

Women in Co-operatives: the policy of the International Co-operative Alliance

Laura Gómez Urquijo

The role of women in the Co-operative Movement has deserved special attention and has led to the development of specific policies by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA). Attempting not only to represent and extend Co-operation worldwide but also to work towards a fairer society, the ICA has gone beyond the defence of women's rights in co-operatives to include other aspects of economic and social life. Yet, in spite of the important contribution it has made, we can still find some unresolved questions on the subject.

The improvement of women's situation through Co-operation

The starting point from which to analyse women's presence in co-operatives can be the role that Co-operation has played in their social and economic situation, a role generally considered as extremely positive. However, we have to remember that the situation of women in co-operatives is very different depending on the country. While in some areas there are still many obstacles to the formation of co-operatives, in the more developed ones the problems are more often regarding participation in decision making¹. Nevertheless, and referring to the Movement as a whole, the contribution made by the Co-operative Movement to improving women's rights and welfare is frequently recognised. An outstanding statement in this sense is the declaration made by the United Nations on the occasion of the International Day of Co-operation in 1995². Recognising the achievements of the Co-operative Movement, it stresses that women have found adequate means to improve their economic situation in this kind of enterprise. It also points out that the Co-operatives have not only allowed women to overcome a 'poverty trap' (by offering favourable conditions of employment and credit in many cases), but furthermore they have made considerable contributions to achieving equality with men by improving education and training opportunities, access to health care and so on.

These achievements (manifested on this and other occasions

by the United Nations³) had been previously highlighted by the International Co-operative Alliance, the firmest defender of the contribution of Co-operation to the welfare of women. For this reason, the ICA reiterates the important role played by women in society, with special reference to certain aspects such as consumption, nutrition, child-care and education, and intervention in rural and agricultural communities⁴. The knowledge that Co-operatives are an excellent way to increase women's access to credit facilities, employment, education and health care⁵ has formed the basis of the development of concrete policies.

Nevertheless, while it is certain that co-operatives have contributed to an improvement of the social and economic situation of women, especially in developing countries⁶, it has been a long process, and we can not generalise all of the excellent achievements proclaimed by the above mentioned declarations. Women in co-operatives, mainly in non-developed countries, still find serious obstacles imposed by the legal regime, access to education, traditions, and so on.⁷ It is the inequality evident in such wider conditions that frequently keeps women from entering co-operatives⁸. This situation is especially serious in developing countries, where in spite of the numerical superiority of women in the total population and their more needful situation, they are the most affected by unemployment and poverty.

Furthermore, and regardless of the development level of the country, co-operatives are mainly managed by men, and women frequently have inferior wages or fewer possibilities of promotion compared to men. As pointed out by Katarina Apelqvist (President of the Committee that represented women in the Alliance until September 1997), this situation implies an evident discrimination against women and raises doubts about the credibility of the Co-operative Movement before the wider society⁹. In spite of this, consideration should be given to the fact that, in the same way that there exists diversity among co-operatives according to the country, the situation in each single co-operative also represents important differences. So, although these considerations can be useful to illustrate specific situations, the criticisms can not be generalised.

The ICA itself it admits that, in many aspects, co-operatives

cannot proclaim that female participation has been greater here than in other areas of the community where women are integrated. The ICA holds that an outstanding effort in certain other fields especially relevant to female problems (such as consumption, housing or childhood care)¹⁰ can be illustrated just as effectively. Likewise, upon analysing sustainable development by region, it recognises the major implications of 'women in co-operatives' and their contributions in areas such as health or education. The ICA also confirms (especially in respect to the African Regions) that problems still exist, and obliges co-operatives to direct their efforts towards certain key aspects such as the support of female participation at all levels, especially in decision making and management positions¹¹.

Certainly, one of the most important remaining aims concerning female participation in co-operatives is the presence of women at decision making levels. One possible solution would be the establishment of co-operatives exclusively for women, so that their access to higher ranks of control would be guaranteed. Nevertheless, their integration in normal co-operatives is seen as a much more positive aspect, avoiding the isolation of women. Concerning this subject the United Nations suggests that even though an increased presence in management positions has not been reached, the fact is that Co-operation promotes full and equal participation of women in this area. Alongside the efforts made to achieve internal promotion, their presence in the co-operatives also provides a means of accessing other positions in the wider political life outside the co-operative movement, as co-operatives permit women's access to education and training, health care, and so on. The United Nations acknowledges other contributions of co-operatives, such as that they "eliminate violence against women", "promote women's economic self-reliance", and "integrate gender-equality dimensions into policy and programme planning".¹²

