



San José de Costa Rica  
November 20, 2019

## **CONCLUSIONS OF THE 21 REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF COOPERATIVES OF THE AMERICAS**

**CHANGE - IMPACT - SUSTAINABILITY  
COOPERATIVES ECONOMIC ACTORS  
WITH SOCIAL AND SUSTAINABLE IMPACT**

In the City of San José, Costa Rica, on the 20th of November 2019, the different sessions of the 21st Regional Conference of Cooperatives of the Americas are concluded - Change / Impact / Sustainability “Cooperatives, economic actors with social and sustainable impact”.

During the three days of the 21 Regional Conference have participated more than 1,000 cooperative delegates, as well as representatives from public promotion Institutions and organizations supporting the Movement in the Americas, representing 23 countries of the region and 6 countries outside the region.

Americas is living a particular historical moment, as several countries of the region are facing serious institutional crises. In line with the global definitions of ICA achieved last October in Kigali, Rwanda and especially with the Sustainable Development Goals, enshrined in the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, Cooperatives of the Americas reaffirms the responsibility of its member organizations in supporting the processes of dialogue and democratic participation, highlighting the specific role that cooperatives can play to build less unequal societies, facing one of the worst historical scourges of our continent.

The products of the work of these days are various and important and include the presentations, analysis and recommendations of the 15 parallel sessions (so called “Laboratories”) as well as the contributions of the Keynote Conferences, the Results of the 1st Regional Cooperative Hackathon, as well as a synthesis of the sectoral and thematic work meetings developed by the Committees and Networks.



All this material will be integrated in the Document with the Memoirs of the 21 Regional Conference and will be published on the Cooperatives of the Americas website.

**We present hereafter a first synthesis with the main Conclusions of the event, resumed by three axis, as follows:**

- (a) Advocacy at the level of National Governments and Intergovernmental Organizations;
- (b) Strengthening of the Cooperative Integration in the Continent; and
- (c) Strengthening of Cooperation between Cooperatives.

## **1. ADVOCACY AND LOBBY TOWARDS NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS**

There are still several deficiencies in the legal frameworks for cooperatives in many countries of the Region, and it has not always been possible to find ways out to effectively influence governments. Something similar occurs with intergovernmental organizations.

Both cooperative national apex Organizations and the ICA has to strengthen their capacities to advocate and lobby, as well as to set up the necessary alliances for this.

The importance of moving from advocate for governmental policies to State Policies is stressed, as this focus would avoid gaps of cooperative enabling environment or legal framework raising from any political changes.

The importance of go further with the harmonization of public policies that allow the implementation of inter-institutional programs in favor of a cooperative enabling environment is also stressed.

Public policy and legislation must respect the cooperative identity; but also the cooperatives themselves must respect their own identity and not resemble other organizations that are not part of the social and solidarity economy: as an example of this statement, cooperatives organizations have particularly take care of good governance and transparency.



Government and intergovernmental organizations must understand the specificity of the cooperative identity, and the implications that require the promotion and support of cooperatives in terms of sustainable development. The consultation of the Cooperative Movement is relevant when definitions of policies that directly or indirectly affect the sector are to be taken.

The importance of the participation of local governments in the development and integration strategies of cooperatives is also stressed.

Cooperatives of the Americas will make available in a few months a comparative study of cooperative legislation in the ICA member countries. An operating protocol was presented during the Inter-parliamentary Forum of Solidarity Economy of the Americas, held on November 18 and the legislators participating into the meeting committed to sign in the upcoming days.

Cooperatives of the Americas affirms its commitment with the Decade of Family Farming, encouraging rural extension actions with an emphasis on cooperatives. In this sense, it is agreed to support the construction of a database for the registration of farmers and cooperative entities of Family Farming as well as to facilitate the involvement of cooperatives as vehicles for family farmers access to technology and inclusion.

States must recognize that housing is a right and not a commodity and must ensure mechanisms for the promotion and development of cooperatives in this sector.

