

CODE OF ETHICS AND CONDUCT

Approved by the CD on the 16th of December 2013

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CODE OF ETHICS AND CONDUCT

Introduction

Credibility and reputation are invaluable for an NGO that works in economic, political, social and heterogeneous cultural contexts. It is therefore essential to clearly express the values, common principles and responsibilities that guide our behaviour in relationship with our donors and funders, with our beneficiaries, with the communities in which we operate, with project partners, with people who work with us and with any other party that has a legitimate interest in our activities.

Values and principles, which coherently derive from our vision and mission and which are expressed in our Charter of Values: The Code of Ethics of COOPI Suisse derives from the Code of Ethics of COOPI Foundation, to which the Association refers its values to.

The Code of Ethics and Conduct, with reference to the Charter of Values, emphasizes all the rights, duties and responsibilities of all operators, employees, volunteers and COOPI Suisse consultants.

The knowledge and observance of the Code of Ethics and Conduct by all of us from COOPI Suisse constitutes a decisive factor in ensuring the efficiency, reliability and excellence of our activities.

The principles to which we aspire cannot ignore the strict observation of the law. The organizational model of the procedures and of control has the goal of ensuring:

- The observance of laws, procedures and internal regulations
- The availability of clear and controlled documentation

COOPI Suisse is committed to promoting awareness of the Code, ensuring transparency of operations and behaviour and intervening appropriately when necessary.

1 – The Organization and its values

1.1 – The “roots” of COOPI Suisse and of COOPI

According to the Swiss Civil Code, COOPI Suisse was founded in Lugano in May 2012 and was officially recognized as a public entity in December 2012.

It aims to contribute to a harmonious and integrated development of the communities it works with in Least Developed Countries (LDC), with the awareness that through the encounter and collaboration of populations, ideals of equality and justice are pursued, thereby achieving a better world balance.

The Association was born out of the initiative and motivation of a few people from Ticino, who have known and worked with COOPI in Italy through both communication and fundraising activities and through the management of developmental and emergency projects in Africa and in Latin America. COOPI Suisse operates independently in Switzerland for the implementation of awareness and fundraising campaigns in support of the cooperation and humanitarian projects managed by COOPI in the southern part of the world, realized through supporters, activists and society in general. It also maintains institutional relations with key players of the international cooperation in Switzerland. COOPI Suisse inherits the values of international solidarity from COOPI and transfers and applies them in its work.

Father Vincenzo Barbieri (1931 - 2010) was COOPI's soul: as the association's founder, and president in the last decades, he dedicated his entire life to the weakest, engaging in the assistance of foreign immigrants in Italy and in the development of supportive projects for children in Africa.

COOPI in Italy was established on the 15th of April 1965, when the Association was formally founded in Milan. It has a history with long established beginnings dating from the late fifties (a synthetic reconstruction can be found in Annex B).

It represents an extraordinary experience, for which Father Barbieri was not only a guide and president but also a constant point of reference regarding the values, style and strategic decision-making which made COOPI into what it is today: a great non-governmental organization operating in Italy and many other countries around the world.

The General Assembly and the Committee are the bodies of COOPI Suisse. Besides them, there are workers and volunteers who work for the development of the various activities of the Association. COOPI Suisse promotes and operates in collaboration with COOPI developmental programs and humanitarian aid operations, training and sending aid workers and volunteers to areas of intervention.

1.2 – Our Vision

COOPI Suisse aspires to a world without poverty, able to concretely realize ideals of equality and justice, of sustainable development and social cohesion, based upon the contact and collaboration among all populations.

1.3 – Our Mission

Through the commitment, motivation, determination and professionalism of its people, COOPI Suisse strives to contribute to the process of alleviating the struggle of poverty and to support the growth of the communities with which it cooperates in the world, intervening in situations of emergency, reconstruction and development in order to achieve a better balance between the North and the South of the planet, between developed and depressed or less developed areas.

1.4 – Charter of values

COOPI Suisse aspires to the protection and promotion of human rights, inalienable and fundamental prerogatives of human beings and the basis for the establishment of societies founded on principles of equality, solidarity, repudiation of war and the protection of civil rights, political, social rights, economic, cultural and so-called third-generation rights: the right to self-determination, peace, development and environmental protection.

