

DOCUMENTATION REPORT

Regional Forum on it@coops

Empowering Co-operatives Through Information Technology

19–21 November 2007 ■ MMLDC, Antipolo City, Philippines

Introduction

The Regional Forum on it@coops entitled "Empowering Co-operatives through Information Technology" served as one of the culminating activities of the it@coops project, also known as "Information Technology for Southeast Asian Co-operatives Project." This Forum was conceived primarily to inspire more co-operatives to use IT (information technology) and to help co-op members, especially its women members, maximize the use of different business services for their economic improvement. This Forum was also meant to improve the competitiveness of co-operatives, to enhance their operations and engagement in entrepreneurial work, and to encourage set up of IT-supported business development centers (BDCs) in their communities.



Conducted on 19-21 November 2007 in Antipolo City, Philippines, the project stakeholders showcased on this Forum the different outputs of the it@coops Project that led to a better understanding of and accessibility to IT by co-op women not only from Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand but also from other Southeast Asian (SEA) countries as well. Specifically, the Forum was intended to:

1. Share best practices and innovations on co-operatives through IT,
2. Reinforce the regional networking of the IT Specialists/Trainers,
3. Create awareness on the importance of IT in co-operatives, and
4. Capture impacts and perspectives of the it@coops project.

The it@coops Project was intended to address poverty through provision of basic and advanced IT skills, and stimulating virtual cooperation among Southeast Asian co-operatives. This will be realized through the Project's three pillars/components: 1) training the co-op staff as IT Specialists and Trainers, 2) setting up IT-supported Business Development Center (BDCs) in co-ops, and 3) forming a national and transregional (Southeast Asia) virtual networks among co-operatives.

This Project was a collaborative effort among Asian Women in Co-operative Development Forum (AWCF), a regional umbrella organization in Asia that functions as a resource center and advocacy body on gender and co-operatives; InWEnt (Capacity Building International, Germany), an organization that seeks to provide advanced ICT knowledge to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; and the Germany Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), an organization that provides funding support for the project. Implementation of this Project started in 2004 and will end this 2007.

The Participants



More than 70 participants, speakers, guests, and AWC Secretariat attended this Forum. The bulk of the attendees were the 47 staff, representing different co-operatives from Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand, who had been part of the 100-138 days ICT Training entitled "Training the Trainer Program within the it@coops project." They were among the core 60 IT Specialists/Trainers (20 from each country) trained through this Project. They represent 23 organizations specifically three national umbrella co-operatives— Forum for Indonesian Co-operatives Movement (FORMASI Indonesia), National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO, Philippines), and the Credit Union League of Thailand (CULT, Thailand); 17 primary co-ops; and three NGOs (non-government organizations) promoting co-operatives.

Guests at the Opening Ceremony include Hon. Lecira Juarez, Chairperson of the Philippines's Cooperative Development Authority (CDA); Mr. Niel Santillan, CDA Executive Director; Dr. Ute Huebner, Representative of InWEnt Regional Office in Manila; Mr. Pit Heltmann, Deputy Head of Mission of the German Embassy in Manila; and Mr. Mahmudin, First Secretary on Economic Affairs of the Indonesian Embassy in Manila. They were also joined by other organizations such as the International Open Source Network (IOSN) and the Department of Information Systems and Computer Science of the Ateneo de Manila University (AdMU); and some NATCCO primary co-operatives that had been part of the Project for the past years. Media representatives from Manila Bulletin, Isis International-Manila, Media Coop, and Gateway Publications also covered the event.

Methodology

The conference made use of workshop groups and sharing of experiences either in plenary or in small groups. A summary of all the presentations together with insights and recommendations regarding the sustainability of the it@coops Project was also provided by one of the Forum participants. On top of this, an overall assessment of the Project was also shared by one of InWEnt's Consultants based on the survey it conducted involving the it@coops' IT Specialists, BDC Managers, and the Steering Committee.

There was also an exhibit viewing that showcased the achievements of the three implementing organizations in the area of IT as well as a media conference that paved the way to disseminate information regarding the digitalization of co-operatives.



I. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE it@coops REGIONAL FORUM

Day 1, 19 November 2007

Opening Ceremony



The it@coops Regional Forum started with an [Opening Ritual](#), an invocation, participated by four country representatives. As different offerings were made, the representatives led the group in calling for unity and sharing in improving the lives of others. Formal greetings followed as [Welcome Remarks](#) were given by three distinguished persons: Mr. Wilfredo Dimamay, Chairperson of the National Confederation of Cooperatives (NATCCO), representing the host organization; and Dr. Ute Huebner, Representative of InWEnt Regional office in Manila, and Ms Salome Ganibe, Executive Director of the Asian Women in Co-operative Development Forum (AWCF), representing the conference organizers.



