ILO hosts partners meeting on cooperative responses to advancing public health

ILO hosts partners meeting to discuss the next steps on research exploring the potential of cooperatives to advance public health in Cameroon and Kenya

The meeting of partners to discuss the next steps on research exploring the potential of cooperatives and mutuals to advance universal health coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Cameroon and Kenya took place on May 23, 2018 at the ILO Headquarters in Geneva with the participation of representatives from International Health Cooperative Organization (IHCO), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Association de Soutien aux Centres de Recherches, d’Enseignements et de Soins, Novartis Social Business Team as well as ILO’s Cooperatives Unit.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Jean-Pierre Girard who welcomed the new partners (IHCO, Espriu and Novartis) that joined the existing partners (ILO, Nor West, Federazione Sanità, Réseau éducation Santé, Alliance for Health Promotion/Kenya chapter, SDC, ASCRES, CIRES – Cameroon). He reflected on where the initiative stands and provided an overview of the feedback he received on his presentation of the research findings at the Geneva Health Forum in April 2018. (See photo, next page.)

The session proceeded with a brief introduction by Ms. Simel Esim, the head of the ILO’s COOP Unit on the ILO and its work on cooperatives with a specific focus on its tools on capacity building. In the following discussion, the participants shared their reflections on role of cooperatives in providing health and social care services. More specifically the discussion focused on how to proceed with a pilot phase on activating cooperative potential in providing UHC in Kenya and Cameroon.

It was agreed that the pilot phase would proceed with exploring two cooperative models in the provision of health and social care services. In the case of Kenya, it was agreed that existing financial cooperatives could expand their services into awareness raising on public health care. In the case of Cameroon, it was suggested that existing agricultural cooperatives partner with mutuals that provide health and social care services to extend these services to their members. The ILO COOP representatives reiterated commitment to supporting the capacity building component of the initiative.

In addition to the pilot initiative in these two countries, it was agreed that it would be useful to explore smart entry points for establishing a global platform for exchange and learning among cooperatives to leverage their comparative advantage and expertise for UHC in low and middle income countries. As a first step a global mapping of different cooperative models and their contribution to provision of public health awareness and UHC was welcomed. In this context IHCO president Dr. Carlos Zarco agreed that his organization would take the lead. All partner organizations expressed their willingness to support to the realization of the project proposal that would be prepared by Jean-Pierre Girard in the coming months.
below, from left to right: Éric Comte (ASCRES), Simel Asim (Head, Co-op Unit, International Labor Organization), Carlos Zarco (president, International Health Co-operative Organization), Alexander Schulze (Swiss, Development and cooperation), Rebecca Stevens (Novartis social business), Erika Placella (Swiss, Development and cooperation), Jean-Pierre Girard (Project leader), Guy Tchami (Co-op Unit, International Labor Organization), Jose Perez (general secretary, International Health Co-operative Organization).

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