COOPI Suisse rejects any kind of discrimination, corruption¹, forced or child labour. Particular attention is given the recognition and safeguarding of the dignity, freedom and equality of human beings, the protection of labour and trade union rights, health, safety, the environment, as well as the system of values and principles concerning transparency, sustainable development and efficiency. In its work COOPI Suisse takes full account of the Universal Declaration of the Human Rights of the United Nations and of the International Humanitarian Law.

¹ To make a promise, offer or give a benefit that can abnormally affect the decisions of the official public

THE CHARTER OF VALUES

1. **Solidarity:** COOPI wants to broaden and affirm a culture of solidarity through its activities and through the spread of information and awareness for the defence and respect of the fundamental rights of all people.
2. **Transparency:** COOPI is committed to efficiently manage collected funds and make all its donors, both institutional and private, accountable.
3. **Neutrality:** COOPI operates in total independence from private interests and autonomously from governmental policies, maintaining equidistance from both political parties as well as from religious entities.
4. **Participation:** COOPI involves institutions, communities, associations and local organizations to analyze problems and identify the most appropriate solutions, respecting the cultures and customs of its beneficiaries
5. **Sustainability of the intervention:** COOPI implements its projects by valorising structures, economic resources and local staff, with the goal of establishing a concrete and long-lasting development of the countries in which it operates.
6. **Responsibility:** COOPI constantly evaluates the effectiveness of its interventions, checking the qualities and the capacities of its local partners in order to ensure self-sustainability of the projects.
7. **Transfer of knowledge:** COOPI spreads its abilities and skills until the receiving beneficiaries are able to work completely autonomously and independently.
8. **Innovation:** COOPI pursues the continuous improvement of its skills, refining methods and strategies that are able to implement and innovate more effective approaches.
9. **Respect for diversity and the fight against discrimination:** COOPI is committed to valorise cultures and cultural differences, believing that this is a fundamental factor in achieving progress.
10. **Appreciation of the human resources:** COOPI respects the rights and protects the safety of all its employees and volunteers, acknowledging their professional work in accordance with international standards and those of the country in which they work.

2 – General Principles

Acknowledging laws, international procedures, regulations, regulatory codes, ethical integrity and fairness, is a constant commitment and duty for all operators² and have to characterize the entire organization.

By carrying out professional activities, one is required to behave in line with the principles of transparency, fairness, honesty, good faith and in full compliance with laws and rules with which to protect the organization.

The principles contained in the Code include behavioural rules with which every employee is required to comply, in accordance with the general obligations of diligence, honesty and fairness that should characterize work performance.

At all levels, the relationships between operators should be based upon criteria and collaborative behaviour, loyalty and mutual respect.

2.1 – Scope of application of the Code of Ethics and Conduct

The Code of Ethics and Conduct refers to the values expressed in the Charter of Values, and to the principles established in the international conventions listed here:

- Universal Declaration of the Human Rights of the United Nations
- Fundamental conventions of the ILO (International Labour Organization)
- UN Conventions of children's rights (Convention on the Rights of the Child – CRC)
- UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- International Humanitarian Law

This marks all the rights, duties and responsibilities of workers, volunteers, consultants and those who collaborate with the Association in different ways.

2.2 – Recipients

The Code of Ethics and Conduct is addressed to the following:

- Voluntary workers operating in- and outside of Switzerland without distinction or exception, within their respective functions and responsibilities should be aware that compliance with the Code is fundamental for the quality of their work and professional performance.
- Those who collaborate with COOPI Suisse in positions of consultancy or goods and/ or service providers.
- Donors, lenders and whoever may voluntarily contribute to the support and development of COOPI Suisse.
- Operators and volunteers of COOPI Suisse that take on assignments of projects abroad will sign a contract of collaboration with the Foundation COOPI and therefore should refer to the Code of Ethics and the procedures of the Foundation COOPI.

2.4 – Knowledge and diffusion of the Code

The Code is brought to the attention of all those with whom COOPI Suisse has dealings, whether internal or external to the Association and the operational structure, thereby facilitating comprehension and implementation. The Code is available to everyone on the website from which it can be downloaded: www.coopisuisse.org.

² The term operator is intended for any person who collaborates with COOPI at any organizational level for a short or long period regardless of the contractual arrangement: volunteer, collaborator, employee, consultant

ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL

The Association COOPI Suisse is equipped with an organizational model that transparently defines roles and functions of the various professional figures and services involved.