In this sense it can be said that, due to its social basis, the Co-operative Movement has largely improved the situation of women. At the same time the participation of women in the movement is not merely confined to concerns of equality and women's rights, as it has also highlighted many other important issues such as peace, development and education. This allows further discussion on their important contributions to achieving

the Co-operative Movement's objective of the transformation of society. The strong role played by women across co-operatives has led the Alliance to defend their greater participation as a way of reinforcing all co-operative development activities¹³. The United Nations goes further, beyond the confines of co-operative development, and highlights women's contributions to sustainable human development¹⁴. Women's traditional concern about social aspects, characterised by self-help, equality and equity, has led the UN to consider that there is a special link between women and the co-operative principles¹⁵. In this way, the incorporation of women into the Movement seems absolutely necessary for the achievement of its objectives and those of the Alliance itself.

The organisation of the female Co-operative Movement and its links with the ICA

Women have been part of the Co-operative Movement from the outset, having had an outstanding role in the development of British co-operatives. Some authors even cite a woman - Ann Tweedale, as having been among the Rochdale Pioneers¹⁶. Furthermore, the co-operative women, especially the British, played a leading role in the phase preceding the creation of the Alliance, and documentation of their participation can be found in the discussion of the De Boyve project in 1887 as well as in the Committee in charge of the Constitution Congress of 1895¹⁷.

On becoming part of the Co-operative Movement, women struggled for a major role; Applying the principle of democratic process - "one person, one vote", the women fiercely defended their right to share all responsibilities with men in the administration of the co-operatives. Thus, in the first Congress of the International Co-operative Alliance, a representative of the co-operative women's movement of the United Kingdom asked that women's views be voiced throughout the Movement, reminding the representatives that if they wanted to succeed in their efforts they had to take female contributions into account¹⁸. Only two years later, during the Delft Congress, a group of women from different countries made a proposition that was adopted by common consent, in which co-operatives were required to include fair and equal treatment towards women,

especially concerning their admissibility as members¹⁹.

It was soon realised that the representation of women's interests was best achieved with an organised presence within the Movement itself. This presence was demonstrated with the birth of the Women's Co-operative Guilds. Among them, the first was the British Guild; created in 1883, it developed very rapidly, concentrating mainly on preparing women for participation on an equal basis with men in the Movement²⁰. The results accomplished by these associations in Great Britain and other countries attracted the attention and support of the ICA, as was demonstrated at the Cremona Congress²¹. There, the Leagues were highlighted as valuable instruments to the achievement of the aims of Co-operation and a practical and peaceful means to alter the situation of women.

The international organisation of the women's movement

While the Guilds were gaining more importance, the definitive step for women's participation in the International Co-operative Movement came with federation of the national Guilds into an international organisation. This idea was strongly advocated towards 1914 and endorsed by important personalities of the women's movement such as the Austrian Emmy Freundlich and Catherine Webb from Britain; both distinguished collaborators with the Alliance²². At the same time, the creation of the federation was widely supported by the European Guilds - in particular the British one, with the leadership of Secretary General, Margaret Llewelyn Davies. With the prospect of this international organisation, the need to develop major publicity between the members and other co-operatives became a priority²³.

There was some debate as to whether the new organisation should be created through the ICA or not²⁴. Finally, the question was decided in the International Conference of Co-operative Women celebrated in Basle in 1921. At this meeting, Emmy Freundlich suggested guidelines for the best ways in which women could contribute to the goals of the Alliance, and presented a firm proposal for the creation of an international organisation of women with representatives from different countries. Women's aspiration of participating actively in the Co-operative Movement was tied to their desire for closer

co-ordination with the Alliance and its objectives:

... In order that the work and enthusiasm of women shall be used for the promotion of the work for which the International Co-operative Alliance stands²⁵.

Thus the International Committee of Co-operative Women was born, with the responsibility of promoting the women's movement where it had not yet emerged and developing the spirit of solidarity and a co-operative common purpose. When it was created, this first committee was by nature a temporary one and it was soon replaced by the International Women's Guild, (ICWG), a permanent organisation. At that time, the co-operative women showed they were convinced of the important contribution they could make, with more freedom and financial support, to the most important objectives of the Alliance's efforts - Co-operation and Peace²⁶. They also consistently claimed that they deserved a place in the ICA, hoping to achieve female participation in the Executive Committee²⁷.

