

The background of the slide is a scenic landscape photograph. It shows a wide valley with a lake in the distance, surrounded by green mountains. In the foreground, two people are standing on a grassy ridge next to a yellow and white tent, looking out over the valley. The sky is clear and blue.

WORKER COOPERATIVES BUILD A BETTER WORLD: Democracy, Diversity, and Justice.

Keynote by: Juliet Kego Ume-Onyido, MBA, CUDE
Canadian Worker Co-op Federation (CWCF) Conference | Nov. 18, 2025

Outline



I. SANKOFA (YESTERDAY): Revisiting the Cooperative History.

I. TAATA (TODAY): Re-examining the Present Trends & Shifts

III. OBI (A MATTER OF IDENTITY): Reclaiming the Heart of the Movement and Re-rooting our work in the Cooperative Identity, Values and Principles.

IV. ECHI DI IME (TOMORROW): Re-imagining new futures; the promises and possibilities of tomorrow.

Definition of Key Terms & Lens Used:

- ❑ Diversity
- ❑ Democracy
- ❑ Justice
- ❑ Wheel of Privilege & Power



Worker Co-ops as Pathway to Democracy

“In the 20th century, democracy has least advanced in the world of work, and yet work is a central experience of adults, much of our identity springs from our work.”

- John Jordan

“SANKOFA”:

**Revisiting Worker
Cooperative History**

Sankofa - Revisiting the Past

Source: Ian MacPherson: The History of the Canadian Cooperative Movement



Informal Co-ops

- Informal farming cooperatives across Africa, India, Latin America, Asia etc.
- Olaudah E. (Journal)



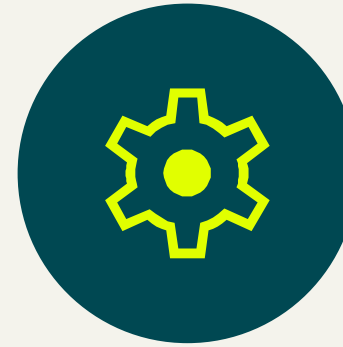
1760 - 1828

- Worker Co-ops in Scotland
- Robert Owen, Fourier, King



1844 - 1880

- 1844: Rochdale (modern co-op movement)
- 1880: 200 co-ops



1864 - 1900s

- USA
- Canada (1880s - Worker Co-ops)



1970s -2020s

Revival and surge in WC driven by grassroots groups in response to inequalities & injustices

Sankofa - Revisiting the Past

SOME REASONS WHY WORKER COOPERATIVES EMERGED:

- Similar to the labour movement, in response to the industrial revolution, and to check the excesses of unbridled capitalism.
- To address the insecurities of wage labour, lack of worker rights and poor conditions of work, etc.
- *To ensure true worker ownership and agency, economic democracy and economic justice.

“TAATA”:

Re-examining Present Trends and Shifts

Re-examining Trends & Shifts

- ☐ Macroeconomics Factors (Inflation, Unemployment etc.)
- ☐ Artificial Intelligence
- ☐ Gig Economy & Digital Transformation
- ☐ Tech & Cybersecurity
- ☐ Future of Work
- ☐ Climate Change
- ☐ Political Environment
- ☐ Regulatory Changes
- ☐ Trade Tariffs
- ☐ Youth
- ☐ Women
- ☐ Indigenous People
- ☐ People with Disabilities
- ☐ LGBTQIA2+
- ☐ Black & Racialized groups
- ☐ Immigrants/Newcomers
- ☐ Aging Population
- ☐ Refugees/Undocumented
- ☐ Migrant Workers
- ☐ Other Intersectionalities



Trends: Macro-Economic Factors



Based on a population of 25.81 million Canadians aged 18 years old to 70 years old, July 2019 (Statistics Canada)
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Source: Seymour Financial Resilience Index