In his speech, Mr. Dimamay encouraged co-ops and individual entrepreneurs to be competitive by producing IT-enhanced products and services that of superior value. Dr. Huebner, on the other hand, encouraged the project actors to continue maintaining linkages and sharing ideas and activities with each other even after the end of the project period. She also encouraged the national umbrella organizations to link with other German development partners in their respective countries. For her part, Ms Ganibe led the participants in recalling the three to four year journey of the it@coops Project in the three countries. Before ending her speech, she acknowledged the contributions of all the it@coops project actoryous in the attainment of the Project goals. She also recognized the guests and media representatives who graced the Forum's Opening Ceremony.



After the initial speeches, a [Video Presentation on the it@coops Project](#) followed. This presentation summarized the achievements of the it@coops project from 2004-2007. It focused on how IT (information technology) changed the lives of co-op women and men who were members of AWCF's national umbrella organizations in Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand.



[Messages](#) of support and admiration on the Project continued. In pointing out the contributions of the IT Specialists and Trainers to the Project, Mr. Pit Heltmann, Deputy Head of Mission of the German Embassy in Manila, encouraged them to continue sharing their experiences to marginalized women and men especially in making life easier for everyone. Mr. Balthas Seibold, Senior Project Manager of InWEnt, honored the IT Specialists by acknowledging them as the building stone and the most valuable resource of this Project. He encouraged the IT Specialists, who were now alumni of this Project, to continue 'enlightening' others on the benefits IT can bring not only to the co-operatives but also to the co-op members, its family, community, and society, in general. Hon. Lecira Juarez, Chairperson of the Philippine's Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), agreed with Mr. Seibold. She reminded the IT Specialists that this Project provided them an opportunity to be empowered hence they should use this privilege and blessing by being "a source and resource to share out and reach out to others."

The morning session concluded with the [Giving of Tokens](#) to the distinguished guests. This was followed by a [Photo Opportunity](#) that was participated by everyone.

Before going to the Lunch Reception, the participants took part in the [Exhibit Viewing](#) organized by the IT Specialists/Trainers from



the three national umbrella organizations. In this event, guests and participants viewed pictures of the it@coops actors at work, examined IT-related video presentations on display, and purchased co-op products and publications promoted by CULT, FORMASI Indonesia, NATCCO, and Media Gateway. A [Media Conference](#) attended by selected guests and tri-media representatives representing Manila Bulletin, Isis International-Manila, and Media Coop followed the exhibit.

Forum Proper



The afternoon session started with a Solidarity Message given by Hon. Guillermo Cua, Congress Representative of Coop NATCCO Partylist. In his speech, he encouraged the project stakeholders not to rely on politicians, the government, and even external funding in attaining project sustainability. Instead, he encouraged them to tap the co-op sector in their respective countries for support and resources as this Project was intended primarily for co-operatives.

To level-off the expectations among the participants, Ms Angelita Valdez, AWCF Program Coordinator, presented the objectives and programme of activities as part of the [Forum Orientation](#). Hearing no questions or clarifications, Ms Valdez called Ms Renate Pasch, InWent Consultant, to orient the participants on the procedure for the [it@coops Evaluation](#). In this activity, all the participants answered an evaluation questionnaire to make an overall assessment of the Project's achievements taking the viewpoint of Steering Committee Members, IT Specialists, and BDC managers.



This was followed by [Workshop 1](#) or the Sharing of the IT Specialists as Trainers. Here the participants were pre-assigned in one of the four groups and were assigned a facilitator and a documentor to assist them in conducting the workshop. They were asked to reflect on the following questions and to share their answers in their respective groups:



1. How are you using the knowledge and skills that you gained from the it@coops Training of Trainers (TOT)? What information technology (IT)-related tasks did you handle after the it@coops TOT?
2. How do IT-related training activities support:
 - member-entrepreneurs?
 - the efficiency of your co-op operation?
3. What problems or constrains did you face while implementing your IT action plan? How did you solve them?
4. How can we best raise the interests of the members (farmers, older members, women, and children) and help them with IT-related services?
5. What other IT topics do you want to learn?



