
Mr. President,

I am thankful to you for giving me this opportunity to address the General Assembly.

As we gather here to mark 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, it is most befitting that the United Nations is taking leadership to raise awareness about Cooperatives as a progressive model of socio-economic advancement. Considering the role that Cooperatives have played the world over in bringing about social change, rural development and raising economic productivity, this global recognition has been long overdue.

The Cooperative model of development has met with remarkable success in varied socio-economic contexts in both developed and developing countries. Yet, its true potential as a means of socio-economic organization remains to be fully harnessed, and the model itself to be better understood by the larger global development community.
Its space in global development discourse, thus far, has been limited. In fact, the Internationally Agreed Development Goals including the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) have really not focused on this people-centric development option.

**Mr. President,**

They say in every crisis lies an opportunity. There is a strengthened push for financial inclusion, promoting social protection and empowering small and medium enterprises and marginal farmers to act as levers against economic shocks. This has pitched forth Cooperatives as a viable choice for social and economic action. We must fully capitalize on the situation.

India calls upon Member States, the United Nations system, civil society and the private sector to strongly advocate for Cooperative Movement. This would be most timely, as the global community prepares to renew its commitment to Sustainable Development at the RIO+20 Conference next year.

The decentralized nature of Cooperative structure based on popular participation and bottom-up approach makes it an ideal platform for local action. Cooperatives have contributed significantly in ensuring economic productivity, rural development; promoting social empowerment and cohesion; opening marketing channels for village and artisanal produce; and providing credit and input support to farmers, consumers and workers. Their catalytic role in national advancement, both in developed and developing countries has been well recognized.

**Mr. President,**

India’s experience with Cooperatives has been singularly successful. This has been duly noted by the Secretary General in his report. Given that almost 70% of our people are dependent on agriculture, it is natural for our Cooperative Movement to have an agricultural bias, both in credit and non-credit segments. Our national priority for poverty eradication, inclusive growth, women empowerment and promoting self-reliance underpins the fundamentals of the Indian Cooperative Movement. In the process, we have constantly drawn inspiration from the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi who desired to see village societies and cooperative farming at the center of his idea of GRAM SWARAJ or Rural Independence.

A unique feature of the Cooperative Movement in India has been that the State has played an active role in it. We believe such responsibilities are part of a developmental State, especially in the early years of its existence. With the Cooperative Movement having gathered strength of its own, the Government now is largely playing a facilitator’s role.

Cooperatives have been the lifeline of India’s white revolution or milk production, and have made us the largest producer of milk in the world. Milk Cooperatives have been most successful in the dry parts of India, not the most ideal setting for dairy,
making cooperative action even more note-worthy. A Milk Cooperative, AMUL is a household name in India with its products available throughout the length and breadth of the country. Behind the brand AMUL, stands a milk marketing federation, a union of 15,712 village milk cooperatives comprising 3 million milk producers, with a daily milk collection of 12 million liters and supported by one million retailers. Milk Cooperative under the brand name SUDHA has contributed significantly to ensuring healthy, nutritive and affordable food to the people in our State of BIHAR- the land of Lord Buddha.

The Indian Farmers’ Fertiliser Cooperative Limited [IFFCO], the largest fertiliser producing cooperative in Asia is another stellar example of cooperative success in India. It has a membership base of more than 39,000 agricultural cooperatives throughout the country. It has recently diversified itself in insurance, IT services and other developmental activities in rural areas, establishing new networks of group action to empower people.

There are a large number of other such success stories from the cooperative sector in India. Our cooperatives have shown impressive results in banking, sugarcane farming, urban housing, fishery, poultry, home-based economic activities, marketing of village produce and social welfare. India’s cooperative action in providing affordable housing in the urban areas has been instrumental in making progress on slum development, an MDG commitment.

Mr. President,

given India’s success in Cooperatives, we have taken steps to integrate it fully into our planning and development process. We have established the National Cooperative Union of India, an apex body to guide and strengthen the movement. To support its growth and professional needs, we have established a network of Cooperative Management institutes. In order to improve the functioning of the Cooperatives, we are placing greater emphasis on consolidation, internal resource mobilization, meeting their training needs and re-orienting the role of Government as a facilitator.

Mr. President,

We are living in uncertain times. New and emerging challenges of food security, energy access, rapid pace of urbanization, degeneration of natural resources, and growing rural-urban inequality seek an enhanced collective action. We are compelled to do more with less resource. How do we do it? One of the answers, Mr. President, lies in the Cooperative Movement. Let’s do our best to project, protect and promote it.

I thank you.

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