

What Does the Solidarity Economy Have to Offer BIPOC and other Equity-denied Groups?



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AGENDA:

- An Introduction to BWPW CO-OP – Our Story
- Our Challenges and Successes as a Worker Cooperative
- Why is the Solidarity Economy important for BIPOC and Others?
- What Can We Do better – as a Federation, Cooperatives, & Individuals?
- Question & Answer Session

Black Women Professional Worker Co-op



BWPW CO-OP: OUR STORY

**Dignity. Indigenous Wisdom. Celebration of Sisterhood. Sense of Belonging.
Partnerships for Shared Prosperity. People-centric. Power of Community.
Courage. Subjugation of Capital. Solidarity & Cooperative Economies.**



B W P W C O - O P

BLACK WOMEN PROFESSIONAL WORKER CO-OP

BWPW CO-OP: OUR STORY

- **Co-Founded Whole Woman Network (WWN) – (an Informal BIPOC collective using cooperative principles and ROSCA model), in December 2010**
- **Federally Incorporated Black Women Professional Worker Cooperative (BWPW Co-op) - in August 2021, as a Worker Cooperative with 10 Founding Members. (Focus: Under-represented Black Women in the Agro/Food Sector)**
- **Bootstrapped BWPW Co-op using ROSCA (Rotating Savings & Credit Association) aka “Esusu/Susu/Ajo” and Peer-to-Peer Lending/Support Network**
- **Research-based & Evidence-driven – Based on Intersectional Black Feminist Theory - Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Aba Women of Nigeria, and the works of Dr. Caroline Shenaz Hossein, Prof. Nwando Achebe, & Dr. Jessica Gordon Nembhard, Fannie Lou Hamer etc.**
- **Ecosystem Approach using Multidimensional Frameworks – ESG, SDGs, and Indigenous Values (7 Kwanza values, 12 NVI - Igbo, Eastern Nigeria).**

OUR CHALLENGES

- **Navigating Systemic Barriers, Structural Inequalities, and Institutional Racism**
- **Underestimating Time and Financial commitments required (value-chain coordination and intangible contributions (time, intellectual property, sweat equity, etc.))**
- **Internal Conflict Management for our Members-Workers-Owners**
- **External Stakeholder Management; Regulatory, Market, Political**
- **Lack of Access to Capital to Support Growth and Organizational Effectiveness, Operations, Capacity Building and Skills/Staffing**
- **Lack of Access to Robust Representation in Mentorship and Support**

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OUR SUCCESSES:

- CWCF matched us with a BIPOC Co-op Developers to develop our Brand/Bylaws
- Currently enrolled in the CWCF Coop Academy Program under a Mentor/Trainer/Coach with extensive coop experience to build our capacity
- Building a Peer-to-Peer/ROSCA model that empowers members with Financial Literacy
- Plugged into the Coop & SPO ecosystem; 2 BWBW Co-op Board members were sponsored by CWCF to attend the ACE Institute conference
- Created our food label (SISTER'S OWN)
- BWPW Co-op Members' Products are Currently in 22 Canadian Stores:
 - ELSUTRA FOODS INC. (Ontario, Canada)
 - HONEY STORE NG (Enugu, Nigeria)



Why is the Solidarity Economy Important to BIPOC and Other Equity-denied Groups?

“Solidarity Economy (SE) is a post-capitalist framework that emerged in Latin America and Europe in the 1990s. It rejects state-dominated authoritarian forms of socialism, instead affirming a core commitment to participatory democracy. Furthermore, it is explicitly feminist, anti-racist, and ecological, and advocates for economic transformation that transcends all of forms of oppression, not just class.”

– By Emily Kawano & Julie Matthael
(System Change: A Basic Primer to the Solidarity Economy)

HOW DOES THIS INTERSECT WITH THE BLACK SOCIAL/SOLIDARITY ECONOMY?

Why are BIPOC and Other Equity-denied Groups Important in the Solidarity Economy?

