

## **Report on the Coopathon Event during the ICA Global Cooperative Conference, India November 2024 and the YLEP (Youth Leadership Exchange Program) in December 2024.**

### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

In November and December 2024, India hosted two noteworthy events for youth under the auspices of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA): the Coopathon and the Youth Leadership Exchange Program (YLEP). These initiatives were specifically designed to engage and empower young leaders by uniting cooperative youth from around the world, with a focus on innovation, cooperation, and the development of youth leadership skills. Both events were supervised by the ICA Youth Committee, highlighting the global significance of cooperatives and the active participation of youth in shaping their futures as well as that of the cooperative movement.

### **2. COOPATHON EVENT:**

The Coopathon was a significant event designed to promote innovation within the cooperative sector by encouraging cooperation between emerging cooperators and established cooperatives. Organized as a hackathon-style challenge, the event brought together diverse teams of young leaders, innovators, and cooperators to develop solutions for pressing challenges faced by the cooperative movement.

Participants were categorized into 'builders' and 'explorers,' with each group pursuing a pathway tailored to their respective experience levels. Over four days, from November 25 to November 28, 2024, attendees engaged in structured activities, teamwork, and open discussions. To enrich the experience, an online platform was made available for pre-event preparation, enabling participants to delve into cooperative principles, share personal insights, and familiarize themselves with one another. This preparatory engagement ensured that participants maximized the value of the daily activities.

Experienced participants concentrated on the design of games that promoted cooperative values, while those who were newer to the field engaged in interactive challenges aimed at enjoyably exploring the concept of cooperativism. At key strategic moments, both groups convened to share insights, test the games they had developed, and establish connections with members of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) and other cooperators during the ICA global conference held in Delhi, India. This collaborative effort fostered a collective commitment to the principles of cooperatives.

#### **2.1 Key Features**

Teams collaborated to translate themes and issues related to cooperation into game designs that effectively encapsulated the core values and challenges inherent to cooperatives. This practical exercise extended beyond mere creativity; it provided a meaningful lesson in teamwork and resource-sharing, which are essential elements of cooperative enterprises.

**Theme:** The Coopathon was meticulously designed to immerse youth in the transformative potential of cooperativism. By categorizing participants as 'builders' and 'explorers,' the program offered a meaningful experience for all, combining more than 20 hours of guided activities, teamwork, and open discussions. The integration of structured sessions with informal networking fostered creativity, dialogue, and connection.

**Participants:** Teams comprised individuals from various ICA regions, including Asia-Pacific, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Participants included young entrepreneurs, social innovators, cooperative employees, and technology developers.

**Mentorship and Supervision:** Participants received guidance from mentors appointed by the ICA Youth Committee, who provided valuable insight on aligning innovative ideas with the fundamental principles of the cooperative model.

**Outcomes:** Throughout the event, participants cooperated with peers to promote cooperative principles, fostering cooperation and open discourse. Emerging cooperative leaders were encouraged to inspire and uplift each other, thereby laying the groundwork for the future of the cooperative movement. Additional outcomes included:

- i. The development of several prototypes for digital tools, such as cooperative management platforms.
- ii. Exploration of collaborative solutions aimed at enhancing cooperative market reach and improving member engagement.
- iii. Proposals for sustainable cooperative business models that integrate local communities.
- iv. Addressing the challenges faced by cooperatives globally through innovative solutions initiated by youth.

The Coopathon emerged as a dynamic platform for young cooperators to engage with cooperatives, displaying their creativity while addressing the pressing challenges that cooperatives encounter in the contemporary landscape.

## 2.2 Representation from the ICA Africa Region

The ICA Africa region was represented by five youths who actively participated in the Coopathon:

1. Mabruck Ismail Mpangule from the Tanzania Federation of Cooperatives (TFC) Limited.
2. Salma Hachimi from the Office of Cooperative Development in Morocco (ODCO).
3. Hilda Ojall from Kenya Union of Savings and Credit Cooperatives (KUSCCO).
4. Omar Akmal from the General Authority for Construction and Housing Cooperatives in Egypt (CHC).
5. Kisaakye Angelline from Uganda.



