

Discussant Comments on Dave Grace's Presentation on the Global Census on Cooperatives 2014

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First of all, I would like to commend Dave Grace and UNDESA for carrying out the first ever world census on cooperatives.

The key issue that I will focus on in my comments is how to build on this initial endeavor to institutionalize a periodic, global census on cooperatives.

The big questions that I think need to be addressed are:

1. Where should the world co-op census be housed?
2. When should the next co-op census occur? How often should it occur?
3. What variables should be added to the census in the future, and how should they be determined?
4. What should the annual budget of the census office be?
5. How should it be funded?
6. How should the results be publicized?
7. What's the next step in moving toward an institutionalized global census?

My intent in these brief remarks is not to answer all of these questions, but rather to offer some possible answers and to initiate a dialogue.

1. Where should the world co-op census be housed?

Possible sites include: UNDESA, UN Interagency Group on Cooperatives, World Bank, ICA, ILO, others.

2. When should the next co-op census occur, and how often should it occur?

My recommendation is that the next census should be completed in 2016. The initial census, undertaken in 2013 and 2014, should be viewed as a pilot initiative that sets the stage for an ongoing, fully developed census.

The third census should occur in 2020, and every five years thereafter.

3. What questions should be added to the census in the future, and how should they be selected?

An expert panel should develop the contents of future co-op censuses. In addition to the variables included in the 2014 census, there are many other variables that could be added in the future. For example, I am particularly interested in several issues: What is the legal and regulatory environment for co-op formation and operation in each country? What is the number of co-ops in each country that operate in accordance with the ICA co-op principles?

4. What should the annual budget of the census office be?

I suggest that the minimum annual budget for the census office ought to be in the range of \$1 million. If the census office does more in-depth, country-level research on co-ops, the budget should be substantially higher.

5. How should the census office be funded?

It could be funded directly by the UN or the World Bank. However, financial support from the cooperative community is likely to increase the potential that the census office will be established and adequately funded. Rabobank was the primary funder of the first co-op census. Perhaps, a consortium of large international cooperatives, especially cooperative financial institutions, could agree to be the funders or guarantors of funding for the first 10 or 15 years of the office's operation.

6. How should the results be publicized?

The census should be published as an attractive, stand-alone document, similar in design to the World Bank's "Doing Business" report. Preferably, it should be published every five years, with a supplementary report published every year.

7. What's the next step in moving toward an institutionalized global census?

An ad hoc working group should be established, perhaps under the auspices of UNDESA, to address the questions presented above, and to ensure that the co-op census become a highly anticipated, easily accessible, periodic research report.