After the First International Conference of Women, their activity notably increased²⁸. The members also participated actively in ICA tasks and meetings, starting with their presence in the following Ghent Congress in 1924, where they unveiled their activities. Shortly after, in 1927, Emmy Freundlich was elected as a member of the ICA Executive, whereas, the international guild, with its own offices, had a separate representation before other international organisations. The stability and importance gained by the women's guilds is demonstrated by their willingness to participate in several areas of public life, their influence in their respective countries, and their interest in subjects of international concern²⁹.

To achieve their objectives, co-operative women soon realised that it was absolutely necessary to reinforce their unity and extend their ideas³⁰. Publicity and unification were assumed to be the main functions of the ICWG³¹. In order to reach these goals no attempt to exclude the Alliance was made; on the contrary, it was reaffirmed as the true representative of the "global" Movement³². This concern was increased with the start of the Second World War, which brought with it significant hindrances to International Guild activities. In 1946, the

co-operative women reinitiated their meetings together with the Congresses of the Alliance. Nevertheless financial problems, which had already been present before the conflict, had by now increased. For this reason, in 1952, the Women's Guild requested the ICA's help, and as a consequence, a link committee between them (the Liaison Committee) was created.

The coincidence of objectives and interests between both organisations was evident and the International League reiterated the identification of their ideals with those of the Alliance and their gratitude for its support³³. As remarked by Cecily Cook³⁴, one of the most active Presidents of the Guild, the International Women's Guild and the ICA were two separate organisations that pursued a common objective. But although they followed parallel paths, this meant there were two separate bodies for the representation of the International Co-operative Movement, when it was argued the Movement was unique and could not be divided into men and women. The need to offer a common and united image of the Co-operative Movement as a whole led to an increased collaboration and rapprochement.

During this time, the economic problems continued, and the Laussane meeting in 1960 only took place thanks to the Alliance's support. Finally, in 1963 the suspension of the Guild's activities was decided on, not only because of economic problems but also on the increasing opinion that the Committee defending their interests should be integrated into the ICA's structure. Thus, the institution that represented the whole Movement came to embrace in its own structures the defence of the particular interests of women.

The representation of women's interests through specialised bodies

After 46 years, the International Women's Guild ceased its activity. The organisation and its funds were transferred to the Alliance, on the condition that the funds would go towards helping women in non-developed countries³⁵. Later, at the Bournemouth Congress in 1963, the Women Co-operators Department in the ICA and the Women Co-operators Advisory Council (WCAC) were set up³⁶. The function of this body was to advise the Alliance on the promotion

of female participation in co-operative activities, especially in reference to specific areas such as youth work, education, consumer information, publications and in international co-operative activity, alongside a concern about development.

Despite the anticipated advantages of the inclusion of this body in the ICA's infrastructure, there were some doubts and criticisms expressed in the Congress of Vienna in 1966³⁷ and in Hamburg³⁸ three years later. The Alliance was accused of having allocated merely formal functions to the Advisory Council, considering that other organs and committees already included among their tasks the problems related to women and their respective areas of work. Besides, the WCAC realised from the first moment the lack of women's presence on the Central Committee, and petitioned the ICA authorities for a more significant role. Its initiatives, three years later, led to the transformation of the WCAC into the Women's Committee of the ICA³⁹. This was defined as an integral part of the Alliance that would promote the goals and purposes of the organisation, while its efforts and actions were directed by women and for their benefit. The Secretary of the Committee was to be filled by a member of the Alliance personnel, guaranteeing the union between the Committee and the rest of the Alliance structure. Likewise, it is necessary to highlight the financial dependence, though partial, of the Committee on the ICA which was in charge of its administrative expenses⁴⁰.

As was pointed out in the Congress of Moscow⁴¹, the Women's Committee is the only Auxiliary Committee that works "towards its own destruction". It considers that its goal will be reached when the Central and Executive Committees of the ICA have a sufficient and truly representative number of women, the member organisations name more female delegates for Congresses, and in the Auxiliary Committees there is a fair proportion of women. Until that moment, the organisation can be considered to be in a "transitory period", during which, it must continue its struggle in matters of representation. Recently, the Women's Committee realised its aim of transformation into a Global Committee of Women, an aim determined in the meeting held at the last Manchester Congress. In its Constitutional rules⁴² the Committee expressed its ultimate objective (defined as its "vision"), which consists of a Co-operative Movement led by

men and women and based on the principles of democracy, development and welfare. This new body, self defined as a 'Forum for the interchange of experiences and ideas on subjects concerning female co-operators', established the same aims and means proposed by the previous Committee. Nevertheless, it endeavoured to adapt to the transformation undergone by the Alliance and to its new regional structure. To this end it inspired the establishment of regional Women's Committees, (covering different geographical areas in accordance with the new ICA divisions) and desired the maximum co-ordination between them to attain a global world-wide focus.

