

WHAT IS COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP?



A Statement By CoopYouth to the International Cooperative Movement Delivered to the International Cooperative Alliance 2015 Global Conference & General Assembly

*Maritim Pine Beach Resort
Antalya, Turkey*

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BACKGROUND

The following statement was delivered orally to the closing plenary of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) Global Conference on November 12th, 2015 in Antalya, Turkey. The statement was read, alongside some personal remarks, by Sebastien Chaillou, President of Solidarite Etudiante – a multi-stakeholder cooperative of university students and the workers at the cooperative’s campus businesses.

Recommendations included in the statement are the result of work done by the youth in attendance at the ICA Global Conference and General Assembly. Young people gathered together on Wednesday in a participatory session on November 11th, 2015 led by the USA Cooperative Youth Council (USACYC). The session used a Peoples’ Movement Assembly (PMA) format, a large group participatory process developed through the World and National Social Forums organized in response to the creation of the World Trade Organization. The PMA process leads participants through small group discussions on a particular topic that get aggregated into a single resolution or statement of the large group. The discussion walks through an evaluation of the status quo of the chosen issue, obstacles to addressing the issue, ideas to overcome those obstacles, and the vision for what the issue would look like if all the obstacles were overcome. In this way, the group process begins with reflection and moves slowly towards an aspirational visioning exercise.

For this PMA, the group discussed the meaning of “Cooperative Leadership.” To begin the discussion, we first explored the damaging impacts Neoliberalism has had on shaping our notions of success, democracy, and leadership, which then allowed us to assess what impact those concepts had on our cooperative movement. The session was filled with tremendous intellect, insight, and creativity by the participants that resulted in an action-oriented and progressive statement calling for cooperative movement leadership to make very specific changes to their philosophy and practice.

If we are to move beyond “2020,” there are some criticisms that need to be heard. We won’t succeed without greater youth empowerment and participation in the cooperative movement. Empowering young cooperators not only directly benefits the youth but will positively impact the whole movement.

YOUTH STATEMENT ON COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP

For us, our international cooperative movement fails to genuinely lift up marginalized voices and is inward-facing with limited representation, participation, transparency or a powerful political platform.

Because it is possible to create a safe, trustworthy, and empowering space for our cooperative movement, with more dynamic participation by evolving our technology, inclusiveness, and representation. This will improve the integrity of the cooperative movement and strengthen our relationships with civil societies as a global role model.

Therefore, be it resolved, that the youth of the International Cooperative Alliance commits to building a movement based on the following three practices:

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

In order for our movement to be truly democratic, we must utilize participatory processes to openly discuss strategy, vision, and challenges. These processes must seek out consensus and engage large numbers of people, rather than rely heavily on representational models. The key ways in which we can accomplish this are to:

1. Employ large group participatory processes
2. Utilize online participation tools to engage cooperative movement members in conversation year-round on topics under consideration by our International, Regional, and National federation Board of Directors.
3. Apply consensus-building and -seeking models to the decision-making processes of our ICA, regional, and national federation Boards. We propose a move away from our false model of overly representational democracy.

LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION & SHARED REPRESENTATION

In order for our movement to maintain relevance and be truly governed by the people, we must have strong leadership succession practices and diverse representation of peoples in leadership. In order to achieve these goals, we can:

1. Maintain term limits and gender equity for the Boards of the ICA, regional, and national federations.
2. Maintain shared management structures among leadership and executives to avoid the consolidation of power and foster turnover of leadership in perpetuity.
3. Proactively include youth on the ICA, regional, and national federation Boards through statutory seats and put in place policy that plans for the development of young staff upwards into leadership roles.

AUTONOMOUS YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

In order to continue to innovate in the cooperative movement, both the autonomy of youth needs to be respected and the autonomous youth organizations need support. We put forward the following proposals:

1. Allow for youth organizations to be autonomous at the ICA, regional, and national levels. More specifically, the ICA Board should allow the Global Youth Network to decide who and how people can be members of our network.
2. Redistribute the cooperative movement's wealth of resources to support marginalized peoples, including youth, to build autonomous networks and innovate the cooperative business model. Specifically, we recommend that ICA member cooperatives pay additional funds to support the function of the Global Youth Network and that national federations financially support youth in participating in all autonomous youth organizations.

We are building this now for ourselves. We are building this for future youth. We call on the broader cooperative movement and - specifically, the ICA Board of Directors - to join us in this important work by implementing these changes to foster a brave, loving, just, and intergenerational cooperative movement.