The consolidated responses of the IT Specialists per question were as follows:

<p>1. IT Specialists apply the IT knowledge and skills they gained from the it@coops TOT through the following tasks they handled:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. IT training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enhanced member's computer literacy - facilitated advanced IT trainings including TOT b. database administration, maintenance, and consolidation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - came up with a list of co-op members and member's products c. system development and implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - installed computer programs - rendered computer maintenance/troubleshooting - established Internet connection and an email system d. web development e. others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enhanced reports/generated complex reports - created/enhanced co-op and business promotional materials - creation of a co-op documentary video - strengthened FOSS advocacy - provide IT-related services, recommendations, and consultations - supported other IT-related co-op services such as the creation of BDC and the youth savings program - maximized use of MS Office 	
<p>2. IT-related training activities supported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. member-entrepreneurs by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. capacitating co-op women and men resulting to increased self-confidence and enhancement/acquisition of new skills b. identifying IT consultant/s that will assist co-op members c. providing them technical support particularly on the use of the Internet d. enhancing product marketing and product development e. creating/enhancing a database or a product directory f. consolidating members' products and promoting them through the Internet ii. the efficiency of co-op operations by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. creating timely and improved reports b. automating the system that led to delivery of fast and improved services to members c. hastening communications and information dissemination among the co-op members and with other affiliate co-ops and organizations d. producing and enhancing organizational brochures and materials e. improving the present list of co-op or member's products through product development, quality control, and marketing promotion f. making co-op work more organized 	
<p>3. Problems and solutions faced by the IT Specialists in implementing their IT action plan:</p>	
PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - insufficient or lack of budget (high cost of purchasing IT gadgets/limited number of computers) - lack of proper IT infrastructure (insufficient IT training venues or IT facilities) - time constraints (hectic schedule/lack of time/work backlogs) - limited human resources/insufficient number of trainers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tie-up with other NGOs/institution for pooling of resources - purchase new/2nd hand computers - organize fund raising activities - charge a minimal fee from the IT training participants - tap services provided by Internet cafes - conduct trainings in areas where there is always electricity/generators - arrange training time - time management/work prioritization/ render overtime (OT) - conduct individual tutorials - creation of a co-op policy allowing co-op training time from 6-7 pm daily - conduct a second wave TOT to increase the number of IT Specialists/Trainers - need to raise interest in IT by:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of awareness among various stakeholders - minimal knowledge of IT Specialists - some trainings were cancelled due to lack of participants or women's inability to attend trainings because of their multiple tasks at home - most IT manuals are in English - IT programs not used frequently were forgotten - insufficient training time in each course/need to level-off the knowledge and background of the target participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ providing an orientation or awareness on the importance of IT and its uses during meetings or assemblies (social marketing) ➤ creating graphic based posters ➤ introducing the advantages of using computers and the Internet based on the needs of the target clientele (ex. research and educational games for children, identification of cooking websites for women, use of excel programs for farmers, etc.) ➤ providing step-by-step IT training, hands-on, and free Internet access to members ➤ familiarize co-op members on accessible and familiar IT gadgets such as mobile cellphones, etc. ➤ marketing members' products through the Internet/use of website - seek assistance from other IT consultants - adjust module/schedule - provide home-based training - conduct regional trainings - conduct English classes - translate manuals to local language - ensure practice and use of different computer programs - divide group into small classes either based on age or IT level - give pre-tests to participants
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4. Ways to best raise interest of co-op members on IT and help them with IT-related services:

- a. IT training
 - conduct hands-on trainings and continuous education
 - integrate an IT topic in other co-op trainings and seminars
 - design interesting modules
 - teach members how to use the Internet for research purposes

- b. promoting the benefits derived from IT
 - set up an Internet café suited for older members
 - provide free Internet services to members
 - familiarize members with the IT applications that will be beneficial to them (ex. Excel programs for farmers to help them in computing production costs, educational games for children, etc.)
 - conduct social marketing (provide an orientation on the importance of IT and its uses)
 - demonstrate the use of IT during assemblies
 - disseminate information regarding the accomplishments of the it@coops Project

- c. promoting co-op and members products
 - create promotional materials such as posters, brochures, flyers, etc.
 - promote members' products in the co-op website

5. Interesting IT topics according to the IT Specialists

- a. website hosting and development
 - Macromedia Dreamweaver
 - 3D animation
 - Flash
 - Joomla!
 - PHP, SSP, SQL
 - Web Linux and web based programming
 - CMS

