

Reorganization to a New Apex Organization

February 27, 2018

Japan Joint Committee of Co-operatives

1. Introduction

For more than 60 years since it was founded in 1956, the Japan Joint Committee of Co-operatives (JJC) has been liaising, forming partnerships between co-operatives, solving their common problems, and promoting collaborations with overseas co-operatives. With the aim of further promoting inter-co-operative collaborations on the national, prefectural and local levels, we explored the necessity of establishing a new apex organization as well as what form and functions it should assume.

As a result of discussions spanning more than 18 months, the JJC reached a decision by consensus of its members to reorganize to a new apex organization with the aim of empowering the co-operative sector to take the initiative to expand the roles and functions of co-operatives in communities.

2. Objectives of establishing a new apex organization

(1) Situations and challenges faced by co-operatives

As economies globalize, issues such as widening disparities in wealth and opportunities, social divisions, and social isolation have also become global problems. In addition, Japan is faced with a decreasing and aging population as well as a declining birthrate, which are generating social problems such as the following in local communities.

- ✓ Loss of vigor in regional areas due to weakening of local industries and population exodus
- ✓ Challenging environment imposed on the younger generation, as exemplified by scarce employment opportunities in regional areas and an increase in public burden
- ✓ Governments' inability to solve social problems on their own due to financial deterioration

Internationally, co-operatives are expected to fulfill certain roles in eradicating poverty, generating employment, achieving social inclusion, and engaging in "creating better life and work in sustainable local communities", as we can see the fact that its inclusion in UNESCO's list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, in Japan, diverse discussions are underway to explore the desirable forms and functions of co-operatives.

In view of such circumstances, we, co-operatives with the aim of meeting the common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations of members have reached a conclusion that it is critically important for us to strengthen collaboration in order to tackle local issues and to engage in "creating better life and work in sustainable local communities".

(2) Current status of co-operatives

In Japan, co-operatives are active in diverse areas including agriculture, forestry and fisheries, retail, finance, mutual aid, employment creation, welfare, medical care, travel, and housing. Total membership of co-operatives is a huge 65 million, although there is some overlap.

Each co-operative has developed in its own way, is based on different laws, and is overseen by

different government authorities. This is one of the reasons why although individual co-operatives (e.g., consumer co-operatives, agricultural co-operatives) are widely recognized, the organization and activities as “co-operatives” are not. Therefore, we need to publicize who we are and what we do to a greater extent among the public at large.

We have long been working to form partnerships among co-operatives. At the national level, alliances have been promoted by the JJC and the Cooperatives Japan, which are conference bodies. However, co-operatives are faced with an increasing number of challenges that are becoming more complex in nature in both quality and quantity. If co-operatives are to take on more significant roles, they need to reinforce their structure and expand their functions. Collaborations have also been undertaken at the prefectural level, but member groups of coordinating bodies such as co-operative associations and the details of their collaborative activities differ by prefecture.

Thus, co-operatives need to take new steps in order to tackle our challenges.

(3) Necessity of a new apex organization

For co-operatives to engage in "creating better life and work in sustainable local communities", it is imperative to tackle local problems. However, there are limits to what individual co-operatives can do independently.

We have come to the conclusion that if co-operatives are to develop stronger-than-ever mutual ties at the national and local levels while spontaneously expanding their own roles and functions in their local communities, we need to establish and reinforce an apex organization that unites co-operatives across the nation and enhances their common value.

(4) Roles and functions of the new apex organization

Based on the philosophy, values and principles of co-operatives, the new apex organization will promote inter-co-operative collaborations, enabling us co-operatives to contribute to the development of communities and communities by spontaneously working to engage in "creating better life and work in sustainable local communities", as well as to widely publicize the values and operations of co-operatives in local communities and across the world.

The new apex organization will therefore be equipped with the following functions:

- ① Promote inter-co-operative collaborations (promotion and support);
- ② Make policy proposals and engage in public relations activities (dissemination of messages);
- ③ Provide education and conduct research (analysis, sharing and proliferation).

3. About the new apex organization

(1) Name

In consideration of its experience in serving as the JJC’s secretariat and in supporting inter-co-operative collaborations, the Japan-Cooperative General Research Institute will be

reorganized into the new apex organization. The name of the new apex organization will be the Japan Co-operative Alliance (JCA).

(2) Functions

In light of the above objectives of establishing the new apex organization, the JCA will be designed to offer the following functions, which also include those conventionally provided by the JJC.

- ✓ Promote inter-co-operative collaborations (promotion and support)
 - Plan and promote inter-co-operative collaboration at the national level
 - Support collaborations within prefectures and communities
 - Collaborate with government/NPOs/other organizations mainly in implementing activities for protecting people's livelihoods, jobs and communities
 - Collaborate with international organizations such as the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA); disseminate information across the international community
 - Support the establishment of outside-the-box unconventional co-operatives

- ✓ Make policy proposals; engage in public relations activities (dissemination of messages)
 - Make policy proposals and engage in negotiations to protect members' livelihoods, jobs and local communities
 - Disseminate information and engage in public relations activities to share with society what co-operatives do, help people gain a better understanding of co-operatives, and encourage participation

- ✓ Provide education and conduct research (analysis, sharing and proliferation)
 - Provide education and training to co-operative members and co-operative managers and staff members
 - Provide education to the general public by sponsoring university courses and outreach programs for compulsory education
 - Conduct surveys/research and maintain databases on and in relation to co-operatives