1. Operating Principles

1.1 - The Control System

The organization implements a control system in order to ensure compliance with laws and procedures in order to protect the organization and its assets, to manage with maximum efficiency, effectiveness and quality of activities and to provide accounting and financial data accurately and completely.

Assuming responsibility at all levels and monitoring the quality and the effectiveness of these responsibilities are fundamental elements of the Association's culture.

1.2 – Accounting records and financial statements, information statements and similar documents

The organization respects the laws applicable to the preparation of financial statements. It adopts any type of administrative and accounting documentation required by law, as well as informative prospectuses (financial statements) required by lenders.

The Organization's accounting bases itself on accounting principles which are universally accepted and governed lawfully; the annual financial statements are subject to certification by an appointed independent firm of auditors. The Organization's information and data provided to third parties as well as the accounting records of the organization's operations guarantee truthfulness, transparency, clarity, accuracy and completeness. Correct and truthful information of the economic situation and financial position are adhered to.

COOPI Suisse has defined accounting procedures, which must be followed by all operators, in which each recognised accounting related to a transaction must be preserved with supporting documentation. In order to facilitate consultation generally and on behalf of authorized domestic and foreign entities, the supporting documentation must be readily available and archived according to the same procedures.

As part of their duties, the staff must ensure the highest possible level of transparency and traceability of accounting operations.

1.3 – Human resources

Human resources are regarded as a fundamental element of the Organization. The dedication and the professionalism of the operators and workers are part of the values and conditions for achieving the goals and objectives of the Organization.

Therefore, the Organization is committed to developing employees and operators' skills and abilities in such a way that everyone has the opportunity of reaching their highest potential.

In this context, all operators are offered the same opportunities for professional growth, making sure that everyone can enjoy equal treatment based on merit, without any kind of discrimination of sex, age, disability, religion, nationality or ethnic origin and political opinions.

When selecting operators as foreign officers, the Organization gives consideration to the particular situation of the country concerned in order to guarantee maximum security possible.

In particular, one is required to assure the following:

- a working environment adequate and functional in relation to the activities to be carried out
- a relational, collaborative and communicative context which can positively influence the quality of the working environment
- a style of behaviour which encourages and promotes knowledge of the Organization's objectives

- the recognition and the valorisation of the skills, abilities and contributions of each person in order to achieve common objectives;
- an appropriate and transparent circulation of information, functional to the regular performance of the working activity and relative to the working organization.
- formative processes suitable to each position and task
- protection of privacy
- an appropriate prevention and a balanced management if conflicts should arise between employees
- an available ongoing support for those believed to be subject to acts and behaviours not in line with the principles listed above
- appropriate information regarding living and safety conditions in the country in which the operator works as well as preventive health practices that must be followed³

With the establishment of employment, each employee receives the necessary information:

- 1) Regarding the functions and tasks which are to be performed;
- 2) Regarding normative and retributive elements applicable to the type of work contract;
- 3) Regarding the procedures and norms to be adopted in order to equip the working activity with the greatest safety possible

1.4 – Protection of Health, Safety and the Environment, Public Safety

The Organization is attentive of the activities conducted by the operators so as to ensure that they are in accordance with the national politics of the countries it operates in. This is done in particular with regard to the protection of the worker's health and safety, and concern for the environment and public safety.

Moreover, the Organization expects the operators, even when adhering to procedures as part of their duties, to participate actively in the process of risk prevention, of safeguarding the environment and the public's safety, in addition to health and security protection in regard to oneself, colleagues and third parties.

2 – The Organization's properties and information

2.1 – Use of the Organization's properties

Every worker is equipped with material and non-material properties such as computers, printers, facilities, cars, software, know-how relative to the activity, planning of strategic and economic-financial activities.

The protection and conservation of these properties constitute a fundamental value for the safeguarding of the Organization's assets. The use of these properties by the workers is functional and exclusive to the carrying out of the Organization's activities and for purposes authorized by the specific functions.

2.2 – Protection of information (Privacy)

The Organization ensures the confidentiality of the information in its possession and abstains from researching confidential data, except in cases of conscious consent being given of the parties concerned and always in accordance with legal rules. Care is taken that all employees use confidential information acquired by virtue of their relationship with the Organization solely for purposes connected with their tasks and duties exercised.