- b. networking
 - LAN set-up
 - server administration

- c. multi media production
 - extensive video creation and editing
- d. others
 - program about graphical design
 - deepen FOSS/Extensive open-source programming
 - CISCO accreditation (for advance networking)
 - extensive online based program
 - mobile programming
 - software creation/development
 - more knowledge about interactive server pages
 - enhance technical knowledge about hardware and software maintenance

Day 2, 20 November 2007

Presentation of Co-op/BDC Managers and the IT Coordinators

Day 2 of the Forum marked the start of the different presentations. In discussing the topic ["Importance of IT in Co-operatives/Enterprise Development,"](#) four co-op/BDC managers shared the benefits and changes brought by IT in their co-op/business enterprises. Order of presentation was as follows: Mr. Tanom Poolsri, Manager of Huaykhanang-Tungna Credit Union Ltd.-CULT; Ms Yuyu Rahayu, Head of Secretariat Unit/BDC Manager of Bina Desa-FORMASI Indonesia; Mr. Mario Espeso, General Manager of Labo Progressive Multi-Purpose Cooperative (LPMPC)-NATCCO; and Ms Maria Elena Limocon, General Manager of Lamac Multi-Purpose Cooperative (LMPC)-NATCCO.

In his presentation, Mr. Poolsri pointed out that the use of IT in their credit union (CU) enabled the members to access timely CU news and information. He also stressed that as their co-op used different IT applications, they were able to provide more services to their members. On the other hand, Ms Rahayu emphasized that the use of IT in their enterprise not only increased the member's income, but it also helped narrow down the gap between women and men co-op members. Mr. Espeso, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of improved co-op image brought by IT to them. According to him, as their products and services were promoted in the Internet, they were able to get the attention and support of both government and private institutions thus enabling them to increase their co-op resources. Lastly, Ms Limocon challenged the other co-operatives to follow LMPC's lead in taking the dual role of provider of market information and market developer for their members especially the micro and small entrepreneurs as this group cannot afford investing in IT equipments. Through this endeavor, she expressed optimism that a large portion of LMPC's membership will greatly improve their economic standing.

The [IT Coordinators Sharing](#) ensued with the presentations made by Mr. Yohannes Baptista Agusnugroho, IT Coordinator-FORMASI Indonesia; Mr. Darwin Evangelista, IT Coordinator-NATCCO; and Ms Sirirat Juyyen, IT Coordinator-CULT. Aside from presenting the major outputs of the 60 IT Specialists and Trainers' re-echo trainings and seminars from September 2006 to November 2007, summarized below, they also presented the national umbrella organizations' major achievements in the area of training and development:

	FORMASI Indonesia	NATCCO	CULT
No. of trainings conducted	90 (Sept. 2006-Nov. 2007)	26 (Sept. 2006-Oct. 2007)	34 (Jan.-Oct. 2007)
No. of trainers	20	19	20
No. of attendees/beneficiaries	1343	1192	906
No. of women	577	870	591
Percentage	43%	73%	65%

FORMASI Indonesia

- developed a training material for the Community Training Center (CTC) Project, another IT project of FORMASI Indonesia in partnership with Microsoft Indonesia
- acknowledged as IT experts even by other organizations as IT Specialists and Trainers were requested to provide trainings to other co-operatives/organizations
- developed standard references for basic knowledge on IT
- it@coops training model was adapted by the CTC Project

NATCCO, Philippines

- advocated co-op digitalization through increased awareness on IT
- enhanced members' skills particularly on the use of office applications and Internet/e-mail
- increased the confidence of co-op women and men in using computers
- most of the trainings they conducted were on Computer Fundamentals, Office Productivity (word processing, presentations, and spreadsheet), and Internet and e-mail

CULT, Thailand

- trained 14 new IT Specialists/Trainers from the second wave TOT
- redesigned five modules (Introduction to Computer, Word Processing, PowerPoint, Excel, and Adobe Photoshop)
- developed and enhanced the modules on Word Processing, Internet and e-mail, and Adobe Photoshop

Skills sharing of IT Specialists/Trainers

The bulk of the activities for Day 2 focused on [Workshop 2](#) or the Skills Sharing of the IT Specialists entitled "Experiencing Various IT Forms." For this activity, 21 IT specialists were pre-assigned to present a particular form of IT to their co-participants. As there were eight presentations, the skills sharing session was divided into three batches wherein the participants were asked to sign-up for the session or group she/he will be present at. Shown below were the topics, resource persons, and the number of attendees per topic.

