

## **61<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission for Social Development**

### **The role of Young Women in Cooperatives in combating inequalities, enhancing productivity towards 2030 Global agenda: Working Women's Forum –Indian Cooperative Network for Women – Side event**

#### **Concept note**

At the 61<sup>st</sup> session of Commission for Social Development, the legendary Working Women's Forum – Indian Cooperative Network for Women will hold a side event to focus & discuss the challenges faced by young women globally. This side event will highlight key issues and how poor young women are transformed from atomized women workers into cooperative leaders & cases from different regions of the world will highlight it through presentations/discussions.

Girls & young women experience disadvantages in cooperatives, compared to men due to social & gender norms that limit their ability. Their economic empowerment & equal participation in work is crucial to eliminate poverty & strengthen the global economy. Young women, hailing from poor background, with zone zero input (no backup but minus input) such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, underemployment, etc., makes them as late starters. They face many key issues like lack of access to education, employment opportunities, reproductive health & rights, training, maternal health, gender based violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, etc, which are barriers for young women to access professional development, even in developed countries.

The Working Women's Forum (WWF) (India) – Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW) is a social movement having reached 6,20,000 poor women members in 4 southern states of India (Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka & Telangana), having provided around 5 billion US\$ as small petty loans to informal sector poor women engaged in 285 occupations. Using financial inclusion as key, organising poor women workers through credit groups, continuous loaning, counselling training in empowerment/ gender awareness/ skills.

In WWF-ICNW many young women start their career after 30 years as late starters, as they experience their life – cycle difficulties i.e., after marriage & reproductive roles (children) and zero backing. Often, they had only primary education, if educated; they couldn't go out for work, as they had childcare/domestic/household chores. Their spouses worked often only as wage workers, being problematic and unable to take care of their children & family.

In other case's, some young women of age around 25 are working & studying (independent & inspiring), also engaged in entrepreneurial work without parental support. This is possible only through cooperatives, which plays a major role in poverty reduction. Even the youngest, poorest & semi-literate women can manage & run institutions through financial inclusion of cooperatives.

As they start from zone zero, financial inclusion plays a great role in moulding their future. Young women also lack access to credit. Cooperatives can act as new mechanism's (instrument) in transforming poor & vulnerable young women to successful entrepreneurs & leaders & contribute to the 2030 global agenda. In addition to this, imparting training to the culturally deprived sections in management skills, economic operations & other vocations can shift their business from informal sector to the pre – formal sectors.

WWF-ICNW, is a role model for transformation of many other cooperatives of poor & vulnerable. The ICNW developed a model within the context of SDGs, (1,2,3,4,5,9,13 &14), therefore poor women after availing loans, diversified business, trained as co-operators, become women leaders & contribute globally. As a result, many young women opted to work independently to take care of their families & business through financial assistance from WWF-ICNW, emerging as successful entrepreneurs. WWF-ICNW have proved that if poor young women are provided financial assistance & training, they will not be poor any more.

The following case will illustrate the above context. Gracy, (29 years, Corona warrior Awardee), B.Com graduate, hailed from a poor background, initially worked in a beauty salon, received loan from money lenders. With insufficient income, she was unable to pay exorbitant interest. Through Financial assistance enabled from WWF-ICNW, enabled her to repay her debts, start own salon, support family & generate employment for 3 other staff today. Monisha (24 years), was introduced to the WWF-ICNW through her grandmother (her grandmother, mother were also old members, vegetable vendors), she started an onion business, due to continuous loans, she has become independent also holds a degree today.

Earlier WWF-ICNW was privileged to host a side event at the United Nations 60<sup>th</sup> Session on Commission for Social Development and two parallel events of 65<sup>th</sup> & 66<sup>th</sup> Session on Commission on Status of Women in a highly successful manner. WWF-ICNW is the first women only International Cooperative Event to win this recognition of conducting these historic events simultaneously, sequentially in 3-4 years.

The key speakers are **Madam Daniela Bas**, UN focal point on cooperatives, **Director - UNDESA** and Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations will kindly deliver the inaugural address from New York. Representatives include, **Mr. Andreas Kappes**, Secretary General, The International Raiffeisen Union (**IRU**), Germany (Oldest cooperative union in the world), **President**, World Farmers Organization (**WFO**), **Ms Lana Zaman**, Associate Sustainable Development Officer at UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, **Mr. Hirofumi Kobayashi**, Executive Director, Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Asia (**IDACA**) Japan, Rome, **Ms Faith Wayua**, We Effect representative (East Africa) will kindly participate apart from other important unions/networks worldwide. This will be followed by WWF/ICNW grassroots leaders, winners of 2023 Jaya Arunachalam Awards and Q/A session.