Actions in favour of women's participation: the gender perspective

Among the different actions carried out by the ICA in favour of women, the increase of their participation in all fields of the Movement is without doubt the main objective. The Manchester Congress brought to light the resolution on gender adopted by the European Region, according to which a collective influence between men and women is the key to co-operative excellence. Thus, it is considered that a major equilibrium between men and women is the force that will give a new impulse to co-operatives and improve their current image as democratic enterprises⁴³. The Alliance had also expressed its opinion in this sense during its Forum on gender disputes, held jointly with the International Labour Office (ILO) in 1995. In this context, it firmly pointed out that it is not possible to talk about a true fulfilment of the co-operative principles and values, and true democracy, if women do not have equal access to the decision making powers in co-operatives or are not sufficiently represented⁴⁴. Although this objective features clearly in the field of institutional declarations, the problem of how to put it into practice remains⁴⁵.

In its memorandums and recommendations to co-operatives on the subject, the ICA historically has promoted the elimination of all obstacles to equality, and the establishing of the closest possible relation with women's organisations. On the other hand, women co-operators have also been petitioning for a greater collaboration with the Alliance and further, that the integration

of women into the governing board of the co-operatives be made compulsory⁴⁶.

The claim for a more meaningful presence implies that this be taken into account in the formulation of co-operative principles and values. However, the embodiment of the "not discriminating by reason of gender"⁴⁷ requirement has been a relatively recent achievement (procured at the Manchester Congress in 1995), and therefore represents a belated success for women co-operators. The question was posed by the Women's Committee long before, and, in particular, at the Tokyo Congress, where it was also asked that the second principle should include the equal representation of men and women in the management of co-operatives⁴⁸. In contrast, this claim was not realised in the review of principles at the Manchester Congress.

In respect to Co-operative values, the report presented in the Tokyo Congress⁴⁹, and the resolution adopted in consequence, recognised equality as among the basic values of Co-operation. However, the Women's Committee needed a more significant reference to women and was in need of a focus on the co-operative values from the gender standpoint. The Committee President added that this report did not adequately demonstrate:

... the discrepancy between the basic co-operative values of equality and democracy, and the lack of equality between men and women inside the Co-operative Movement: a discrepancy that is ruinous for the credibility and security of the Co-operative Movement's existence⁵⁰.

The same thing occurred regarding the principle of "democracy". Apelqvist observes that there only exists an "illusion of democracy" in the Co-operative Movement, as long as there lacks an authentic equality between men and women⁵¹. In contrast, concerning the values of self-help and economic and social emancipation, the critics refer to Co-operation's reference to its responsibility to the poor. Taking into account world data on the "feminisation" of poverty, it is essential to emphasise the fact that the poorest sectors of the population are women.

In spite of the claims made by women that have been outlined above, it is true that there has been increasing concern surrounding this subject on the part of the ICA. The Alliance's

traditional ideas referring to women have followed a process of evolution inspired by female co-operators, who have requested a revision of its policies, encompassing a focus from the gender perspective⁵². On this point, W. Herath points out that while sex is a biological difference, gender is determined by the social and economic conditions. When speaking about "gender integration", the intention, according to this author, is to solve the problems caused by the existence of specific and stereotypical roles for men and women, that prohibit the participation of the latter under equal conditions⁵³.

In this respect, the end of the traditional categorisation of women is sought. As indicated by Apelqvist⁵⁴, women as a group have been included among pensioners, children, youth etc (cf the Report presented by Sven Åke Bööck at the Tokyo Congress in 1992⁵⁵) when in fact the only valid distinction is the one made on gender between men and women. Both groups include the employed, pensioners, children, and youth. While both of them perform very diverse roles in society, women, historically, have always had a subordinate role.

