

Cooperation between Latin America & Europe: Contributions to an inclusive & sustainable development

5th November 2014, Cartagena, Colombia

Outcomes of the Meeting

The international meeting “Cooperation between Latin America & Europe: Contributions to an inclusive & sustainable development”, held on 5 November 2014 in Cartagena, Colombia, welcomed over 140 participants from 19 countries. Its outcomes are summarised as follows.

Morning session - Social inclusion through cooperative partnerships

The morning opened with an **overview of cooperatives in Latin America**, their context, their impact, and the role of Cooperatives of the Americas in strengthening the sector. The session then focused on **the key cooperative sectors in Europe** and a presentation of Cooperatives Europe, its work, and its members’ development activities within the Cooperatives Europe Development Platform.

3 thematic workshops then showed how **partnerships** between Latin American and European cooperatives provide opportunities for development and **social inclusion** with a central role for local communities, using diverse forms of synergy, collaboration and empowerment.

The **workshop 1 on social inclusion, youth & gender** stressed that women and young people are a social and economic driving force, through and for whom cooperatives need to create decent jobs, integration, and prevent social risks. Gender gap and youth’s lack of opportunities can be addressed by supporting education based on cooperative values, targeted projects, and exchange of best practices regionally and internationally. Strengthening youth networks, internships and job advertisements within cooperatives, improving legal frameworks on gender, and creating trainings and board quotas for women, also bears fruit.

The **workshop 2 on family agriculture & rural development** evidenced that cooperatives have significant assets to address challenges on rural areas, support smallholders as a pillar in food provision, and facilitate access to markets. Appropriate legal frame, land access rules and infrastructures, efficient political advocacy, high-impact education, as well as deeper integration and exchanges among cooperatives at the regional and international level, were considered key to success.

The **workshop 3 on finance and credit cooperatives** demonstrated how these are the backbone of cooperative development in many Latin American countries, and how good

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practices and partnerships in the sector are essential to reach out to the most excluded. The importance of visibility and supportive public policies was emphasised, along with the need to use appropriate technological platforms, improve cooperative governance at all levels, and take advantage of European experience on the integration model and IFRS implementation.

Afternoon session - Bridging LA & EU: Political dialogue and inter-regional partnerships

The afternoon session illustrated that development is not solely a government's issue, but also requires the involvement of civil society, private sector and academia, making it essential to build efficient alliances. With their concern for community and locally rooted approach, cooperatives represent an ideal option for an inclusive and sustainable process.

The **panel 1**, centred on **policies and enabling environment for cooperatives**, examined how LA and EU institutions have started to build up relations with the cooperative movement, and called for **increased interregional dialogue on policy priorities and good practices** in regulation and program implementation, to address common challenges and learn from each other on how to improve support to cooperatives. LA and European cooperatives also need to define common positions and improve their **advocacy** at the regional level, pooling knowledge and efficient tools to get a stronger voice vis-à-vis political institutions.

The **panel 2**, centred on **partnerships between the EU and LA cooperative movements**, emphasized that different regional experiences open up fruitful collaborations opportunities for social and economic development. A **multi-stakeholder approach** must therefore be created to bring together cooperatives, NGOs and other social economy actors, and encourage the creation of spaces for exchanges such as the Cooperatives Europe Development Platform. Moreover, **alliances must be reinforced between CSO networks** from Europe, Latin America and other regions, to encourage the sharing of experience and strengthen field cooperatives - with a focus on small producers and competitiveness (in fair trade, etc.).

Conclusions & final recommendations

- It is important that Cooperatives of the Americas and Cooperatives Europe enable a **common space for mutual collaboration**. Our cooperative networks need to develop further the opportunities of inter-regional partnerships.
- Cooperatives also need a **sound and regular political dialogue with decision-makers** to create an **enabling environment** and ensure a **level playing field** between cooperatives and other forms of enterprise, so as to achieve their full potential in fostering inclusive development.
- In addition, cooperatives need to efficiently **strengthen exchanges within Latin America and at the inter-regional level**, looking for the best cooperative models available.
- Finally, cooperatives should open up to other civil society actors and **engage in multi-stakeholders partnerships** to strengthen their impact on development.

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