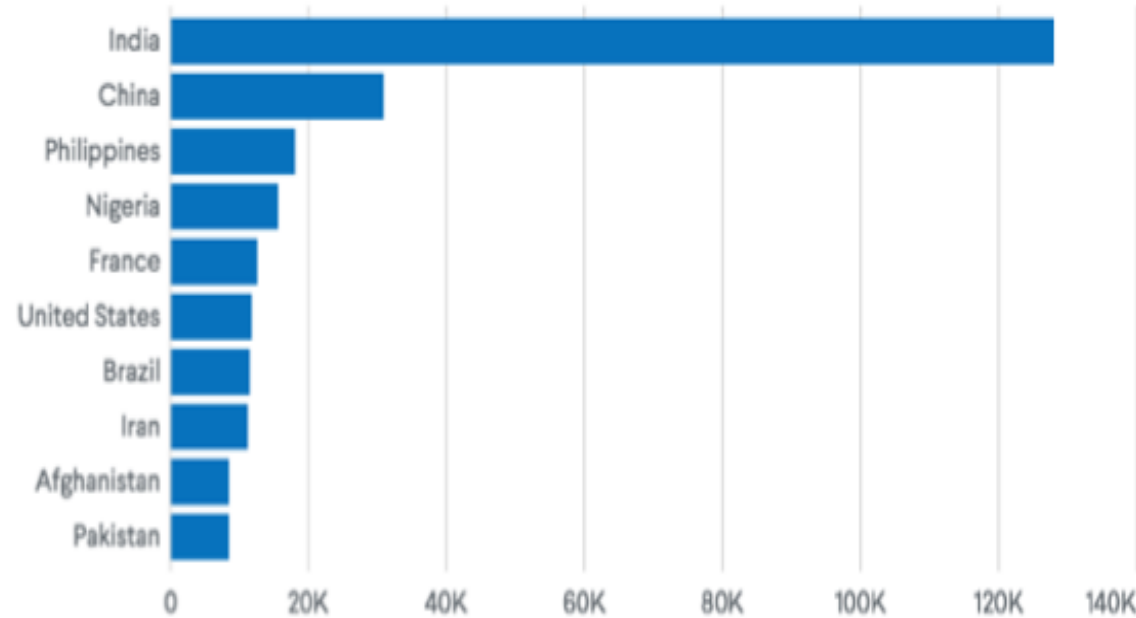
Trends: Artificial Intelligence & Tech

- ❑ How can we ensure democracy, justice, equity, inclusion, accessibility and belonging in the worker co-op sector in this new 4th Industrial Revolution?
- ❑ What are the gains, opportunities and threats posed by Artificial Intelligence considering existing biased algorithms and lack of equity in data & AI technologies?
- ❑ How can AI broaden and deepen our understanding of data and knowledge – e.g. embodied data with women and indigenous people?

Trends: Immigration Patterns

Where Do Canada's Immigrants Come From?

New permanent residents by country of origin, 2021 (top ten countries)



Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

COUNCIL_{mf}
FOREIGN
RELATIONS

Where Do Immigrants to Canada Settle?

New permanent residents by city, 2016–2021 (top six cities)



Source: Government of Canada.

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RELATIONS

Demographic Shifts - Youth



Allow the next generation to develop.

Invest in the next generation.

Make room for the next generation at the table.

Diversify the background around the table.

Develop a presence within the educational system.

Make cooperative involvement more credible.

Source: White Paper on Young Cooperators in Canada | <http://canada.coop>

Demographic Shifts - Women



- The Great Wealth Transfer.
- Business Case for Women.
- Cultural Affinity for Immigrants.
- The Gender Funding & Wage Gaps, and Opportunities for the Worker Co-op Sector
- Job Loss (USA): 300K Black Women

Source: The Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH)'s State of Women's Entrepreneurship (SOWE) in Canada 2024 Report | MSNBC.com

“OBI” - A MATTER OF IDENTITY:

**Reclaiming the Heart of
the Co-op Movement**

A Matter of Identity

“The Cooperative Business Model is compatible with the most progressive understanding of sustainability, but many cooperatives still need to broaden their views toward deeper and more meaningful impact. This requires sophisticated and systematic adherence to the cooperative enterprise model in order to enable transformation from an economistic to humanistic paradigm, and from purely financially-motivated enterprise to alignment with the 7 cooperative principles, as expressed in the ICA’s statement on the Cooperative Identity.” - Karen Miner and Sonja Novkovic

Cooperative Identity

Source: ica.coop

ICA's statement on the cooperative identity states that a cooperative is an “autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.”