The ICA did incorporate this focus in its efforts, though gradually, as is demonstrated in the report presented by the European Region to the Congress of Manchester. In this report, the Alliance points out that revision of matters concerning the gender question will be a continuous responsibility and task of the Movement⁵⁶. Nowadays, the Alliance insists on the importance of including the question of gender equality into co-operative programmes, in order to integrate women into its strategies and plans: consulting and implicating women in decision making, creating specific programmes, revising the plans periodically to ensure they are adapted to women's needs, and so on⁵⁷. From the perspective of women co-operators, however, the results obtained with this policy are very limited. The lack of concrete results is mainly due to the lack of available means within the ICA, or at least, a deficiency in those that are destined for the needs of the Women's Committee. Along with the lack of financial resources, the development of these activities is also hindered by the lack of human resources. This was expressed by some of the representatives at the Assembly of the Women's Committee in 1995, who considered that the ICA and its member organisations' structures were still too rigid to embrace the new concept of 'gender'. In this sense, the Alliance's ideas in this

area are still far from becoming reality in the co-operatives.

The integration of women in the Alliance: positive discrimination

The deficient female presence in the decision making bodies of the co-operatives, led, in parallel to a scarce participation in the structure of the Alliance and their lack of decisive power in its meetings and specialised departments. Despite the earlier requests of women, the ICA was for a long time an organisation in which all the directive positions were occupied by men. There were, however, some exceptions such as the above mentioned Emmy Freundlich, (a member of the Executive Committee between 1927 and 1934, who stayed at the organisation for 50 years), and Gertrude F. Polley, (in charge of the Secretariat, who, in 1932, became the acting head of the Alliance upon the death of the General Secretary Henry May⁵⁸). Since then, there was not to be another woman on the Executive Committee of the Alliance until Raija Itkonen in 1984, who shortly afterwards became the first female Vice-President in the history of the ICA.

The concern about the presence of women at the decision making levels of the Alliance led to it becoming not only one of the women's principal aims but also an objective of the organisation itself, perhaps with a special emphasis following the Congress of Moscow in 1980. The Central Committee, in its subsequent meeting in Prague, highlighted its concern about the scarcity of female representatives and, following the Helsinki meeting in 1981, presented a resolution which urges member organisations that do not have any female delegates in the Central Committee to opt voluntarily to fill the first vacancies arising in the delegation with a qualified woman⁵⁹. Nevertheless, during the 1980s, women petitioned for greater responsibilities and representation in the ICA to reflect their actual strength in the Movement, at a time when almost half of the co-operators globally were women⁶⁰. The same ideas were to be reiterated shortly after, during the Hamburg Congress in 1984. In one of the resolutions, co-operatives were urged to increase the number of women playing leading roles and consequently, their presence at the Central Committee and specialised organisations at the ICA⁶¹.

When the Åke Bööck report was presented to the Tokyo Congress, the Women's Committee vigorously criticised the references made to women⁶², as they are treated as "hidden resources" that must be free from hindrance⁶³, while the Co-operative Movement is being asked to act positively to resolve the inequalities. Therefore, the Committee criticised what it saw as "words without content" from the Alliance that continued to treat women as a separate group and not as equals.

Every time, the support given by the ICA, its attitude as catalyst and co-ordinator of actions in favour of women, are seen as more and more insufficient. Therefore, the Alliance is required to go a step further, stimulating complete and egalitarian women's participation at the decision making level and within its structure. Nevertheless, when it comes to putting these positive actions into practice, we encounter one of the most controversial questions concerning the ICA and women: Is positive discrimination necessary in order to guarantee a respect for women's rights? This question has only been seriously debated by the Movement and the ICA in recent years. Thus, when the future of the Co-operative Movement was discussed through the Laidlaw report on 'Co-operatives and the year 2000', the special reference to women did not take any affirmative action into consideration. It was believed that co-operatives in which the talents and capacities of women are encouraged would have larger advantages in the future, but a special and separate role for women would only be maintained where it is required by respective cultural and religious traditions⁶⁴.

In reference to this question, Dr Kaplan de Drimer⁶⁵ believes that a distinction between the different roles for men and women in co-operatives should not be permitted. She bases this affirmation on the words of Laidlaw, for whom women do not occupy important positions by virtue of being female but rather, in a broad sense, by being members⁶⁶. She suggests that non discrimination also implies a rejection of a positive discrimination that leads to more favourable conditions for women wanting to reach certain positions, and further to the establishment of a certain proportion of women as a compulsory presence. Similarly, in the 1980s, many female co-operators with a significant role in the Women's Committee rejected claims for the proportional representation of women inside the different organs of the ICA.

A request for special treatment as women came second to their desire to claim a similar level of competence as their male counterparts.