To ensure maximum privacy the Organization provides a high level of security in the selection and use of its information technology systems, specifically designed to process personal data and confidential information.

³ It is the responsibility of each operator to implement the correct prophylaxis and implementation of the necessary therapies that ensure their health.

The Organization works to adopt suitable preventive safety measures for all databases in which personal data is collected and stored, in order to avoid any risks of destruction and losses as well as unauthorized access or forbidden processes.

The Association's activities constantly require the acquisition, conservation, processing, communication and the dissemination of information, documents and other data regarding negotiations, administrative proceedings, financial transactions and know-how (contracts, projects, reports, notes, studies, photographs, software, etc.) that may not be made known outside the organization, due to contractual agreements, or whose inopportune or untimely disclosure may result to the detriment of the organization.

Notwithstanding the transparency of the activities carried out and the obligations of the safeguarding of information, operators are required to ensure confidentiality in all circumstances with regard to all information acquired as a function of their work.

Therefore, operators are required not to reveal information about the properties of technical, organizational and financial knowledge of the Organization, as well as all other non-public information, except in cases where such disclosure is required by law or other internal arrangements.

In no circumstances may the recipients of the Code use information from inside the Organization for their own benefit nor may they divulge such information in any way to the outside.

2.3 – Research, innovation and the protection of intellectual property

The Organization promotes activities of research and innovation of all operators within their functions and responsibilities. The intellectual outcome of these activities is a central and indispensable asset and all employees are required to contribute actively to such production, working together with the government to ensure the protection of this heritage and to allow for its development, protection and enhancement.

3 – Relationships with third parties

3.1 – Relationships with donors

For the implementation of its activities, the Organization makes use of public and private funding. Relationships with donors are based on maximum honesty and transparency. Transfers must be made on accounts held in the foreign office. Payments to accounts of individuals are not allowed. Within the relationship with private donors, it is forbidden to give, offer or promise money or other benefits or favours that could reasonably be interpreted as exceeding the normal standards of courtesy. It is also forbidden to exercise illicit pressure upon an official appointed by a public service, managers, officers or employees of a public administration or of the public community or international bodies, or their relatives, partners and cohabitants.

Participating in tenders with the intention of receiving grants, contributions or funding from public bodies, the staff – each according to their skills, responsibilities and powers – is held responsible to form, screen, and provide declarations and / or authentic and truthful documents.

Private companies wishing to participate in humanitarian projects, including through the provision of goods or services, must comply with the organization's requirement for the respect of human rights, workers' rights and the environment.

The Organization rejects both donations of materials and money from companies that produce or trade in armaments, pornography or anything else that degrades the human being or the environment.

3.2 – Relationship with partners

As part of its humanitarian activities, the Association promotes and encourages active involvement by local partners for the realization of the activities and in the pursuit of its purposes and objectives.

The choice of partners (organizations or associations) is conditioned by the following criteria:

- They must be independent from national or international parties

- Their actions must be based on the same ethical principles as the Organization
Local partners can also be public, as long as they guarantee freedom of movement and decision-making, respecting the declared objectives and purposes of the Organization.
Within the work of all projects, the emergence of local organizations that enhance and develop the abilities and skills of individuals and communities, aiming at giving continuity to humanitarian action, are encouraged.

3.3 – Relationships with providers and suppliers

Regarding the purchase of goods, work or services for the cooperation's initiatives and humanitarian aid, the Organization prefers those which guarantee quality, employing technical and economic operators of the countries subject to intervention.

The choice of suppliers and the purchase of goods, works and services are carried out on the basis of objective assessments in respect of competitiveness, quality, cost, price, integrity: principles expressed and regulated in the procedures adopted by the Organization.

Recipients are required to comply with these principles as they are required to comply with rules dictated by the Organization concerning supplies.

The contracts signed by COOPI Suisse must inform third parties of the fact that COOPI adopts a Code of Ethics and Conduct, with which all stakeholders must comply. The procedure of purchasing goods and services defines the manner in which it requires suppliers to comply with ethical standards.

3.4 – Relationships with the press and other mass media

The success of COOPI programs also depends on the relationships established with the media. COOPI Suisse operators may be entrusted with tasks of representation and as such should play a role in communication.

The material that is to be used, the contents of press releases and the signing of appeals must be agreed with the President. The communications on the outside of the Organization must be truthful, complete, and verifiable, not aggressive, and respectful of the rights and the dignity of the person.