1.1 Participants of the coopathon gathered during the closing session on November 28, 2024.

### 3. YOUTH LEADERSHIP EXCHANGE PROGRAM (YLEP)

The Youth Leadership Exchange Program (YLEP) was carried out following the ICA Global Cooperative Conference, from December 1 to December 7, 2024. The primary objective of the YLEP was to foster the development of youth engaged in cooperatives throughout all regions of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) by providing them with exposure to the practical operations of cooperative enterprises. Participants partook in visits to various cooperatives in Himachal Pradesh, India, thereby gaining firsthand insights into their operational activities, historical contexts, and overarching objectives.

#### 3.1. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE YLEP PROGRAM IN HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA.

The program commenced with our departure from New Delhi on the 1st of December, travelling by bus to Dharamshala. En route, we conducted refreshment breaks at Amrik Sukhdev Dhaba and Heritage Haveli. Upon our arrival in Dharamshala, we enjoyed an evening meal and were accommodated at Hotel Camp Dharamshala.

**On the 2nd of December**, after breakfast at the hotel, we attended the inaugural ceremony at the DRCS office in Dharamshala. This was succeeded by a study visit to the Kangra Central Co-operative Bank. Following lunch, we proceeded to the Malan Co-operative Agri Service Society. The day's activities culminated with a bonfire gathering at Hotel Camp Dharamshala.

**On the 3rd of December**, we travelled to Mcleodganj to engage with the Tibetan Handicraft Cooperative Society, followed by local sightseeing at various Temples, thus immersing ourselves in Tibetan culture. The day concluded with dinner at the hotel, accompanied by a bonfire and

musical entertainment.

**On the 4th of December**, after breakfast and checkout, we journeyed to Kullu via Mandi, during which we paused for lunch. Following this, we visited the HP Milk Fed unit (Himachal Pradesh State Cooperative Milk Producer's Federation Limited) before arriving in Kullu, where we checked into Hotel Shobla Royale for dinner.

**On the 5th of December**, we conducted a visit to the government sheep farm, followed by a tour of the Kullu Valley Regional Marketing Cooperative Society and BHUTTICO in Bhuntar. Subsequently, we convened in Kullu for an evening dinner.

**On the 6th of December**, we travelled to Benchi for a study visit to the local cooperative agriculture service society and subsequently proceeded to Manali to visit the Lahaul Potato Growers' Cooperative Society. After a lunch break, we explored the Manali Market before returning to Kullu for dinner.

**On the 7th of December**, we departed from Kullu and began our journey back to New Delhi, where we spent the night at Hotel Treebo Corporate Park.

The program concluded on the 8th of December with breakfast at the hotel before our departures.



**1.2 Participants of the Youth Leadership Exchange Program (YLEP) at Hotel Camp Dharamshala, India, on December 3, 2024.**

### 3.2. KEY FEATURES

The objective was to facilitate group travel aimed at the exploration of local cooperative environments in India and to foster opportunities for learning about fellow travellers. This approach not only provided a comprehensive perspective but also enhanced cultural empathy, stimulated inspiration, enriched multinational understanding, and established connections worldwide for future collaboration.

- Theme: Empowering youth to lead in the cooperative movement with a focus on global cooperation, leadership skills, and fostering intercultural exchange.
- Participants: A diverse group of young people, aged 18-35, from cooperative organizations around the world, including the Asia-Pacific region, Europe, and Africa.
- Supervision by the ICA Youth Committee and NCUI (National Cooperative Union of India): The ICA Youth Committee and the NCUI played a key role in curating the program and ensuring its alignment with the values of the cooperative movement. They facilitated the mentorship, leadership exercises and hosting, guiding the young cooperators in effective YLEP.

