COOPERATIVES RENDER VALUABLE SERVICE DURING LOCK DOWN ENSURE CONSISTENT SUPPLY OF ESSENTIALS IN RURAL SIKKIM

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Real courage is doing the right thing when nobody is watching.
As adversity stares straight at our faces, and when social distancing norms are at its peak, there has never been a more important time to “Co-operate”!

The world is facing multiple crises during the ongoing pandemic and the entire country is in lockdown mode. Even in these circumstances, it is noteworthy that several frontline workers, individuals and organizations have been continuously rendering their service. They have often been referred to as Heroes or Warriors.

However, there is one section of service providers, conspicuously removed from the limelight, who are silently working behind the scenes to make a difference in the lives of people at the grassroots level in these extremely challenging times. The reference here is of Multi-purpose Cooperative Societies, engaged in distributing essential commodities at ground zero. Primary Cooperatives like Multi-purpose Cooperative Societies, Farmer’s Producers’ Cooperative Societies, Dairy Cooperatives and Poultry Growers Cooperatives dealing in essential commodities are open and serving their members and the community at large.

Unlike any other private or fair price shops, cooperatives are joint liability corporate bodies whose centre of energy is derived from the unity amongst its members. This is the time to acknowledge the contribution made by the cooperative societies in helping its members, families and communities, especially in rural areas, to get through this crisis.

These member driven, autonomous organizations have extensive network of shareholders and marketing linkage facilities in almost all the Gram Panchayat Units of the state and they have stood up to their responsibilities in making Government efforts successful by reaching out to the people at their door step with day to day essentials. To help maintain the chain of procurement and supplies, the Cooperatives have been showing solidarity and concern for communities duly utilizing available backup facilities and support of district administration. It may be mentioned here that there are 125 Multi Purpose Cooperative Societies Ltd. (MPCS), about 30 Farmers Producers Organization (FPO) Cooperative Society Ltd, more than 300 Primary Milk Cooperatives, few poultry cooperative societies and about 5 Consumer Cooperative Societies Ltd. across the State which are currently engaged in essential retail business during this lockdown.

The Department of Cooperation is coordinating with the management and officials of these Cooperative Societies on a day to day basis to monitor and guide them on various aspects.

Some of the actions and impacts of the cooperatives in Sikkim during lockdown is summarized below:

1. Most of the Multi Purpose Cooperative Societies (MPCS) all over Sikkim have been designated as distribution centres for the State Government relief material for the beneficiaries. More than 80% of the MPCS have been receiving relief material from the food godown in coordination with the Area Panchayat and assisting the administration in the distribution of the same to the identified beneficiaries. Infact, cooperatives like Padamchey MPCS Ltd and Amba Taza Organic Farmers Producer Cooperative Society Ltd. which both have their own utility vehicles have also gone the extra mile to lift the relief materials from the food godown till their respective villages voluntarily.

2. About thirty (30) Farmers Producers Cooperative Societies (FPOs) Ltd like Sustainable Organic Producers’ Marketing Cooperative Society Ltd., West Sikkim, Mellidara Kateng FPO, South Sikkim, Rongli FPO, Rani Khola FPO, East Sikkim, to name a few have been collecting fresh vegetables from the farmers and supplying it to the nearest local market.

3. Sikkim has about 300 Primary Milk Cooperatives, few poultry cooperative societies and about 5 Consumer Cooperative Societies Ltd. across the State which are currently engaged in essential retail business during this lockdown.

4. The Sikkim State Cooperative Bank Ltd. (SISCO) through its network of 14 branches across the State, business correspondents and mobile cash vans has been able to cater to all withdrawals and other banking needs of the customers spread in rural areas. The banks ATMs have always been kept funded during this period.

5. The premises of Sikkim State Cooperative Union (SICUN), an apex cooperative body was, also utilized as one of the quarantine centers by the district administration. 55 students studying outside the State with all logistic assistance and safety preparedness in coordination with the concerned officials were kept for quarantine.

6. Two apex cooperative federations namely Sikkim State Cooperative Supply and Marketing Federation (SIMFED) and Dzenzog Agriculture Cooperative Society (DACS) have also been actively engaged in maintain daily supply of vegetables and poultry.