3.5 – Participation in initiatives, events or external meetings

The participation in initiatives, events or external meetings is supported on the condition of compatibility with the performance of operators' professional activities. These are regarded as such:

- Participation in conferences, congresses, seminars, courses
- Drafting and editing articles, papers and publications in general
- Participation in public events in general

In this regard, operators in charge of illustrating or providing data or news concerning objectives, results and viewpoints beyond the perimeters of COOPI, are required to be in accordance with internal procedures and the President.

3.6 – Relationships with people in charge of monitoring and reviewing the activity

Relationships with people performing activities of monitoring⁴ must be based on principles of integrity, timeliness, honesty and transparency. Additionally to these, maximum cooperation must be given. It is also forbidden to conceal information or to provide false documentation or to state untruths or otherwise prevent and hinder the performance of control or auditing activities.

4 – Conflict of interests

4.1 – General rules

Any situation that may constitute or determine a conflict of interest⁵ shall be immediately reported to the President for evaluation. It is also not allowed for operators to accept money or other favours

⁴ Internal Audit, Audit by lenders, Auditing firms, the Guarantor of the Code

⁵ To have private interests within the same area of institutional intervention that is managed to obtain benefits

from third parties for advice or services rendered in connection with their relationship with the Organization.

4.2 – Relationships of Kinship

Any decision related to the Organization's operations (supply contracts, partnerships, recruitment, etc.) should be adopted in view of its benefit to the Organization's opportunities; it must therefore be based on sound assessments and never be dictated by personal interests or benefits both direct and indirect.

4.3 – External employment

It is not allowed for operators to give third parties work or to perform activities contrary to or incompatible with the duties of office, purpose and image of the Association.

5 – Specific obligations for operators

In addition to being in compliance with the laws, it is the responsibility of COOPI operators to have a respectful attitude towards ethics and human rights as stipulated. See below for a comprehensive list of the operator's obligations:

Compliance with laws and regulations

Operators should take all measures possible to exert prevention and control in order to guarantee, within the area of one's own activity, respect for the laws of the country in which they operate and for the procedures and internal regulations within every geographic context at all decisional and executive levels.

COOPI operators who become aware of omissions, falsifications or negligence in accounting or in the accounting documents, are required to report the facts to their superior in such a manner as stipulated by the regulations.

Non-discrimination

Operators are required to respect the fundamental rights of the person, without any form of discrimination and with particular reference to children's rights; they are also required to respect cultures, religious orientations and the dignity of others.

All operators, within the existing relationships with the parties with which they operate, are required to avoid any kind of discrimination based on sex, state of health, age, nationality, political and religious orientations.

Employment of minors

Employing minors within the project's activities needs to be evaluated and considered with regard to the rights and laws of the country.

Mobbing and Stalking

Operators are forbidden to adopt any form of behaviour which is likely to be morally or psychologically harmful or offensive to the dignity and integrity of subordinate operators or of posing the threat of degrading the working environment.

Within working relationships, internal and external, no one should be subject to violence, threats, abuse of authority, offenses and aggressions, physical or verbal, or sexual harassment. Every form of harassment, including sexual harassment, is prohibited.

Sexual exploitation

It is prohibited to undertake or request sexual relationships with beneficiaries of projects. Relationships between project's staff, the organization and the beneficiaries are discouraged where dynamics of unequal powers are generated. The use of money, favours, gifts, employment and promises of employment in exchange for sexual performances is prohibited.

Sexual relationships with minors

It is prohibited to exercise and maintain sexual relations with minors.

Use of Psychotropic substances

COOPI's operators should never work under the influence of drugs, alcohol, psychotropic substances and in general, all substances which are illegal in the country one is operating in. The presence of none of these substances is permitted in the offices and communal structures of COOPI.

Security

Behaviour that encourages health risks or that may risk one's own safety or that of third parties is prohibited.

Every COOPI operator carries the responsibility of promoting and ensuring a safe and secure environment, respecting the procedures of the organization and following the present dispositions in the country.

Involvement in military operations and political activities

It is prohibited for operators to be involved in military operations and in political activities subversive to public order. Moreover, in general it is also prohibited for the operator to take part in the political life of the foreign country he is operating in.

For operators located in Switzerland, it is prohibited to use their position as a mean of favouring political parties.

