



**CIPRIANI COLLEGE**  
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

# WORK MATTERS COLUMN

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# Co-operatives Building a Better Trinidad and Tobago

The United Nations, on June 19th 2024 adopted a resolution proclaiming 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives 2025 (IYC 2025) to be celebrated under the theme “Cooperatives Build a Better World.”

Prior to the above, at its 66th plenary meeting on April 18, 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution “Promoting the Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development” (A/77/L.60). The resolution provides an official definition for the Social and Solidarity Economy and acknowledges that it can contribute to the achievement and localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

These two declarations by the United Nations provide the Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) which includes co-operatives with a tremendous opportunity to advance the position of the sector, as well share its successes with wider society. Entities in the SSE directly impact the lives of working people, with the provision of much needed social and final services. ICA has estimated a membership in cooperatives of over one billion globally, providing job or work opportunities for over 280 million persons. Credit Unions are the dominant form of financial co-operatives, and globally they are estimated to have a membership of 411 million. In Trinidad and Tobago, hundreds of thousands of households have benefited from the services of Co-operatives, and Credit Unions are the major players in the local co-operative movement comprising over 700,000 members with assets of over USD \$2.8 billion.

The IYC 2025 provides an opportunity for co-operatives and SSEs locally to position themselves to play a greater role in national development. The discussion captured below addresses three broad areas central to the Co-operative movement’s focus during 2025 and beyond.

Co-operative Resilience refers to the ability of Co-operatives to use their unique features as a strategy

to address key socio-economic, environmental and cultural issues to achieve their objectives of meeting the needs of their members and the wider society. The need for Co-operatives to be resilient is linked to the fact that this form of collective action similar to other SSEs, focuses on service delivery to individuals at the lower income levels. These individuals tend have higher levels of exposure in situations of disruptions, and Co-operatives are often the entities that reduce these levels of vulnerability and provide a mechanism for survival and recovery.

Co-operative Transformation and Modernization refers to the movement’s ability to be continuously adapt its approaches, systems, structure and practices resulting in new models that which are underpinned by the Co-operative philosophy. To this end, transformation in Co-operatives can occur in its governance systems that they may, as well as innovations related to transparency and democracy. Transformation with respect to economic and financial management seeks to better utilize the collective assets of members or even address the redistribution of surpluses in areas that better service members’ needs. The ability of Co-operatives to adopt, and adapt to new technological advancements (AI, Digitalization, Digital Currency, etc.) are all issues which will inform the next generation of Co-operative users. Co-operative transformation and modernization are therefore closely linked to innovation as they should ultimately result in systematic changes.

Co-operative Innovation and Sustainability addresses the ability of the movement to develop new ideas that improve their ability to have greater impact on sustainable development. In an era that will most likely continue to see various forms of disruptions, Co-operatives need to employ innovative solutions within their governance structures, business models, social focus and operations which will result in greater levels of agility. One key example of innovation is the rise of Platform Co-operative Model which involves “website

or mobile app that is designed to provide a service or sell a product - that is collectively owned and governed by the people who depend on and participate in it. That includes those who deliver the underlying service by contributing labour, time, skills, and/or assets.... the two key traits that these digital Co-operatives must realize are democratic control and collective ownership.”

With reference to sustainability, Co-operatives in collaboration with government agencies, local and regional education and training institution, funding/donor agencies and local Co-operative support institutions, should establish initiatives such Co-operative incubator systems, and the like. The system will focus on harnessing and supporting the growth of new Co-operatives giving special focus to women, youths and marginalised groups which can benefit from the formation of a Co-operative business model to address socio-economic issues in the communities. Additionally, business incubator structures can be used to support innovative models such as green Co-operatives which assist with achieving environmental sustainability goals.

The Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies (CCLCS) is poised to support the movement in achieving its full potential. CCLCS has undertaken research and development projects focused on Co-operatives across the Caribbean, having amassed significant competence and expertise to assist the movement. The College has planned a series of activities to recognise IYC 2025 with particular emphasis on Co-operative institutional development. One major event is an academic conference in May 2025 which will feature world class Co-operative researchers and global leaders addressing contemporary issues ranging from policy to membership benefits. We look forward to welcoming you to the Caribbean World of Work Conference in May 2025.

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