TOPICS	RESOURCE PERSONS	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS PER SESSION
Group A: Free and Open Source Software (FOSS)	Ms Sari Hidayati and Mr. Farih Ibnu Khozin IT Specialists-FORMASI Indonesia	14
Group B: Co-op Automation: E-koopBanker System	Mr. Noel Almera and Mr. Jovito Escalante IT Specialists-NATCCO	18
Group 1: Photoshop Design	Ms Natchamon Thali, Ms Suwannee Impalboon, and Mr. Wisit Sa-nguanhong IT Specialists-CULT	9
Group 2: Importance of a Website	Mr. Horace Briones and Ms Merlyn Sotello IT Specialists-Philippines	12
Group 3: FOSS on Co-op Sector	Mr. Al Caputol and Mr. Junifel Oculam IT Specialists-NATCCO	12
Group 4: Photoshop	Mr. Allan Jeffrey Mendoza, Mr. Geronimo Halos, and Ms Lasalette Gumban IT Specialists-NATCCO	10

TOPICS	RESOURCE PERSONS	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS PER SESSION
Group 5: Website Design	Ms Parichat Saneewong Na Ayutthaya, Ms Thidarat Thammasut and Ms Sipakorn Suksawat IT Specialists-CULT	10
Group 6: Experience on Website Development through Teamwork	Mr. Fuad Bahari and Ms Hastin Qomariyati IT Specialists-FORMASI Indonesia	9

At the end of the small workshop groups, the participants expressed appreciation of the process used in this activity. The groupings provided them an opportunity to mingle with the other IT Specialists and Trainers from the other countries and to observe different teaching techniques from their co-specialists. The participants also showed marked improvement in conversing in English as the workshop discussion required everyone to use English.

Day 2 ended with a **Teambuilding Activity** participated by everyone that enabled them to relax by engaging in some local Filipino games.

Day 3, 21 November 2007

Presentation of Program Managers

The last day of the Forum focused on discussing the general effect of the it@coops Project in the three Southeast Asian (SEA) countries where it was pilot-tested. Since project implementation will end this year, action plans regarding project sustainability were also presented.

The discussions started with the presentation of the "Over-all Impact of the it@coops Project" as well as the "Sustainability Actions/Action Plans" of the three national umbrella organizations. For this topic, an IT Coordinator and two IT Program Managers were the presenters. The order of presentation was as follows: Mr. Yohannes Baptista Agusnugroho, IT Coordinator of FORMASI Indonesia; followed by Ms Kruewan Chonlanai, Chief of General Manager's Office of CULT; and lastly, Ms Evangeline Lopez, IT Department Manager of NATCCO.



In their presentations, although they emphasized the need for additional and/or continued trainings and assistance from InWent, they affirmed to continue implementing the it@coops project even after the project term. As part of continuing the it@coops Project in their respective countries, the presenters committed to conduct the following:

- integrate the IT training and applications in the general programs and services of FORMASI Indonesia, NATCCO, and CULT
- continue strengthening the first batch of IT Specialists and Trainers while identifying and training a new batch
- continue setting up and strengthening BDCs
- strengthen web hosting capabilities of national umbrella organizations while increasing the number of websites developed for the member-affiliates

- continue networking with other co-operatives and organizations for the promotion and use of IT by co-operatives
- continue advocating for FOSS as an alternative to commercial software
- identify programs or activities that can help sustain the it@coops programs and initiatives



Aside from the common activities enumerated above, other activities currently or to be pursued by each of the national-umbrella organizations that is specific/inherent in their organizations are as follows:

FORMASI Indonesia

- link-up it@coops program to pertinent parties such as Ministry of Cooperative and SME, Ministry of Women Empowerment, Ministry of Research and Development of Technology, SMEs association, National Network for SME Development to have support in capacity building on IT and BDC

NATCCO

- Launched NCash, a payment solution for co-operatives and their members for disbursement of benefits, payment of bills, dues and contributions, and remittances
- Expand ATM network nationwide for online financial services
- Enhancement of ekoopbanker software: web-based, open-source platform, integrated mobile phone facility, inter-branch connectivity

CULT

- Coordinate or be the lead organization in promoting for the enactment of the ICT policy of credit unions.
- Use the various media or promoting channels to encourage farmers to use IT such as community radio and training.