### 3.3. OUTCOMES

1. **Exposure to Cooperative Models:** We were exposed to various types of cooperative organizations, ranging from Agricultural Marketing Cooperatives (e.g., Malan Co-operative Agri Service Society, Lahaul Potato Growers' Cooperative Society), Financial Cooperative Organizations (e.g., Kangra District Cooperative Bank) to handicraft cooperatives (e.g., Tibetan Handicraft Cooperative Society, Bhutti Weavers Cooperative Society - Bhuttico). This highlighted the importance of cooperatives in fostering local economic development and providing sustainable livelihoods for communities.
2. **Cultural Immersion:** The visits to religious temples, markets, and cultural sites like Mcleodganj (Tibetan culture), Manali, and Kullu underlined the rich cultural diversity of the regions we visited. This helped us understand the intersection of cooperative community, and culture in rural and urban settings.
3. **Networking and Knowledge Sharing:** The study visits likely facilitated networking between us and local businesses/coop members, providing valuable insights into how cooperatives function, their challenges, and their successes.
4. **Exposure to Rural Development and Agriculture:** The visit to agricultural cooperatives and the HP Milk Fed unit highlighted the importance of agricultural cooperatives in supporting rural economies, enhancing productivity, and promoting local agricultural products.
5. **Team Building and Social Interaction:** Activities like the bonfire gatherings and dinners provided opportunities for us to bond, reflect on the day's activities, and build relationships, fostering a sense of community, teamwork and cooperation.

### 3.4 LESSONS

1. **The Power of Cooperatives:** We learned that cooperatives are vital tools for community-driven development, especially in rural areas. They enable small producers to pool resources, increase bargaining power, and access markets they otherwise might not be able to. The tour of different cooperatives likely provided us with a firsthand understanding of their impact.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity in Cooperative Business:** The integration of cultural sites and activities into the itinerary (like Tibetan handicrafts) taught us the importance of respecting and understanding local cultures, which can lead to more effective and respectful business practices in diverse regions.
3. **Value of Cooperation:** Through our engagement with local communities and cooperatives, we saw how cooperation at the grassroots level can drive positive social and economic change. These cooperatives relied on mutual trust, shared values, and collective action.
4. **Holistic Learning:** The blend of cultural, educational, and leisure activities within the program indicated that a well-rounded approach to learning is often most effective. Mixing cooperative education with cultural immersion and relaxation deepened our understanding and retention of information.
5. **Importance of Networking and Partnerships:** Engaging with various local enterprises, government organisations, and cooperative societies taught us the value of partnerships. It also illustrated how these networks could provide practical solutions to challenges faced by cooperatives and communities.
6. **Sustainable Tourism and Local Economies:** The visit to local markets, handicraft societies, and agricultural cooperatives also highlighted how tourism, when done responsibly, can support local economies. By connecting visitors with local crafts and agricultural products, tourism can create demand for local goods, boosting the community's income.
7. **Self-Reflection and Bonding:** Activities like bonfire gatherings and team dinners at the end of each day allowed for moments of reflection, fostering personal and group growth. These informal interactions deepened our learning and made the overall experience more memorable.

**Final Reflection:** The itinerary combined professional development with cultural exploration, emphasizing the importance of cooperatives in promoting local economies and cultural preservation. It also demonstrated the power of immersive learning and networking while encouraging us to reflect on our experiences and connect with others in meaningful ways. The program was an example of how well-curated study tours can be a powerful tool for both education and social cohesion.

### 3.5 Representation from the ICA Africa Region

The ICA Africa region was represented by two youths who actively participated in YLEP.

1. Mabruck Ismail Mpangule from the Tanzania Federation of Cooperatives (TFC) Limited.
2. Salma Hachimi from the Office of Cooperative Development in Morocco (ODCO).



**1.3 Participants from Africa region, Mabruck Ismail and Salma Hachimi at Kullu Valley Regional Marketing Cooperative Society during the YLEP.**