

New feature: COOP Champions

This issue of ILO and Cooperatives marks the launch of a new item to feature colleagues who are currently working with cooperatives. These “COOP champions” will share information about their professional experience, current work, and the future aspirations with regard to promotion of cooperatives.

Cooperatives United

Our first COOP champion is Mohamed Farzan who works with the ILO's Local Empowerment through Economic Development (LEED) project in the post conflict Northern Region of Sri Lanka as a Programme Assistant for Value Chain Development and Cooperative Promotion. Originally from the North Western Province of Sri Lanka Farzan is a training facilitator of LED tools and is a trainer for My.COOP, an agricultural cooperative management training package.

The LEED project, funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), is an initiative implemented by the ILO in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Labour Relations in Sri Lanka. Started in 2011, the project works in three districts of the Northern Province promoting inclusive local economic development that creates decent jobs and long term sustainable livelihoods in economic sectors with growth potential. Cooperatives have been historically the strongest cooperatives in the country and they are the main partners of the project interventions in the Northern Province as the main economic, social and environmental service providers for the community.

Following the resettlement in early 2010 the Northern cooperative movement reemerged as an important local economy actor. The LEED project partnered with the Provincial Department of Cooperative Development to support the re-establishment of nine primary and secondary cooperatives involved in rice paddy, fisheries, fruits and vegetable. Four multi-purpose cooperatives were also supported to re-equip their rice mills while purchasing



paddy harvest from their thousands of members for a guaranteed price.

The project has been emphasizing business to business partnerships, strengthening of institutional capacities of both government institutions and cooperatives, mainstreaming of gender equality concerns, creation of decent jobs as well as increasing incomes of poor and vulnerable populations by establishing sustainable economic systems via cooperatives.

LEED's focus to date with the cooperative movement has been on the re-establishment of the cooperatives' core businesses and establishing market linkages. Other needs remain unmet for building management capacities, development of cooperative values and principles, provision of better quality and diversified services to members and promotion of innovations. The project has started to address these 'soft needs' through training on planning, effective management, accounting and auditing practices, management of membership skills and know-how.

The Cooperative Branch of ILO in Geneva has supported the project by providing technical advice and expertise in the field. The My.Coop training package has emerged as a relevant tool that the project staff and government stakeholders in the cooperative sector were trained on. In this process, the project has also made an entry point to translate and adapt this training package to both Sinhala and Tamil. Furthermore, the project has also contributed to initiating policy dialogue at national level with the Ministry of Cooperative Development for a comprehensive policy framework for the cooperative movement in Sri Lanka.

Mr Farzan says that the cooperative sector has an enormous potential to grow in the North and other parts of Sri Lanka. For that to happen a more conducive legal and policy environment is needed. The role of ILO in this process has been welcome by the key stakeholders. The efforts initiated through LEED need to be sustained through longer term initiatives at both the national and local levels.



Fishery cooperative members with Upali Herath and Mohamed Farzan