Summary of Discussions, Insights and Recommendations

After hearing all the presentations, a [Summary of Discussions, Insights, and Recommendations Regarding the Sustainability of the it@coops Project](#) was made by Mr. Wilfredo Dimamay, NATCCO Chairperson. According to Mr. Dimamay, the following were the major contributions of the it@coops Project to the project stakeholders:

1. marked improvement on IT HRD programs in the participating co-ops, credit unions, and NGOs;
2. increased in the ICT/Internet literacy of members accompanied by installation of IT facilities as well as its corresponding system development;
3. co-ops have opened themselves to the use and promotion of FOSS rather than the commercial software;
4. marked improvement in the co-op image;
5. expanded linkage/network with other co-operatives and organizations at the national and regional level;
6. enhanced entrepreneurial activities of members; and
7. expansion of marketing opportunities of co-op and members' products through electronic of virtual network.

Taking these strengths on-hand, he still cautioned the stakeholders to take into consideration the following factors that may affect the continuity of the Project within the three countries:

- a. affordability and cost effectiveness of ICT interventions,
- b. relevance and applicability of activities and interventions to the co-ops/credit unions,
- c. create value added opportunities for member-entrepreneurs,

- d. provide reliable support to co-ops for a facilitative implementation and on-time service support, and
- e. continue education and training activities, as well as enhancement of co-op and members' marketing and advocacy efforts.

Refer to **Attachment N** for the presentation of Mr. Dimamay.

Presentation of the Results of the it@coops Evaluation/Survey

Before officially closing the Forum, Ms Renate Pasch presented the [Result of the Survey](#) she facilitated on the first day of the Forum. The following were the major remarks gathered from the 36 IT Specialists and Trainers (56 percent women):

- majority expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the trainings they conducted, the positive feedback they got from the training participants, and the recognition they got from their respective co-ops
- the three most popular contents of the trainings they conducted were on office applications (accounting and report writing), use of Internet (information research and virtual networking), and hardware maintenance
- in general, there are more women participants in IT trainings
- training contents or services particularly relevant to women were office applications and use of the Internet for research and communications
- most of the IT Specialists have used the Collaborative Learning Environment (CLE)
- the most useful IT service for co-op members were Internet/e-mail, accounting or use of spreadsheet applications, and website development

For the 6 BDC Managers (67 percent women), they strongly agree that:

- there was a high demand for the trainings and services offered by BDCs (they were able to meet the demands and expectations of their members)
- setting up a BDC would be profitable for co-operatives
- 75 percent of the BDC users were women
- the three most popular BDC services were IT trainings, product development, and Internet research
- for its continuity, BDCs can:
 - provide additional income to its members as they can market/put their members products on display
 - provide services that will assist members to gain computer literacy, increase their capacity, promote their product, etc.
 - serve as a venue to increase co-op membership by encouraging women and men who avail of the BDCs' IT trainings and tutorials to affiliate with the co-op
- the challenges in maintaining a BDC include:
 - lack/insufficient budget
 - limited human resources/staff resignation
 - external competition

Meanwhile, seven of the Steering Committee members (57 percent women), responded that:

- the roll-out trainings conducted by the IT Specialists have improved efficiency in the daily workflow of the participating co-ops
- the content of the trainings matched the demands of the participating organizations and its members
- there was a marked improvement in the economic situation of the members of the participating co-ops
- profitability can be expected from maintaining BDCs and conducting IT trainings

Closing Ceremony



To officially close the it@coops Regional Forum, Mr. Cresente Paez, President and CEO of NATCCO, was asked to give a [Closing Message](#) to all the Forum participants. This was followed by the Awarding of the Certificates of Participation to the IT Specialists. Tokens of appreciation were given also given to InWent, to each of the national umbrella organizations, and to the it@coops Program Managers, IT Coordinators, and BDC Managers in recognition of their valuable support and expertise in achieving the Project goals. Another certificate of appreciation was also given to NATCCO for being the host-organization of this event.

After the awarding and pictorials, Mr. Balthas Seibold, Senior Project Manager of InWent, was called to give the [Closing Remarks](#). This was followed by the [Vote of Thanks](#) given by Ms Salome Ganibe, AWCF Executive Director. Before officially ending the day's activities, Mr. Seibold announced the creation/ inauguration of the joint regional mailing list, itcoops_SEAsia@natcco.coop, where it@coops advocates can exchange experiences and information with each other.

The Forum ended as the group sang "If we Hold on Together" bidding each other goodbye either by shaking hands or giving each other hugs of appreciation.