

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to participate in the 10th Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference being organized by the International Cooperative Alliance Asia-Pacific (ICA-AP) on the theme **"Visioning Ahead to 2030 : Promoting Stronger Partnership between Government and Cooperative Stakeholders in Realising Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)"**. On behalf of Indian cooperative Movement I extend my warm wishes to the Hon'ble esteem dignitaries present on this historic occasion. The Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference is a prestigious event of ICA-AP which is attended by Ministers-in-Charge of cooperatives, representatives of Governments, ICA-AP member organisations, and international development agencies.

The conference plays an important role in chalking out an effective road-map of cooperative development in the Asia-Pacific Region. The holding of this conference has its own significance as it is held after the successful holding of ICA-AP Regional Assembly meeting in Delhi which was hosted by NCUI from 15th November to 18th November, 2016.

The Asia-Pacific Cooperative Forum held during the Regional Assembly in Delhi had resolved to collaborate with policy makers and legislators to create and maintain an enabling climate for sustainable cooperative development in the Region. The partnership with the government is the key in strengthening sustainable development so far as cooperatives in Asia-Pacific Region are concerned.

United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has set a course to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. At the 3rd edition of International Summit of Cooperatives held in Quebec, Canada, cooperatives were called upon to play their key role in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. They were asked to consider sustainable development Goals as not UN Goals, but their own goals. This recognition has clearly sent a strong message to the cooperatives in Asia-Pacific Region to chalk out an effective strategy for becoming a major player in achieving SDGs till 2030. The nature of cooperative organisations is most suitable for facing this challenge. Cooperatives are flexible to address changing socio-economic changes while incorporating principles of solidarity, cooperation, proximity.

The Indian co-operative movement is one of the largest having a total number of 0.83 million co-operatives with a total membership of 274.97 Million. Out of which, primary agricultural co-operatives which mainly provides inputs to the farmers and procures their produce are approximately 91000. They provide agricultural credit on an average per year approximately 24615 Million US Dollars.

In addition to the above, primary agricultural societies approximately 0.91 Million co-operatives are functioning in the field of fishery, poultry and dairy sectors. The efficient functioning of them mainly depends on visionary and committed leadership backed by professional management.

To know about the importance of co-operatives, the percentage share of them in the Indian national economy is as follows:

Total agricultural credit disbursed – 17.48 % ;

Kisan (Farmers) Credit Cards Issued – 75.71%

Fertilizer distributed – 36%

Sugar Production – 35.15%

Wheat Procured – 24.80%

Paddy procured – 14.80%

Distribution of essential commodities to the poor – 20.30%

Direct employment provided – 13.80%

Strong Human Resource Development with focus on education and training has been key to NCUI's growth. To ensure high standards in cooperative training, we collaborate with national and international organizations which are promoting HRD. To tap the best youth talent, we are conducting PG Diploma Programmes in the subject of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Business Administration of two years at our Training Institutes.

Recognising that training programmes must reach all sections of the society, the programmes have been organized by our twenty regional institutes and one national institute in such way that they cover mostly weaker sections like labour, fisheries and tribal cooperatives. By joining hands with Embassy of Israel, NCUI recently conducted a programme on sustainable and commercial agriculture for farming communities in India.

National Cooperative Union of India, being an apex organisation of the Indian Cooperative Movement is committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Being a promotional organisation with prime focus on cooperative education and training, NCUI is actively engaged with different stakeholders in creating tangible impact for its members through delivering wide-ranging quality services. National Cooperative Union of India in association with its member organisations has been championing the cause of strengthening credit cooperatives at various foras and has been representing their problems and issues to the Government time and again.

At the grass-root level for poverty eradication NCUI is running 43 cooperative educational field projects located in cooperatively under developed areas of India. Self-help groups are formed by project personnel to facilitate micro-credit and sustainable income generating activities. They also guide and motivate the farmer members on cropping system to increase production including arranging demonstration plots on various crops.

National Cooperative Union of India through its education field projects for women motivates women to form SHGs/cooperatives and develop their leadership potential. In this connection, NCUI runs 4 exclusive educational field projects and exclusive leadership development programmes for women to improve their socio-economic condition. NCUI through its educational field projects has been making meaningful interventions by collaborating with health organisations in the project areas so as to provide training in the fields of family planning, childcare, HIV etc.

For tackling climate change NCUI has created right awareness for the issue of climate change by conducting workshops at various foras and through meaningful dialogues. The International Cooperative Day celebrated by NCUI addressed the theme "Cooperatives—the Power to Act for Sustainable Future" to emphasise the contribution of cooperatives to achieve three major tasks — end poverty, fight inequality and injustice and tackle climate change.

The contribution of cooperatives to 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be channelised in productive ways through strong partnership with the government, the private sector and the civil society. The government should create an enabling environment so that the full potentialities of cooperatives in the field of Sustainable Development come up in sharp focus. NCUI plays an important role in influencing government policies towards cooperatives through wide-ranging dialogues with representatives of the government on a regular basis so that cooperatives continue to function as democratic and autonomous organisations.

Based on members' feedback, wide-rangings consultations, and giving due consideration to members' issues/problems, NCUI once in three years organizes Indian Cooperative Congress. The passing of Constitutional Amendment Bill in 2011 in India with the efforts of NCUI paved the way for transparent and autonomous functioning of cooperatives. Most important policy change is giving fundamental right to the citizens forming cooperative.

In the end, I hope that the deliberations during the Asia-Pacific Cooperative Conference will discuss in detail the sustainable development programmes and action-points of cooperatives in various countries of Asia-Pacific Region for realising UN SDGs. An effective road-map will definitely emerge for strengthening the cooperative movement in Asia-Pacific Region. I wish the conference all success in heralding a new era of cooperative development in Asia-Pacific Region.

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