

Co-operatives and Development

The Espriu Foundation, an example of how health co-operatives contribute to development

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On 17 November, the International Health Co-operative Organization (IHCO) and the International Organisation of Industrial, Artisanal and Service Producers' Co-operatives (CICOPA) organised a conference entitled *The Way Forward: How Industrial, Service, Health and Artisan Co-operatives Contribute to Development*. More than 200 people participated in the event, which was held in Cancun, Mexico as part of the General Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) and structured as a roundtable session of 30 experts on development cooperation policies and projects. Representatives from the United Nations, the UNDP, the Brazilian and Mexican governments, development NGOs, the International Federation of Trade Unions, co-operative organisations involved in development and various regional and sectoral bodies of the ICA openly debated relevant topics related to the co-operative movement's contribution to development. Dr Oriol Gras represented the Espriu Foundation at the conference.

The President of the ICA, Pauline Green, who opened the conference, praised the IHCO and CICOPA initiative and stated the importance of the role ICA sector organisations play as drivers of co-operative development. Green also emphasised that international development is one of the crucial topics that the co-operative movement should closely follow and defended the need to intensify its efforts worldwide and define a global profile.

After contributions by government and United Nations representatives, the debate focused on three areas: the *micro* level in relation to individual co-operative enterprises' experiences, the *meso* level which



30 experts in development and cooperatives at the debating table

refers to the sharing of resources through supporting institutions, financial mechanisms, co-operative groups, etc., and the *macro* level, reserved for national and international topics such as the legal framework or inter-cooperation between co-operatives.

Each one of the three levels was illustrated by a video presentation on how co-operatives contribute to development with specific case studies, fo-

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llowed by debate among the experts. The Espriu Foundation was presented in the *meso* level block as an example of health co-operatives.

Some of the most relevant ideas that came out of the debate emphasized not viewing the decline of the economic system as inevitable, but rather as an opportunity to implement the co-operative values of solidarity and mutual responsibility,

working together to build a better world. Co-operatives offer people the opportunity to have an active role in economic, social and environmental decisions through jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprises.

The debate was also concerned with the need to promote inter-cooperation to support co-operatives that can create jobs and generate wealth in less developed areas of the world. To this end, it is also important to gather resources within the co-operative movement and seek support from governments to work on fostering new co-operatives that favour development.

At the end of the conference, the roundtable participants drew up an agenda of the main points to be included in development policies on all levels such as the importance of promoting cooperatives through legislation based on the cooperative identity and standards, the importance of fostering a strong public policy for the development of cooperatives, the promotion of a more democratic governance by stakeholders in economic activities and the importance of sustainable long-term employment for development.