



United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

***Harnessing the Cooperative Advantage to Build a Better
World***

A Global Forum and Workshop on Cooperatives

Welcome Remarks

Ngone Diop

Chief - Gender and Women in Development
African Centre for Gender and Social Development

4 September 2012

Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Development of Ethiopia

The President of the International Cooperative Alliance, Dame Pauline Green

And joining us by video link the Director of the UN Division for Social Policy and Development, Daniela Bas

Our partners in this conference:

- The African Union Commission, represented by Mr Omar Diop
- The International Labour Organisation, represented by Mr Charles Dan, the ILO Regional Director for Africa
- The Food and Agriculture Organisation, represented by Mr Edward Kilawe, Officer-in-Charge, FAO Subregional Office for Eastern Africa

Distinguished resource persons and participants

Colleagues, ladies and gentlemen

Good morning!

On behalf on the UN Economic Commission for Africa and our partners in this workshop, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, I warmly welcome you to Addis Ababa and to this meeting.

We are still mourning the loss of the Prime Minister, Meles Zanawi, whose commitment to poverty reduction and sustainable development was outstanding. He was a strong supporter and believer in the value of cooperatives. Ladies and Gentlemen may I request you to rise as we observe a minute of silence for a great leader.

(Moment of Silence)

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are very pleased to see all of you and are excited of what we expect will be a lively and productive discussion on *'Harnessing the Cooperative Advantage to Build a Better World'*.

We feel very honoured to host such an important forum here at the ECA headquarters. ECA works to promote social and economic development of African member states. We place emphasis on supporting efforts to eradicate poverty, reversing the marginalization of Africa in the globalization process, and accelerating gender equality and women's empowerment. We believe cooperatives are instrumental to achieving these aspirations.

As the former UN Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said at the launch of the International Year of Cooperatives, last year in October and I quote - "the cooperative movement balances both economic viability and social responsibility. They make enormous contributions not only to our members, but to their communities and societies. They empower youth, women, older persons, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples. Hence they serve as a significant social safety net".

Cooperatives present ideals and structures that have invaluable potential to advance inclusive growth and sustainable development:

- They improve opportunities for income generation and increase productivity, particularly in poor communities;
- They assist in the provision of technical and financial assistance. Most importantly micro finance services to low income communities;
- They have proven resilience including in financial and economic crises;
- In both the developed and developing world, cooperatives contribute significantly to agriculture and rural development ; and

- They present a huge opportunity for addressing gender inequalities and empowering women and men towards more equitable and resilient societies.

Ladies and Gentlemen

In recognition of the distinct contributions that cooperative enterprises can and do make to local and global development, the UN declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives.

This Forum is very timely and is a component of the various activities undertaken through out the year to celebrate and promote the cooperative model and also promote capacity for cooperative enterprises. The forum aims to examine the strategic ways in which the cooperative model promotes individual and collective self-help, contributes to social-economic development and strengthens communities around the world.

Almost a year after the launch of the International Year of Cooperatives, it is worth revisiting the objectives, strategies and principles that underpin the development of the cooperative movement with a view to shaping forward-looking actions. The central question to our discussions here is: *how much are we leveraging the potential of cooperatives to advance sustainable development and indeed build a better world?*

We need to come up with focussed policy measures and actions that will help to harness the great potential of cooperatives paving the way for equitable growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development.

On that note, let me conclude my welcome message with a wish for a lively exchange of ideas on the distinct ways in which the cooperative advantage could be harnessed to build a better world.

Our plan is that the knowledge and information generated from this forum will inform the development of the International Plan of Action on Cooperatives – a proposed outcome of the International Year of Cooperatives.

I wish you a stimulating and productive meeting.