For operators with representative positions, the hiring of someone in a political party position needs to be communicated to the council, as it can be in conflict with the responsibility and the recruited function.

Use of the Organization's property

The operators are required:

- To safeguard the personal computer and its relative programs and applications appropriately and return them with all data and information related to the work done. The data and information must be delivered in an orderly and recognizable manner
- To use and browse the *internet*, websites relevant to the work performed, not to participate in forums or *chat lines*, unless explicitly authorized
- To use the electronic mail box only for reasons relevant to the undertaking of the assigned tasks and in particular it is prohibited to send or memorize messages of outrageous or sexual nature
- Use, install and reproduce, without prior specific authorization, software and other material protected by law

Representation and protection of the organization's image

COOPI Suisse's operators are required to have a polite and professional attitude in representing the organization to the public, governments, lenders, partner organizations and to its beneficiaries. Behaviour which is damaging for the organization, even only of its image, is prohibited.

One is reminded also that during non-working hours, to some extent, the Organization continues to be represented. For this reason, operator's private lives should not be in obvious contradiction with the mandate and the principles of COOPI and should be appropriate to the context one finds oneself in.

Operators are also expected to adopt behaviour and style of clothing which conveys respect for their colleagues and partners and for customs, cultures and local traditions.

Non-authorized compensation

Operators are not authorized to receive or accept compensations, donations or other types of payments and benefits from people or entities who may gain an advantage from the managed programmes of COOPI (for example: partners or potential partners, beneficiaries, governmental counterparts, companies providing goods or services). To accept unauthorized compensations may determine cessation of the employee's contract.

Publications

Operators who intend to make external publications of articles or other documents regarding the Association's activities should request authorization from the presidency. All reports, manuals,

formation modules and other documents prepared internally within the undertaking of one's tasks are the organization's property. Therefore, every innovation, device designed, created and developed or realized either individually or with the support of others, is to be considered as the organization's property.

6 – Code management

6.1 – Obligation to know the Code and to report any possible violation

Each member from COOPI Suisse is expected to know the principles of the Code in addition to the reference procedures regarding the specific tasks and responsibilities covered by the employee.

It is mandatory for each operator to:

- abstain from behaviour and conduct contrary to such principles, procedures and contents of the Code
- carefully select, as far as possible, employees and volunteers and to direct them consistently so as be in full compliance with the Code
- question third parties with whom one enters into contact, if they are knowledgeable about and familiar with the Code
- promptly report findings or news from stakeholders concerning possible violations of the Code
- promptly adopt corrective measures, whenever necessary, and in all circumstances prevent any type of retaliation.

6.2 – Consequences of violating the Code

Failure to follow the guidelines included in the present document may cause severe damage to the organization, both to its image as well as from an equity point of view.

Through decisions made by the president, the Organization reserves the right to take necessary measures to safeguard the good name of the Organization.

6.3 – Contractual value of the Code

To be in compliance with the provisions of the Code is an essential part of the contractual obligations of the operators.

Violating the principles and contents of the Code may constitute a breach of the primary obligations of the working relationship and collaboration, constituting a disciplinary offense and leading to legal consequences and possible compensation for damages in order to preserve working relationships.

6.4 – Code review

The revision of the Code has been approved by the committee of COOPI Suisse.

ANNEX A – to be signed by collaborators

The declaration of acceptance of the Code of Ethics

**I, the undersigned,
born inon.....,
resident in,
in my position as,
at the COOPI Foundation.**

I DECLARE

Of having visited www.Coopisuisse.org and read the Code of Ethics and Conduct, prepared by the Association of COOPI Suisse.

Date.....

Signature.....

ANNEX B: The history of COOPI

In order to understand the genesis of COOPI's extraordinary journeys, one must start from afar, from France in the late fifties where Vincenzo Barbieri – "father" and founder – attended the Faculty of Theology in Lyon, before being ordained a Jesuit priest. He was supposed to leave as a missionary for Chad.

However, in the four years spent in France, Father Barbieri came into contact with the movements that supported the liberation of the Algerian people and was committed to helping Italian immigrants to come across the Alps, in search of work and sought involvement in international voluntary work.

Therefore, instead of leaving and with the agreement of his superiors, he launched international secular voluntary work in Italy.

The result is surprising: many youngsters get in touch, all very interested of the proposal.