However, this focus has suffered a significant alteration in recent years. Perhaps becoming conscious of the lack of results obtained with these attempts, the Women's Committee began to defend positive discrimination without which they would not be able to overcome the obstacles to their egalitarian participation, above all at the decision making level. This request for specific policies for women, was further intensified at the recent Manchester Congress, where the Alliance rejected the establishment of "affirmative action" in favour of women. This was illustrated in the 21st Agenda on Sustainable Development presented at that time. In this Agenda a declaration is made to the effect that

... no specific section on the role of women is included as women co-operators participate in all type of co-operatives. They are key actors in influencing the policies of co-operatives, especially with regard to sustainable development⁶⁷.

The ICA's statement was positive in so far as it acknowledged the complete equality of women, their participation, and their important role. These ideas were, however, in conflict with the reality of the situation. As the then President of the Women's Committee said in her speech to the General Assembly of the above-mentioned Congress, women should play key roles in the determination of the policies of the Co-operative Movement. Nevertheless, this does not occur in reference to sustainable development nor in other areas of co-operative activity. While the situation remains unchanged, she believes special attention to women is necessary.

The question of positive discrimination is highlighted in a specific way concerning women's participation at the decision making levels of co-operatives and consequently, in the structure of the Alliance itself. Apelqvist replies to those who consider that the obligation to maintain certain quotas of female presence is a non democratic practice; she points out that it is the lack of participation of women in the decision making that is non

democratic when, in many countries, women represent more than 50 percent of the population⁶⁸. The Alliance's approach concerning female participation is evident within its own structure. On the one hand, it wants the co-operatives themselves to expand this presence, voluntarily and progressively, so that women become party to ICA committees and delegations. On the other hand, it still contemplates the adoption of measures that force co-operatives to ascribe to a greater female presence. In spite of this, the current women co-operators' aim to reach a 30 percent proportion of female delegates is being met with significant obstacles yet to be overcome.

It must be realised that while the ICA attempts to achieve these goals, it is a practical organisation that will pursue its own objectives first. For this reason it is limited in its actions as it must compare its interest in an increased female presence with the need to elect the most adequate representatives for the meetings and activities of the Alliance, regardless of gender. Thus, in the Manchester Congress in 1995 it was decided to try and 'convince' rather than oblige ICA members to increase female participation in the regional bodies. Meanwhile, the Board was preparing a programme to debate the possibility of establishing a compulsory female presence in the delegations. To this end, it was proposed that the organisations that obtain the required percentages could receive a reduction in the subscription paid to the ICA⁶⁹.

These measures, despite having been fiercely debated, did not come to light in the last Assembly of the Alliance held in Geneva, in September 1997. However, the first important advance can already be seen in the first stage to the introduction of "affirmative action", at least in reference to one of its bodies. As was illustrated in the review of article 17:

the Board may as a provisional measure co-opt to a maximum of four women on the Board if, following elections at the General Assembly, the Board deems that the representation of women is inadequate. Any such co-options must be submitted for ratification to the subsequent General Assembly.

Conclusion

Through this analysis we have seen some of the numerous examples in which the ICA contributes to the integration of women. In spite of the above mentioned deficiencies and the unsatisfied claims of women co-operators, the important consequences of this work should not go unnoticed. These achievements can be seen, particularly, in the support for women co-operators and the extended representation of their interests. But beyond the strictly co-operative field we have to stress the ICA's important contributions to women's access to work and education, particularly through programmes carried out in developing countries. The revision of the Alliance's rules in September of 1997 illustrates its historic concern. Among the "objectives" of the organisation, Article 2 includes - "the promotion of equality between men and women in all decisions and activities within the co-operative movement".

This statement signifies an essential advance: thus, it is assumed that the full integration of women is not a subsidiary goal of its activities but an aim, equally important as that of the promotion of the Co-operative Movement. For this reason, it may be expected that the relevance of this aspect will increase and be put into practice in the near future. The introduction of positive discrimination to the Board of the Alliance provides an opening for other bodies and, perhaps, to the member organisations themselves to do the same. In this area, the intense activity of the Global Women's Committee should be mentioned. The words directed by its President to the Manchester Congress were effective in reminding the Alliance of the claims made by the group that they should not be relegated to the margins of the Institution:

The ICA Global Women's Committee has taken this opportunity to remind you, once again, of how essential women's skills, experience and competence are to the well being of the co-operative movement and to the whole world. Without women's influence there is no future⁷⁰.

Laura Gómez Urquijo is a lecturer in economics in the Faculty of Law and the Institute of Co-operative Studies at Deusto University.

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