

Contact:
Rob Nooter
Executive Director
Overseas Cooperative Development Council
(703) 909-8781
Rob.Nooter@ocdc.coop

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Conference delves into opportunities, challenges for using cooperatives as tools for international development

Washington, D.C. (May 27, 2010) – Worldwide, it's estimated that cooperatives directly touch the lives of nearly 15 percent of the population. In developing countries, cooperatives can be a powerful tool for alleviating poverty, creating economic opportunity and fostering a more secure world.

At a one-day event, "Cooperatives: Meeting Development Challenges in the 21st Century," the U.S. Overseas Cooperative Development Council brought together nearly 100 invited guests to learn from hands-on experiences and to formulate recommendations for overcoming challenges and expanding the use of cooperatives as tools for sustainable development.

Speakers included Dame Pauline Green, president of the International Cooperative Alliance, who urged attendees to "deliver programs, not just projects." She also underscored the importance of the U.N.'s International Year of Cooperatives in 2012 as a springboard for comprehensive global cooperative development initiatives.

John Mellor, former director general of the International Food Policy Research Institute, said, "Without this effort to advance cooperative development, urban housing will grossly lag behind demand; urban people will not have insurance to counter individual catastrophes; small farmers will lose high-value, high-income markets to more developed countries; and rural and urban financial needs will go unmet. The opportunity is immense — not grasping it has huge and unfortunate consequences."

Panel members addressed topics from "Using the Cooperative Business Model to Accelerate Economic Growth" to "Donor Strategies in Cooperative Development." They drew from personal experience in countries ranging from India to Mozambique to Sri Lanka to Bosnia to demonstrate how cooperatives often are uniquely suited for successfully delivering sustainable foreign assistance.

Land O'Lakes, one of the nation's largest and most recognized cooperatives, entered the international development sphere nearly 30 years ago. Pete Kappelman, chair of the board, presented how American farmers' successful experience with cooperatives can be reproduced in developing countries, improving agricultural production, accessing farm credit, capturing greater value from the value chain, expanding markets and creating economic opportunity.

Discussion groups delved into ways cooperatives can be more effective in alleviating poverty and hunger, creating wealth and access to products and services, reforming legal and regulatory policies, and measuring cooperatives' success and demonstrating their impact.

USAID is a key partner in international cooperative development and Chief of Staff Sean Carroll highlighted the new direction and focus of the agency, which stresses four key areas:

- Creating innovative, sustainable systems, particularly for global health and food security;
- Investing in programs with extensive country buy-in;
- Developing comprehensive partnerships with countries; and
- Achieving a new level of delivering technology.

He said that under the current administration, foreign assistance is being revitalized, with an emphasis on innovation, an entrepreneurial approach, and involving new thought leaders and players so the U.S. can do an even better job providing assistance.

For complete coverage of the conference including session videos and presentations, visit www.cooperativechallenges21.org.

The U.S. Overseas Cooperative Development Council brings together eight organizations committed to building a more prosperous world through cooperative development. OCDC's mission is to champion, advocate and promote effective international cooperative development. Its members are: ACDI/VOCA, AAC/MIS, CHF International, Communications Cooperative International, Land O'Lakes International Development, National Cooperative Business Association, NRECA and the World Council of Credit Unions.

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