

A Critical Assessment of Kenya's Cooperative Movement Response to Platform Techs: Lessons from The Future

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ABSTRACT: *Economies in less developed nations are faced with low-paid, informal work, and youth unemployment. This challenge has mutated into absolute poverty and sometimes rebellions and uprisings as populations surge. This is a precipice to future crisis. Could the Internet be rebooted to help address some of these issues? The platform cooperativism could offer one of the best solutions towards this direction. New spaces of work creating new powers in the economy are becoming highly inevitable and uptake of such models is now irresistible across the world. Most of these nations predominantly operate offline in the changing scope of work. Platform cooperativism, could, by nature, offer sustainable and participatory forms of businesses, and provide the actual and potential while contributing to sustainable businesses, and development. As such platform are invariably taking shape in all other sectors of the economy, could this be the time to reposition the cooperative movement in the new space?*

KEY WORDS: platform, cooperativism, internet, work

INTRODUCTION

Best practices worldwide and technological advancements have pushed organizations to adopt ICTs in their operations especially communication within and without the organization. As a growing sector, the co-operatives are facing the wave of low-wage work hence the need to come up with solutions to these emerging challenges (Boler, 2008; Boyd, & Nicole, 2008). The platform Cooperativism is about the convergence of the 21st-century technologies and the rich, global heritage of Cooperativism. This platform is comprised of online mediums that support production and sociality, digital labor brokerages, web-based marketplaces that are collectively owned and democratically governed, and all those initiatives that directly support the co-operative economic model (Scholz, *Et AL* 2017).

While rethinking the new workspaces and models, as a solution to unemployment crisis and poverty, scholars and coop activists assert that the platform Cooperativism is set to radically prepare the social organization of emerging technologies among coops, which it aims to re-design with community wealth in mind (Scholz, *Et AL* 2017). Arguments have further been drawn pitting that this Platform is a holistic model to deliver better outcomes than the corporate “sharing economy,” which will fail the ecology, workers, and consumers over the long haul. It is arguable that the emerging experiments in the cooperative platform economy ought to be taken seriously, nurtured, and grown by communities and policymakers alike (Silberman, 2016).

Scholz, a platform Coop researcher and scholar activist argues that radical democracy and the internet are not mutually exclusive; the internet became a tool for corporate extraction, and how to reverse the process. Combining the rich heritage of cooperatives with the promise of 21st-century technologies, the platform Cooperativism is a call for a new kind of online economy, one free from the economics of monopoly, exploitation, and surveillance (Scholz, *Et AL* 2017). Drawing from this argument, we can deduce that the future can draw lessons of the potential of cooperatives in the new tech era. The big question then would be, what is the role that cooperatives need to play today to be part of the future?

Schneider, (2014), notes that platform coops is at once new and old among the cultures surrounding the Internet. His arguments have been drawn that early software and hardware hackers employed certain cooperative-like practices as they assembled the rudiments of the personal computer and the means of networking them; as such they shared source code (Bimber,1994); they developed structures of democratic governance across great distances; they resisted corporate enclosure in the process (Scholz, *Et AL* 2017). Both Schneider and Bimber are finding a clear convergence point at the question of the culture. As such, the internet culture and the future of work is the zone for the new work spaces. We could argue, based on this assertion, that this culture, invisibly will provide a techspace with a huge solution to the future of works.

We would further draw an argument that the technological sophistication necessary to build online enterprises, in any case, has surely seemed prohibitive for many kinds of communities that might adopt cooperative strategies. However, recently the Internet could be considered an optional realm of activity; coops tend to appear when people have unmet needs, not to furnish a mere accessory or curiosity (Scholz, *Et AL* 2017). Evidently, it is becoming harder and harder, around the world, to secure a livelihood without taking part in the online economy. This has, forced the re-emergence, in the past few years, recognizable platform co-ops (Schneider, 2014).

Platform Cooperativism can likewise be taken to mean a broad invitation to a fairer online economy through shared ownership and governance; platform co-ops, however, are strictly those platforms that are also bona-fide co-ops by widely agreed-on standards (Schneider, 2014). Platform Cooperativism inclines towards a different approach, one in which the people contributing value co-own the platforms and help decide to what ends they operate (Scholz, *Et AL* 2017).

A vibrant platform co-op sector will require a variety of financing mechanisms. An opportunity for platform co-op investment that often goes overlooked is the existing offline cooperative sector (Benkler, 2007). While some large, well-capitalized co-ops have begun investing in platforms, they often face a learning curve in doing so. Just as the tech sector is still learning how to develop online co-ops, the cooperative sector must learn how to apply its financial resources and know-how online (Barnes, 2006).

An honest platform Cooperativism should extend its gaze beyond the platform economy itself to its material substrates – in particular, the human conditions surrounding the mineral extraction and assembly of the hardware on which platforms depend (Barnes, 2006). This has been neglected territory for the emerging platform co-op ecosystem, which has remained software-oriented. But there are some promising points of departure to consider (Scholz, *Et AL* 2017; Brabham, 2008). Perhaps platform coops, by building other co-ops into their supply chains, can help set high standards for sourcing and labor (Baran, 2002).

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