

# #CCWW2018

[International Conference on the Changing World of Work]  
April 29 – May 1, 2018 | Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode (Kerala, India)

## Part I

### Common Minimum Understanding

The International Conference on ‘Co-operatives in the Changing World of Work’ led by the multi-stakeholder group of organizers including co-operatives, worker movements, Government, inter-governmental agencies, and academia, and other strategic development groups, present the following as their response to highlight the role of co-operatives and collectives in the changing world of work, and in addressing the challenges of Future of Work, as highlighted in the [Inception Report of ILO Global Commission](#) on the Future of Work.

Having noted the response ([Position Paper](#)) of the International Co-operative Alliance to the Inception Report and its Policy recommendations based on the ILO Recommendation 193 on Promotion of Co-operatives 2002, to:

1. Actively promote the co-operative model as a creator of quality jobs and collective wealth at the local, national and international levels;
2. Change the conditions of access to social protection so that all workers can have access to it, independently from their work status;
3. Approve legislation allowing for the monitoring of the proper functioning of co-operatives, including in the field of workers’ rights;
4. Strongly encourage dialogue and alliances between the co-operative movement and the trade unions.

The Participants of the #CCWW2018 consider the following as the Common Minimum Understanding, to enhance the role of co-operatives and collectives, in meeting the challenges of the changing world of work, and in addressing the mega drivers of Future of Work viz. technology, demography, climate change and economic globalization:

- A. Advocate for policies and strategies on the Future of Work to assess and take into account the role of co-operatives in pluralistic & community-based initiatives in growing sectors, particularly provision of care, renewable energy and management of natural resources.

- B. Promote the use of technology for Sustainable Development, Future of Work and co-operative development, and further promote exchange among technology spaces and co-operatives, particularly worker co-operatives with a conscious inclusion of young professionals.
- C. Promote Decent Work in co-operatives by enhancing value-based membership in enterprises and across value chains they operate in, with an aim to eliminate child labour, forced labour while advancing occupational safety and health, and gender equality.
- D. Promote diversity in ownership and control of co-operatives emerging in the sunrise economy, not only aspire to keep ownership democratic but also to commit to the co-operative identity statement (Definition, Values and Principles) in the substance and labour practices of their enterprises.
- E. Advocate for Co-operatives to promote Decent Work & Economic Growth (SDG8) through the following:
  - (i) Active engagement of Co-operatives in reaching out to women, youth and other vulnerable and marginalized groups, to effectively address their socio-economic needs and cultural aspirations through joint ownership and democratic values,
  - (ii) Ensure producer and consumer co-operatives' supply chains are free from exploitative labour practices, and that co-operatives advance toward decent work practices and integrate calls on eliminating of worst forms of child labour forced labour and discrimination, in their work,
  - (iii) Create an eco-system where established co-operatives actively create and support the initiation of co-operative start-ups, new generation co-operatives like innovative worker co-operatives and social co-operatives,
  - (iv) Advocate for agile co-operative legislation to recognize and facilitate the registration of models like worker buyouts, employee owned co-operatives, social co-operative enterprises etc.
  - (v) Promote active partnership among co-operatives and trade unions, and other movements like women's movements and youth movements, in developing response strategies to secure livelihoods of members in the changing world of work and for upholding the fundamental principles of rights at work.

## PART II

### Thematic Reflections Received from Key Partners

The characteristics of co-operatives are particularly relevant when considering the ILO's Inception Report on Future of Work observations regarding today's high unemployment and underemployment levels, particularly among the youth, stagnating ratios of employment to the population, increased job insecurity and flexibility,<sup>1</sup> deterioration of social protection, widening inequalities, and the fact that the organization of work and of the production of goods and services is experiencing profound changes that may strongly alter the way in which we work and the future of work itself. To prepare the above text, the Conference received the following thematic reflections from its key partners.

