

**Conference on Strategic Business Alliances among Co-operatives
Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam: September 6-7, 2011**

A Brief Report

Background

At the 44th meeting of ICA-AP Consumer Committee held in Pune, India in 2009, Mr. Virendra Singh, Chairman of NCCF of India, stressed the need of developing international trade among consumer cooperatives in the region for mutual benefit of consumers. After that, at the workshop on Development of Consumer Cooperatives, held in Seoul in 2010, Ms. Tran Thi Kim Quyen, Vice General Director of Saigon Co.op, Vietnam, unveiled the possibility of future business collaboration with NTUC Fair Price, Singapore. Considering such an increasing needs of Member Organizations, at the 45th meeting of Consumer Committee, held in Beijing, China in 2010, it was decided to take the first step by holding a conference on Strategic Business Alliances among Co-operatives in 2011.

In view of the above, the Conference on Strategic Business Alliances among Co-operatives was held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on September 6-7, 2011. 27 (23 on Sept.7) foreign participants from India, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Singapore and INTERCOOP attended the conference, in addition to 23 (17 on Sept. 7) participants from Vietnam.

Objectives

The main objectives of the conference were as follows:

- 1) To develop strategic business alliances between consumer co-ops and other type of co-ops;
- 2) To strengthen partnerships between consumers and producers.
- 3) To promote co-operative trade (including “Fair Trade”) and ethical consumption in Asia and the Pacific region.

Conference

The Conference was inaugurated by Ms. Nguyen Thi Hanh, C.E.O., Saigon Co-op. She thanked and welcomed all the delegates on behalf of Saigon Union of Trading Co-operatives (Saigon Co-op) for coming to HCM City. She gave a detailed description of the Conference. She believed that a broad range of mutual benefits will be offered through this conference for not only enhancing solid relationships among international co-operatives but also gaining remarkable knowledge about strategic business alliances.

Following papers were presented at the Conference:

1. Introduction of ICA Committee on Consumer Cooperation for Asia and the Pacific and Strategic Business Alliances among Japanese Consumers' Cooperatives - by Mr. Haruyoshi Amano, Chairperson, ICA Committee on Consumer Cooperation for Asia and the Pacific;
2. The Story of NTUC FairPrice and collaboration with Saigon Coop. - by Mr. Tan Kian Chew, Group CEO, NTUC FairPrice.
3. Introduction of Coop. Brand Product Development Policy by
 - i) Mr. Steven Ang, Group Category Manager (Fresh & Frozen – Purchasing & Merchandising) FairPrice, Singapore;
 - ii) Ms. Tran Thi Kim Quyen, Vice General Director, Saigon Co.op.
 - iii) Mr. Kazuo Murakami, Manager of Product Policy Development, JCCU.
4. Presentations on Coop. Brand Products:
 - i) The challenges of iCOOP Brand Products and its development in South Korea - by Ms. Oh, Mi-Yea, Chairperson, iCOOP Association of Consumer Cooperatives;
 - ii) Presentation of Intercoop (European Coop. buying Office) and Coop. Brand Products Development - by Mr. Alberto Marrassini, Business Development Manager, Intercoop Ltd.

Coop. Brand Products were displayed at the venue of the Conference by Saigon Coop., FairPrice, Singapore, JCCU, Japan, iCOOP Korea and Intercoop. (photos enclosed).

Note: All the above presentations are being uploaded at the website of ICA-AP (www.icaroap.coop)

In addition to the above presentation, an Open Discussion on “Strategies and Future Perspectives of Coop. Brand Products” took place. The panelists were: Representative from FairPrice, Singapore (Mr. Steven Ang, Group Category Manager-Fresh & Frozen-Purchasing & Merchandising; Saigon Co.op (Ms. Tran Thi Kim Quyen, Vice General Director); JCCU (Mr. Kazuo Murakami, Manager of Product Policy Department), They replied to the questions from the audience.

On the 2nd day of the conference i.e. on 7th September, a paper on “Cooperative Law in relation with Consumer Cooperatives” was presented by Mr. Nguyen Xuan Hien, Vice Chairperson, Vietnam Cooperative Alliance. A healthy discussion took place after the presentation and participants from India, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Korea, Japan and Italy(INTERCOOP) participated in the discussions. Mr. Nguyen Ngoc Hoa, Chairman, Saigon Co.op and Dr. Nguyen Minh Tu, Director General, Ministry of Planning & Investment (MPI), Department of Cooperative Development, also participated in the discussions.

In the second half of the second day, a field study visit was arranged by Saigon Co.op. The foreign participants visited one Co.op. Food and one Department Store run by Saigon Co.op. In addition, the participants also visited two private stores – Lotte Department Store (Korea) and Big C from France.

Next day, the participants left for their respective home countries.