➤ Historical Context:

- Pre and Post-colonialism
- Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade
- Centuries of Lived Experiences

➤ Socio-cultural Affinity:

- Black social/solidarity economies
- Collectivist/Cooperative (Nri Kingdom)
- I am Because We Are (Ubuntu)
- “Leave No One Behind”
(*Atautsikut; Onye Aghana Nwanne Ya*)

➤ Political Affinity

- Leadership and Governance Structures
(Councils of Elders, Custodians of Culture)

➤ Economic Affinity

- Business Structures
(Sole Proprietorships, Family-owned, “Imu Ahia)



Why is the Solidarity Economy Important to BIPOC and Other Equity-denied Groups?

“Nobody is Free until Everyone is Free.” – Fannie Lou Hamer

Sense of Belonging – Inclusion for both Informal and Formal Economies to co-exist, contribute, and co-create shared prosperity and an equitable, sustainable, just, and inclusive society.

Harnessing collective power and preserving cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge/wisdoms, practices and legacies.

Empowers BIPOC and equity-deserving groups to organize and collectively dismantle and navigate systemic barriers, institutionalized racism, structural inequalities and injustices of patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, ableism, and classism.

Socio-economic-political considerations – increased capacity to leverage and share resources, transform mindsets, organizational cultures, policies and regulations, and build ecological/sustainable ecosystems and societies.

What Can We Do Better – as Canadian Worker Coop Federation (CWCF)?

- - Use Monitoring, Evaluation, Improvement and Learning Framework to constantly measure and improve the deliverables of the JEDI committee for deeper/wider impact
- - Increase Diversity on the CWCF Board/Staff for more Representation and Inclusion
- Open up CWCF membership to include informal coops, collectives, social enterprises..
- - Amplify and Scale the mandate of CWCF Coop Academy, Racial Justice Action Plan
- - Attract and retain more staff, and build staff capacity to support the operations of CWCF, particularly stakeholder engagement, membership management, trainings/workshops, and social media/publicity
- - Design a Partnership Framework to guide increased partnerships between CWCF and other BIPOC and Equity-denied organizations such as Freedom Dreams, SETSI, in order to deliver joint culturally-attuned workshops, programs, and expand reach and impact
- Invest in more member outreach programs/events –virtual/in-person visits/roadshows
- Build a sustainable volunteer and internship pipeline by engaging more Coop students

What Can We Do Better – as Worker Cooperatives?

- No Citizen, Cooperative or Community Left Behind | “Onye Aghana Nwanne Ya” | “Atautsikut.”
- Consciousness, Curiosity, Commitment, Courage, Co-creativity, Communities of Care.

Consciousness, Curiosity and Courage to Learn, Un-learn, Re-learn.
Invest in Mental Health, Personal Development & Capacity of Workers, Owners, Members. Kaizen Principle: Consistently Monitor, Evaluate, Learn and Improve.

Intentionally invest in Resilient Coop Workplaces as Safe Communities of Care, Celebration and Co-creation.
Apply JEDDI & ESG frameworks across board - Fair Trade with vendors/suppliers, Good governance, Fair Wages, Choose Investors with aligned in values.

Alignment and Commitment to:
- The Cooperative Values & Principles
- Learning Best Practices from Corporations with aligned values.
-Solidarity Economy Values & Principles
(solidarityeconomyprinciples.org)

Participate in Industry events and programs by CWCF. Engage with/cooperate with other cooperatives and other SPOs, as well as Corporations, Government, Communities. Influence change by being/modeling what we seek.

What Can We Do Better – as Individuals?

Show up. Share our experiences and learn from our stories. Study history, interrogate and let go of our Biases & Social Conditioning. Deepen our sense of Empathy/Responsibility/Accountability. Embrace courage to commit/transform daily. SOAR!



BWPW CO-OP

BLACK WOMEN PROFESSIONAL WORKER CO-OP