#### 1. Dr. Reema Nanavaty, Member, ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work

The Global Commission on Future of Work of the ILO, will be bringing out a very strategic and action oriented report on the “Future of Work” that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals as ILO's centenary celebration. The Global Commission has 28 Commissioners. One of the very important areas that the Commission has recognized for Future of Work is the informal economy workers, especially rural workers – women workers. The Future of Work Commission has already had Policy Dialogues on Life Long Learning for the workers, so that the workers can enhance, upgrade skills and prepare themselves for transition. Also a policy dialogue on Rural Workers and Future of Work was held, especially looking at agriculture for small farm holders, agriculture workers and the Role of technology. As we all know 50% of the work force is in the Global South, and 48% depends on agriculture as their major occupation. The Commission will also explore mechanisms to safeguard rural workers against climate shocks and market shocks. The Commission will also explore technology which is labour augmenting and not labour displacing. The role of different forms of organizing of informal economy workers such as Unions and Co-operatives will play a central and crucial role in enabling workers access to life-long learning, create worker owned and managed supply chains, play a role as aggregators to access technology and plug into global supply chains.

#### 2. Dr. Simel Esim, Chief ILO COOP Unit, Geneva

The world of work is undergoing major changes that will continue, and potentially intensify, in the future. To better understand and to respond effectively to these new challenges, the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) has launched a “[Future of Work initiative](#)” that looks at the “mega drivers of change” – technology, demography, climate change and economic globalization. In 2016-17 all ILO members states were invited to undertake national “future of work” dialogues structured around four “centenary conversations”. Following the national dialogues, a [Global Commission on the Future of Work](#) was launched in 2017 for an in-depth

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<sup>1</sup> According to the ILO, the employment to population ratio has even fallen marginally between 1991 and 2016; see ILO (2017) *Inception Report for the Global Commission on the Future of Work*; Geneva: ILO, p. 1

examination of the future of work that can provide an analytical basis for the delivery of social justice in the 21st century. The 28-member commission held its first meeting in October 2017 discussing the main forces shaping the world of work, and the opportunities to be leveraged and the challenges to be addressed for a future of work with social justice. The [ILO views cooperatives](#) as important in improving the living and working conditions of women and men globally as well as making essential infrastructure and services available even in areas neglected by the state and investor-driven enterprises. Cooperatives have been seeing a renaissance to meet the expanding and increasingly complex needs of members, providing services, advancing livelihoods and creating jobs in many parts of the world. Looking at the mega-drivers of change, cooperatives in many parts of the world have reported growth in membership and business volume in a range of sectors from banking to housing and the platform economy during recent times of economic and financial crises. Financial cooperatives have generally fared better than the investor-owned banks due to their combination of member ownership, control and benefit. Cooperatives are also proving to be well positioned to respond to demographic changes including ageing societies in some cases and the youth bulge in others along with the refugee crises across regions. They have been engaging in the [provision of care](#) among diverse populations including for children and the elderly. The growing interest in social cooperatives, including among youth and migrant populations, has also been noted by local and national governments alike. With [environmental changes, cooperatives](#) are involved in adaptation – such as mutual insurance for crops, or agricultural cooperatives supporting diversification of crops and mitigation – such as renewable energy and agroforestry. In urban areas, cooperatives exist in waste management, such as waste-picker cooperatives in countries such as India, Colombia and Brazil. These provide much-needed services and help their members to formalise and access health, training, and financial services.

[Platform cooperatives](#) are being formed by gig economy workers in response to the challenges they are facing, including low pay, the quality of work, and lack of voice and representation. Yet, despite their demonstrated resilience, viability and potential, cooperatives are not mainstream economic players in majority of the economies because of internal (lack of governance know-how) and external (legal and regulatory) impediments. The co-operative model may not provide a comprehensive response strategy to the changes in the world of work, but it is one of the diverse set of economic actors that can help achieve more sustainable futures, as noted in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). Cooperatives need to be developed with an eye for the rights and protection of workers, members and users. The cooperative movement has a role to play in supporting the emerging sectors and populations adopting the cooperative model and transmit their know-how.

