



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **PCC @ 24: Advancing Digital Technology Towards a More Inclusive Society**

The COVID-19 pandemic, which has triggered another new set of variants, continues to affect much of the way we work and conduct transactions. It has equally taken its toll by gravely limiting physical contacts as well as actual work activities. Yet amidst all these hindrances comes a positive solution—or should we say, alternative—that will keep businesses, enterprises and even the cooperative movement functioning as normal, with the touch of a finger through what we call digitalization.

As the cooperative movement in the Philippines, which represents a growing niche market of 10 percent of the entire population (with over 10 million members) gains steam to provide the best for all its members, digitalization will also mean better opportunities to enhance efficiency in several ways.

For one, digitalization can help in smoothly expediting the delivery of coop-made products, via transport/navigational apps that coop-operated delivery service providers can utilize.

Two, digitalization will mean ease of transactions in terms of payment of fees and dues in the case of cooperative insurance plans; the procurement (as well as repayment) of loans; and even in the settlement of financial disputes should this be prompted.

And on another angle, digitalization can be used for educational and even advocacy purposes, through online classes by institutions that offer extensive cooperative courses such as the Polytechnic University of the Philippines (PUP) on one hand, and through the pushing, online, of cooperative-friendly provisions by entities such as the Philippine Cooperative Centre (PCC) in partnership with federations, unions and even the Cooperative Development Authority at the Senate and House of Representative levels.

Amidst all the benefits that the wonders of IT can offer, let us, in the movement, bat for greater inclusivity so that its impact can be felt among its growing number of members, regardless of size, nature, affiliation or ethnic composition.

Inclusivity can mean smaller entities which consider funding a dilemma to work, and partner with the bigger MPCs, federations and unions in getting their views heard online on one aspect, and availing of an extended array of financial services on the other.

Inclusivity can also mean catering to the diverse and specific needs of certain sub-sectors, namely the senior citizens who may have difficulties coping with today's paradigm shifts from manual to digital; and PWSNs or Persons with Special Needs, whereas their disabilities can also provide opportunities

for IT specialists to come up with programs and apps for their convenience and in the long run give them greater peace of mind.

Let inclusivity call for the creation and establishment of a collective data registry co-owned by PCC and the Cooperative Sector, so as to facilitate the sharing of data and information amongst cooperatives – *online*. This data registry can serve as a distinct step towards digitization and a sign of inclusivity and unity of the cooperative sector.

In a similar vein, inclusivity can call for the invitation to and/or creation of digital and technology-focused cooperatives that will pave the way for a centralized digital hub/platform to house the budding digitalization/digital services within the movement.

Above all, inclusivity can also mean creating more of those cyberbridges that will burnish the potentials, prospects and promises that the Philippine cooperative movement can offer to its counterparts from all over the globe, especially with the ICA/International Cooperative Alliance—considering that cooperatives, as ICA Chair Ariel Guarco proudly stressed, ‘put people together in the centre of development and are committed to developing and transforming people in a holistic yet dynamic way, by creating people-centred economies, with coops being in the hands of the people in our planet that we can work for to nurture the next generation.’

Indeed, as we at PCC turn 24 in this digital age, let us celebrate another new PCC year with inclusivity as our means to move forward as a whole, cohesive and proud movement.

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