common issues and exercise influence on decision-making processes in co-operatives at all levels;

- j) Build solidarity with allies in the women's movement, people's organizations, non-government organizations, trade union movement and other movements and organizations in all parts of the world who are supportive to the cause of enhancing women's participation in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives;

Strategy IV: Developing, promoting and implementing a gender-disaggregated data collection and utilization system for co-operatives

To measure the actual participation and contribution of women and men in the co-operatives for the purpose of:

- making women's contribution to co-operative development visible;
- showing the degree of inequity and inequality in women's and men's involvement in co-operatives;
- facilitating the recognition of gender issues in co-operatives; and,
- providing concrete basis for the co-operative's formulation of policies, design of programs, and provision of services that are gender-responsive.

Actions to be taken:

51. By the ICAROAP and AWCF:

- a) Develop a model or system for generating, analyzing and utilizing gender-disaggregated data in all aspects of operations of primary level co-operatives, including on leadership representation and participation;
- b) Promote and assist primary level co-operatives in using this model or system so as to collect gender-disaggregated data on a regular basis to establish benchmarks and monitor the progress towards a more gender-responsive co-operative movement;
- c) Collect and publish gender-disaggregated data on co-op members, to relevant government bodies, and to the general public;

52. By co-operative organizations at the primary and national levels:

- a) Collect gender-disaggregated data on membership and leadership vis-a-vis co-op operations on a regular basis, and utilize these data to make co-op services truly responsive to the needs and conditions of women and men members;

Strategy V: Creating a supportive environment for the enhancement of women's participation in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives

Actions to be taken:

53. By co-operative organizations at all levels:

- a) Undertake pro-active efforts to address and correct gender stereotypes that portray women as less capable than men to be leaders in all structures, including in co-operatives as shown in media, in books and other educational materials, and as practiced in the family; but rather, to portray women as equal to men and that the difference in roles, capacities, and physical make-up between women and men is an advantage and not a limitation;
- b) Provide material and financial resources to support women and men members of co-operatives in their reproductive roles in the form of child care subsidy, parental leave, transport services, good and safe daycare facilities;
- c) Ensure women's equal access to advanced technology as it enhances women's participation in leadership and decision-making in co-operatives;

Strategy VI: Establish a Leadership Development Fund for Women in Co-operatives generated from within the co-operative movement as well as from other institutions to be used in carrying out the actions contained in this Platform of Action.

Actions to be taken

54. By co-operatives at all levels:

- a) Allocate at least 2.5% of the annual net surplus for contribution to the Leadership Development Fund for Women in Co-operatives of the (co-op) organization;
- b) Allocate a percentage of the Education and Training Fund proportionate to the percentage of women members in the (co-op) organization for contribution to the Leadership Development Fund for Women in Co-operatives;
- c) Undertake fund-raising activities to contribute to the Leadership Development Fund for Women in Co-operatives.

Chapter 4

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

55. The Platform of Action is a set of actions that should lead to the increased participation of women in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives. Immediate action and accountability are essential if the targets are to be met by the year 2005. Implementation is primarily the responsibility of co-operatives at all levels: primary, national, regional and international.

56. The participation of other institutions promoting and supporting co-operatives, but do not have the structure of a mainstream co-operative organization, such as co-operative networks (e.g., Asian Co-operative Organization), gender and co-operative networks (Asian Women in Co-operative Development Forum), non-government organizations, people's organizations, and women's organizations at the community, national, regional, and international levels, is important, and may even be essential to the successful implementation of this Platform as they provide the social development and human rights perspective of this endeavor in a sustained basis.
57. Women leaders, members and staff of co-operatives play a big role for the successful implementation of the Platform. They should form the core of advocates who will remind co-operatives at all levels to implement the Platform and achieve the goals for which it was drawn up.

A. Primary Co-operative Level

58. All elected officials of the primary co-operative, especially the Board of Directors, are mainly responsible for giving the co-operative the mandate to implement the Platform of Action. All elected co-op officials and management must ensure that the Platform is implemented and must account to their members the extent that they have led their co-op to create the enabling and supportive environment for women to participate fully and as equitably as the men in the leadership and decision-making in their co-op.
59. The role of the co-op's Internal Audit/Supervisory Committee is to monitor the implementation of the Platform and report to the members.
60. The Education Committee (EdCom) must be mobilized in implementing the Platform. The EdCom must ensure that gender perspective is integrated in the Education and Training program of the co-op. The EdCom itself must have gone through some basic Gender Sensitivity Training and must be trained for running leadership training seminars for women members.
61. The co-op management must ensure that any kind of training that the co-op accesses from other institutions has a gender perspective and is supportive of the increased participation of women in leadership and decision-making in co-ops.