The financial tools and intermediaries that are best suited to support the expansion and replication of good cooperative practices need to be developed by financial cooperatives. A better understanding on cooperatives requires their inclusion in education and training curricula. Representation of the cooperative movement needs to be strengthened for effective engagement in the future of work debates and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. International guidelines on coop statistics need to be activated to assess the impact of cooperatives and to conduct comparative analyses on the advantages and

disadvantages of different governance models. These and many and other issues will be discussed during this international event on cooperatives and the changing world of work in Kerala, India. We welcome researchers, activists, practitioners who are thinking about these issues to come and join us in this important exchange.

### 3. Dr. Trebor, Scholz, professor for Culture & Media at The New School in NYC

#### Equitable Pioneers for the Digital Economy

Almost thirty years after the inception of the World Wide Web, platform ownership is more concentrated than ever. It didn't take Facebook's massive data compromise or Care.com's unsustainably low wages to understand that a more diversified and democratic digital economy is more needed than ever. How can especially workers on the edge of society respond to the numerous "disruptions" on the horizon including automation and algorithmic decision making as well as unanticipated and unpredictable changes? The new generation cooperativists propose an economic, political, and cultural alternative that responds to these challenges by driving the economic domain into more humane and equitable directions. Four years ago, platform cooperativism which is an Internet based on broad-based platform ownership and democratic governance was introduced. This activist research project supports the integration of cooperatives into the digital economy. Work with platform co-ops in India, Germany, Spain, Italy, Australia, Columbia, Brazil, the UK and the United States, demonstrates that a democratically-owned People's Internet is not only possible but that it already exists. Silicon Valley loves a good disruption; let's give them one.

### 4. Mr. Osamu Nakano, Board Member, Japanese Worker Co-operative Union (JWCU)

The conference is an opportunity to learn more about the diversity of “co-operatives in industrial and service sectors of which principle objective is to serve members’ employment or business activities” (ICA-AP/CICOPA “Call for Research Paper”). There are various types of cooperatives in this category, and/but it is necessary to make clear the similarities and differences between them. In this regard, it is also necessary to rethink the relationship between cooperatives in this category and labor/trade unions. Indeed, some labor contract cooperatives, or self-employed producers’ cooperatives seem to be similar to trade/labor unions through which, for instance, freelancers are organized for the purpose of collective bargaining. This sort of comparative approach should be adopted not for narrowing the definition of cooperatives in this field but precisely for widening or developing the conceptual/theoretical possibility of the cooperatives.

While exploring the diversity of cooperatives in this field, as the same time, it is necessary to discuss the fundamental significance, or the essence of cooperatives in this field together with rethinking the meaning of “work” for human beings. As the ILO’s “Inception Report” reveals, the majority of people (particularly in developed countries) today is thinking that work is NOT just a way of earning money. I also think that work is not just a way of earning money but a certain practice through which human beings could develop her/himself. In other words, work is a certain kind of socio-ontological practice through which human beings subjectivize

her/himself. Working at private (capitalist) companies—employed work—thus means that human beings, as commodities of labor power, are deprived of this socio-ontological practice, and thus of their subjectivity itself. By contrast, working at workers' cooperatives means that human beings regain the subjectivity of their own at work.

In this regard, however, it is also important to recognize that human beings cannot grasp their subjectivity without the relationship with others, or the social relationships. In other words, we could subjectivize ourselves at work through the relationships with our colleagues, i.e. by working cooperatively with them. In this sense, workers' cooperatives are the social, ethical and ontological spaces in which human beings become the free independent subject by “working together” with others, i.e. through “associated work”. This sort of argument might sound too idealistic, but at any rate I would like to discuss the essence (or the distinctive characteristic) of workers' cooperatives while exploring their diversity. I think this sort of discussion is very crucial in order to keep the fundamental agreement among us about the definition of workers' cooperatives (in a broad sense) within the rapidly changing circumstances in political, legal and technological senses, surrounding “work”.