In Lyon a house was opened that welcomed the first Italian volunteers and prepared them before leaving for their missions.

In October 1963, with a group of lay people, two houses were rented in Milan. It became a real community in which everything was shared: money, hopes and commitment.

When the experience of the first two volunteers, a husband and wife in Rwanda, was made public by the media, COOPI received over 600 letters within only a few days: from young and old, believers and non-believers, from every part of Italy, requests concerning lay missionary activities (the term cooperating was not used yet).

Under the thrust of the Second Vatican Council in Italy, the first voluntary associations appeared, including the 18 volunteers of Father Barbieri who then chose to form an association.

By 1965, up to 25 people visited ten countries in Latin America and Africa and in Milan the organizational structure of the association was being strengthened.

In order to further the proposed conscientious objection to military involvement, COOPI started to collaborate with don Milani. Subsequently, connections were made with the honourable Pedini in order to finalize the legal text for the replacement of military services with 24 months of civilian service in developing countries.

In those years, great interest for third world issues was generated within the Italian public. Catholics and lay people begin to organize common struggles for a goal of justice among populations. A strong non-violent movement formed against the Vietnam war, communists and religious believers often marched side by side. Without hesitation COOPI joined, encouraging peace and the end of bombing civilians. Following the example of Abbé Pierre, in 1968 labour camps are organized in Italy which are intended for operations of solidarity.

The working environment was mixed: Catholics and non-Catholics worked hard and voluntarily with the goal of helping others. Non-Catholics felt encouraged by the secular status of COOPI. The Jesuits, however, did not accept the fact that Father Barbieri, a member of the order, was the guide and leader of an association, not employed by the religious order. So that it was, at the beginning of 1969, in agreement with his brothers, father Barbieri left the Jesuits, while remaining a priest.

In June 1969, thanks to the goodwill of the Municipality of Milan, COOPI moved into a farmhouse, which is to be renovated, in Via De Lemene on the outskirts of Milan. The building remains the historic headquarters of COOPI today.

The association underwent a remarkable development during the seventies. It was mainly Paolo Giorgi, who played a key role in its strengthening and further development. With Paolo Giorgi,

COOPI started to engage in the most important programs, financed by the Italian government and by the EEC and the UN.

During the eighties, due to the increase in its responsibilities, continuous reorganization was required. Administrative functions were developed by professionals who came from projects in developing countries. Due to pressure on behalf of the lenders, COOPI started to work alongside international cooperation activities in order to raise awareness in Italy.

In 1997, in collaboration with the University of Pavia and two other NGOs (CISP and VIS), COOPI organized the first international Master in Cooperation and Development in an Italian University.

In 2010, the Association COOPI turns into a “Foundation held”, an appropriate instrument to facilitate the expansion of operational responsibilities regarding the development of the projects in each country and which provides “governance” with more agile and suitable structures to manage the organizational complexity, with an enhanced ability to network between different structures.

Today COOPI is one of the largest and most important Italian non-governmental organizations. It has a general director, several managers and hundreds of operators working in Africa, South America, Asia and Europe. But above all, COOPI today has a strong social foundation and thousands of friends in Italy and all around the world.

Its projects and interventions require considerable specializations, professional skills, organizational structures and financial resources. However, the values and the enthusiasm of our current cooperatives are still the same as of our past volunteers. The history of COOPI is the story of a constant evolution and constant innovation to respond evermore effectively to the needs of the weakest on the planet: an evolution and innovation which have never betrayed the original spirit of the association.

COOPI was among the founding organizations of both the FOCSIV (Federazione degli Organismi Cristiani di Servizio Internazionale Volontario, created in 1965) and the COSV (Comitato di coordinamento delle Organizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario, set up in 1966). While the former was inspired by Christians, the COSV had a decisively secular connotation: the fact that COOPI was part of it, helped to pressure the government to encourage non-religious voluntary work, which led to the approval of the laws on exemption from national service for citizens providing technical support in developing countries (n ° 1033 of 8 November 1966), and those regarding technical cooperation with developing countries (n ° 1222 1 January 1972 and the n ° 49 of February 26, 1986 is still in force).

In recent years, COOPI, along with some of the other major Italian NGOs, created “AGIRE” (Agenzia Italiana Risposta alle Emergenze), and founded the “Link 2007” network.