B. National Level

62. The Board of Directors of the national/apex organization must provide the mandate for the organization to implement the Platform. All elected officials and the management at the national /apex level must account to their member-coops, the extent that they have led their co-op to create the enabling and supportive environment for women to participate fully and as equitably as the men in the leadership and decision-making in co-ops at the primary, chapter/federation, and national levels.
63. The national/apex organization must take a lead role in mobilizing resources from among their member-coops, in particular, and within the co-op movement, in general, for the establishment of a Leadership Development Fund for Women which shall be made available for use by co-ops.

64. The national/apex organization must train the education committees of its member-coops in running leadership training seminars for women. The national/apex organization must ensure that gender perspective is integrated in its Education and Training Program for members, staff and leaders. The staff of the whole Education and Training Department of the national/apex organization itself must have gone through some basic Gender Sensitivity Training.
65. The national/apex organization must ensure that any kind of training that the organization access from other institutions have a gender perspective and is supportive of the increased participation of women in leadership and decision-making in co-ops.

C. Regional and International Levels

- International Co-operative Alliance Regional Office for Asia and Pacific (ICAROAP)
66. To ensure effective implementation of the Platform by ALL co-operatives at all levels, the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA), the international body of co-operatives representing the family in which all members of co-operatives—women and men—belong, should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming the gender perspective in all co-operative policies, programs, services, and business operations. The ICA must play a key role in promoting awareness about the Platform of Action and its funding requirements as well as in monitoring co-operatives' participation and contribution in implementing the Platform. In Asia and Pacific, the ICA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ICAROAP), must perform these roles.
 67. Within the ICA structure, specialized committees and specialized bodies were set up for the purpose of providing advice to the ICA about specific sectors of the co-op movements as well as about specific areas of concern related and/or affecting co-operatives. Although the Women's Committee would be normally expected to play a lead role in ensuring that this Platform is implemented and in fact, in actually implementing the Platform itself, all specialized committees and specialized bodies must be concerned and contribute to the successful implementation of the Platform.
 68. The **Regional Women's Committee for Asia and the Pacific** has a key role in ensuring that the Platform is implemented. Comprised of leaders from the movement who are aware of gender inequality and inequity and committed to correct this imbalance in and through co-operative structures, the Committee can effectively monitor the implementation of the Platform by all members of the ICAROAP.
- Asian Women in Co-operative Development Forum (AWCF)
69. Gender and co-operatives network such as the AWCF play an important role in the successful implementation of the Platform. The AWCF, because of its nature and the purpose for which it was set up, is in good position to perform its advocacy role in ensuring that mainstream co-op organizations do not forget or fall short of their commitment to implement the Platform. As a resource body, it has a long experience and has developed an expertise in the area of gender and co-operatives. AWCF is available to co-operative organizations and development agencies promoting co-operatives (who are not its members) at national, regional and international levels to provide technical assistance and services, upon request, for the successful implementation of the Platform.

70. The AWCF should assist ICAROAP in promoting awareness about the Platform and its funding requirements as well as in monitoring co-operatives' participation and contribution in implementing the Platform.

Chapter 5

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

71. Commitment to change is best demonstrated in the willingness to pay for the financial costs of the change. All co-operatives at all levels: primary, national, regional and international levels must allocate funds needed for the successful implementation of the Platform. The Boards of all co-operatives at all levels must adopt a policy mandating their organizations to allocate funds for the implementation of the Platform.
72. All co-operative organizations must contribute at least 2.5% of its annual net surplus and a percentage of its Education and Training Fund which is proportionate to the percentage of women members to the Leadership Development Fund for Women in Co-operatives.
73. Regional and international bodies such as the ICAROAP and the AWCF must play a lead role in accessing resources from outside the co-op movement to contribute to the Leadership Fund for Women. The Fund must be made available to all women in co-ops as well as those who will eventually become co-op members. The Fund can also be made available to fund Gender Sensitivity Training seminars for co-operative members, leaders and staff—men and women—as they contribute to gender awareness among cooperators and support the enhanced participation of women in the leadership and decision-making in co-operatives.