In addition, I would like to discuss “the future of work” for workers' cooperatives (in a broad sense) in relation to the rapid technological developments such as AI, robotic technologies and particularly digital platform. This is because the market value of various works seems to change in the near future due to the technological developments. For instance, the value of care works in a broad sense (including elderly care, childcare, care for people with disabilities, etc.) will increase, whereas the value of most office works will decrease due to the development of AI. At the same time, it is absolutely important for cooperatives to deal with platform economies in order to oppose platform capitalism. Thus I am thinking that workers' cooperatives should play a crucial role in the field of care works in local communities more than before, while developing platform cooperativism on a global economic scale. I hope we could exchange information and opinions on this kind of issues in the conference.

##### **5. Prof Krishnan TN, Organizational Behaviour & Human Resources, Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode**

Research has highlighted that Work that provides a sense of identity, meaningfulness and connectedness with others enhances engagement and commitment at work. The Inception report for the global commission on the Future of Work brought out by ILO underlines the fact that due to lack of income and social security during unemployment, job seekers could be propelled to take up a job not matching to their interests or capability or in worse case undertake vulnerable employment. These could affect job quality and earnings dependability due to the often temporary and non-standard forms of employment. As work becomes increasingly fragmented and short term in nature, the opportunities to experience a sense of identity, meaningfulness and to make social connections reduce. This is all the more consequential for emerging and developing economies such as India. A second concern as per the Inception report is that the labour productivity growth has outpaced the growth of real wages. This has two implications – one, the benefits of work has increasingly accrued to the capital investors, and second, those at the top of the income distribution gain much further exaggerating the income divide. It is in this context, the role of co-operatives

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especially worker co-operatives become very significant. While co-operatives are commercial organizations, they operate within a broader set of values and principles not focusing per se on maximising economic returns, but on meeting the needs and aspirations of their members. Business enterprises on the other hand predominantly follow the economic rationale of maximising shareholder wealth, wherein they could decide to relocate their operations or engage in flexible, non-standard forms of employment based on the financial results, with a possible negative consequence on the number, form and quality of employment. With the employee based ownership of worker cooperative organizations, the care for workers and employees is inbuilt in the ownership-governance structure providing for increased voice to workers and reduced income divide amongst employees. Further as Co-operatives are strongly embedded in the local economy in the form of ownership, employment and even customer base, the stakeholder concerns are very much a part of their operations. The Conference is an opportunity to deliberate on ways and means to provide an enabling policy environment and address some of the challenges that confront Cooperatives.

## 6. Mr. Balasubramanian G. Iyer, Regional Director, ICA Asia and Pacific

### Thematic Reflections on Conference hosts, ULCCS (India)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) as part of its Centenary Initiative is focused on the Future of Work, and within this context, prepared the Inception Report for the Global Commission on the Future of Work. According to the report workers around the globe, with some variation across country income groupings, value the contribution of a job to their individual experiences (interesting job) and appreciate the opportunity to help other people through their work (jobs which allow someone to help others). Work remains important because of the social networks that are forged and maintained, the contributions to community that can be made and because it is a source of personal identity and meaning. However, in most countries, there is a chasm between desire and reality. A worker co-operative is a worker owned and managed economic enterprise. Worker-owners in such enterprises work “under conditions determined by them collectively” and share benefits, risks and losses collectively. I had the opportunity to visit the conference hosts, the Uralungal Labour Contract Co-operative Society in 2016 and see first-hand the practice of democracy, collective deliberation, and self-management. This goes back to ULCCS’s roots in 1925 when the co-operative was formed through shared community background, spiritual inclinations, commitment to a just world, and spirit of idealism. This continues to remain strong 93 years on and a bedrock of the co-operative that has diversified and modernized without compromising on its principles. In India, where 52% of unorganized workers are employed as construction laborers, with hardly any regulations in regard to sustainability of their livelihood, earnings and work conditions; ULCCS has shown that it is possible to provide workers dignity, create solidarity, and empower members to meaningfully participate in the life of the cooperative. The worker cooperative model is highly relevant to India’s aspirations to build a modern, sustainable and egalitarian society.

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