

"Cooperatives build Better World"

The above title is the theme of the international year of cooperatives to be celebrated all over the world in the forthcoming year 2025. The United Nations General Assembly declared this in the month of June 2024 through its resolution on cooperatives in social development. It is for the second time in the history of United Nations after 2012 the General Assembly focused on this issue for promoting cooperatives and raising awareness of their contribution to the implementation of the sustainable development goals and overall socio-economic development of the masses all over the world. The theme highlights the greater global impact of cooperatives and emphasizes that the cooperative model is a crucial solution for addressing various global challenges. In changing scenario, it underscores the significant role the cooperatives can play in advancing the implementation of the SDG by 2030.

The Ministry of Cooperation of Govt. of India took the initiative for celebrating 'Sahkar Se Samridhi' (Prosperity through Cooperation) under the aegis of the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives 2025 so that the achievements of the cooperative movement of the country could be reached at the global level. Recently Prime Minister of India inaugurated International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) Global Cooperatives Conference 2024. The five-day conference was observed with the collaboration of ICA and multi-state cooperatives of India like IFFCO, KRISHCO and AMUL from 29th of November to 29th of November at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi in

which 200 speakers and 3000 delegates of 100 countries marked their presence to grace the occasion. The role of the cooperatives was thoroughly debated in context of present circumstances and global challenges and a general consensus was developed how this movement can foster inclusive economic growth, social equality, prosperity and sustainable development through the primary agricultural cooperative societies (PACS).

The modern cooperative movement in India was originated at the time of British in the first decade of 20th century when the primary cooperative credit societies were established for providing credit to the peasantry.

Though these societies could not improve the economic conditions of the peasantry at that time but the eco of this movement could be heard during the swadeshi movement of freedom struggle which mobilizes the poor peasantry to seek their rights from the dispensation. After the independence of the country this movement took Nehruvian legacy and started on the pattern of former USSR's model of social and economic development of masses at the grass root level. The movement has shown its significant strength since the green revolution era by increasing production and productivity of the food grains and the story is continued till date. Now the country has become self-sufficient in the production of food grains and this has reduced the starvation to a large extent. The fullest potential of the country in food grain production has also helped the gov-

ernments to provide subsidized food grains and ration to the poorest strata of the society.

The cooperative model of the country is based on the seven principles of ICA among which democratic member control in cooperatives has an important role to play for fostering autonomy, cooperation among cooperatives and having concern for the community etc. This has enlightened the ownership spirit among the members to control the affairs of the cooperatives. The movement has also been pioneering in producing globally acclaimed leaders and entrepreneurs like Verghese Kurian, a dairy engineer and social entrepreneur who led the initiatives that contributed to increasing milk production in the country termed as white revolution.

This has helped the farmers in improving the breed of livestock through scientific innovations thereby increasing milk production and at the end providing purchasing centres in the form of milk societies at the village level. Since its inception at the central level, the Ministry of Cooperation has realized its vision through Sahkar Se Samridhi (Prosperity through Cooperation) to send the signals of the movement in each corner of the country by helping in forming the cooperatives in every sphere of the economic activities so that the upliftment of the masses at the grass root level be carried out. This initiative has been becoming successful day by day and proving helpful in reducing the severe poverty of the masses in the countryside, a goal of SDG. Though the cooperation is a state subject under the con-

stitutional scheme of things but the decision of the union government to set up a separate ministry at the central level is commendable as large chunk of budgetary allocation has been earmarked towards cooperative sector of the country every year.

The Ministry of Cooperation has realised that there are structural impediments, regional disparities, different regulatory frameworks and other lacunas in different states of the country which are proving to be hurdles in the implementation of the policies regarding cooperatives.

To address these challenges certain regulatory and policy decisions are undertaken by the ministry with the concurrence of the state governments like model bye-laws for PACS has been adopted throughout the country for making them multipurpose and multidimensional entities, modern infrastructural facilities through the computerisation of PACS have been installed to make them economically vibrant and transparent, for better access to e-services in villages common service centres have been set up. In PACS, for establishing world's largest decentralized grain storage plan in cooperative sector, funds have earmarked to the cooperatives under AIF (Agricultural Infrastructure Fund) scheme, new farmer producers organizations are formed by PACS for increasing the income of the farmers, propagation of nano fertilizers as a replacement of traditional fertilizers to increase soil fertility and environmental conservation, at the middle and apex level, initiative have also been

undertaken for strengthening cooperative banks and revival of cooperative sugar mills etc. Further at the national level, three new cooperative bodies namely National Cooperative Export Limited (NCEL), National Cooperative Organics Limited (NCOL) and Bhartiya Beej Sahkari Samiti Limited (BBSSL) have been established through which farmers of India will be able to increase their access to the domestic as well as global market.

In the recently concluded conference, it was discussed and pledged that the cooperatives are the only solution for eradicating the poverty of the masses and removing regional economic disparities and will further pave the way in bringing the empowerment of women and vulnerable sections of the society and thus enabling them to live with dignity and respect.

It is now being observed by the world community that the cooperatives can be true light house for the achievement of the targets of the sustainable development goals within stipulated period of time. No doubt the achievement of the targets of the sustainable goals is a bigger task for the developing nations of the world but the policy makers, promoters of the capitalism and the corporate sector must ponder over the famous quote of Mahatma Gandhi 'Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed'.

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