The specific characteristics of worker cooperatives require a particular effort to promote legislation that effectively allows their development, being key to strengthen decent work options.

At the level of savings and credit, it is necessary to accompany the the ICA guidelines and advocate in the Americas Region in order to promote a harmonization of international standards which would not affect the cooperative specific identity.

It is important to move towards the establishment of Satellite Accounts system for every country of the Region as well as specific indicators that report the impact of cooperatives in employment, health, education, food systems among others.



## 2. STRENGTHENING COOPERATIVE INTEGRATION.

The continental landscape shows us that there is still a long way to go to achieve effective cooperative integration in several countries. Cooperatives of the Americas commits itself to collaborate in those countries where it is necessary to organize or strengthen the Movement. The advantage of working with the SDGs is that it allows to guide the work of the National and Regional Cooperative Movement with a long-term perspective.

The importance of advancing with youth inclusion strategies to be adapted to the value proposals of the cooperative movement has raised, also using and collaborating with a creative use of new technologies.

It is observed that men continue being predominating in decision-making positions, so it is still a priority to implement gender equality policies in the cooperative organizations.

An act was signed, with the participation of more than 10 countries, setting up the Impulse Group of the Cooperative Communication Network of the Americas that will facilitate the implementation of the regional communication strategy, indicating how each action impacts the SDGs. It is very important that our communities fall in love again with the role of cooperatives as vehicles for the construction of well-being and development.

The importance of deepening the role of cooperative organizations as key actors of international cooperation for development was reaffirmed through the Cooperatives of the Americas Development Platform, encouraging the organizations which participated this specific event to join this regional strategy.



### 3. STRENGTHENING COOPERATION AMONGST COOPERATIVES.

Trust and transparency are the basis for cooperative economic development and integration, as well as for the identification of the needs of the members and the ways by which these needs can be tackled easily.

It is proposed to carry out a mapping of cooperatives members in order to visualize the opportunities of the services and products that the cooperatives themselves offer, since there is no better way for the sustainable development of the system that the wealth generated by cooperatives is owned and maintained in the communities where they are based as well as within the sector through the creation of platforms for technology transfer and knowledge management.

Inter-cooperation must be developed within and between sectors, as well as throughout value chain, network or cluster strategies, providing support instruments such as incubators, new financial instruments and marketing solutions systems.

It is proposed to achieve alliances with non-cooperative sectors as long as they do not affect the cooperative identity. In particular with other entities of the Social and Solidarity Economy, generating the necessary methodologies to facilitate this encounter. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged to capture financial resources outside the sector.

The creation of a platform of good practices and experiences is proposed, as well as mechanisms to facilitate the general implementation of the Cooperative Social Balance among the cooperatives of the Region.

It is recommended to promote and disseminate the Consumer Network of Cooperatives of the Americas, articulating intercontinental initiatives and alliances.

Other contributions include the need to resume and deepen education in values, training for the future of work, prospecting and adapting technologies in safeguarding values and creating committees for education, design and implementation of environmental practices. In particular, it is important that cooperatives of the Region incorporate the topic of environmental sustainability as a priority in their agendas both at local as well as national and international level in order to become a strategic ally for governments for the implementation of policies in this field.



#### 4. GENERAL CONCLUSION

With almost 200 years of existence, and more than 100 years of life in the Americas, cooperatives have been able to affirm and develop into a continent that faces historic challenges still unresolved. The impact for change and the construction of more sustainable societies is essential to expand and deepen the presence and cooperative activity throughout the continent.

The analysis and especially the proposals developed during the 21 Regional Conference will be a valuable input to finish defining the medium-term strategy, but also the short-term actions of our Movement.

The conjuncture of the Americas needs us once again standing and acting together, oriented especially by our values of Equality, Democracy and Solidarity, committing ourselves to the Sustainable Development Goals in each of our countries, but also, inspired by Social Responsibility and concern for others, with a collaborative look with our sister Nations, and in general, with all Humanity.