Co-operative Principles

Source: ica.coop

01 VOLUNTARY & OPEN MEMBERSHIP

05 EDUCATION, TRAINING & INFORMATION

02 DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL

06 COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES

03 MEMBER ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

07 CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

04 AUTONOMY & INDEPENDENCE

08 **P8? (DEIB)**

“ECHI DI IME”:

**Re-imagining New
Futures & Possibilities**

P6: From Silos to Solidarity

Cooperation among cooperatives and with other values-aligned organizations

Social Solidarity Economy

“In partnership with SSE, Cooperatives are key to ensuring that care economy are organized for equity & sustainability.” - Anna Moreira Gomes, Regional Director, ILO

Environmental Justice Movement

- Ecofeminism
- Food Justice & Sovereignty etc.

Commons (Economy for the Common Good)

It advocates for an alternative economic model that puts the common good, cooperation and community in the foreground.

Other Post-Growth Movements

Doughnut Economics etc.

SWOT Analysis

of the Worker Cooperative Model

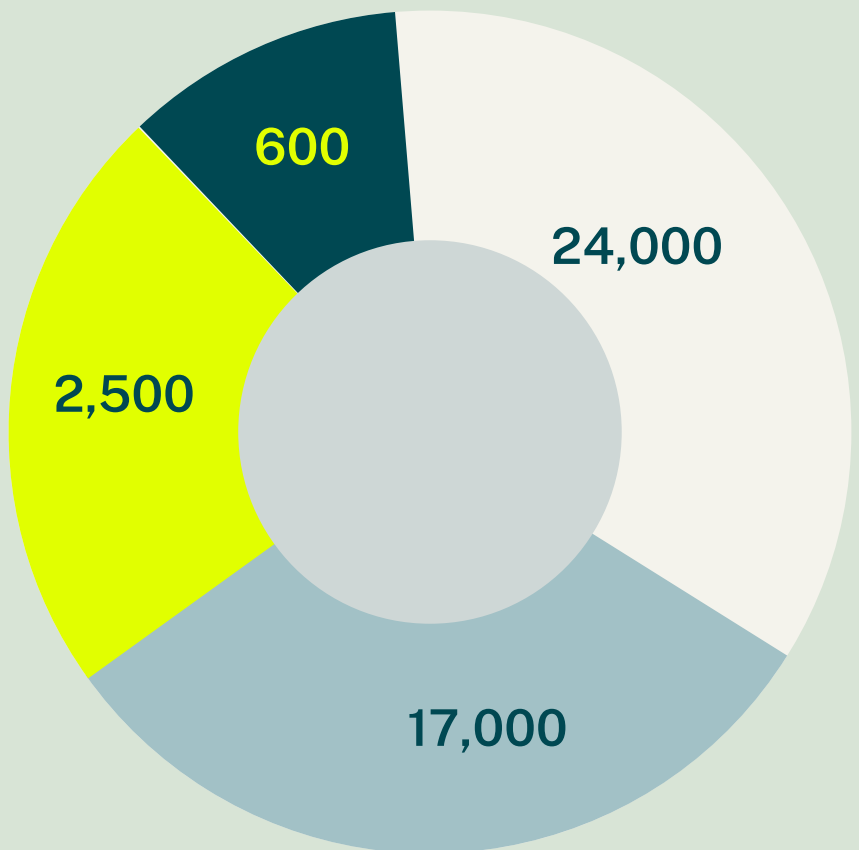
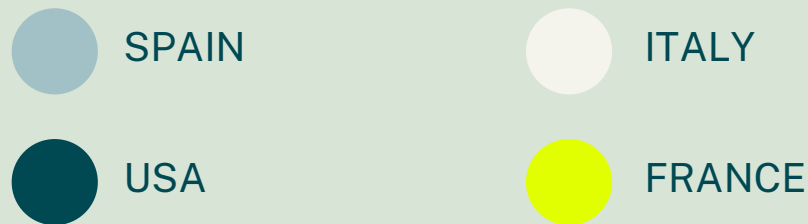
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
- 4Ps - Sustainable model that anchors jobs locally in communities - Empowers and gives people agency, dignity, voice over their wages, rights, and working	- Lack of mainstream awareness and understanding about the model - Challenges in accessing capital to scale - Lack of Capacity & Bandwidth of Workers, leading to burnout & turnover	- Affinity of co-op values with new demographics - e.g. youth, immigrants etc. - Technology as a catalyst to scale and reduce cost - More people are now receptive to alternative models like Worker Co-ops	- Capitalism - Technology (AI) - As a disruptor - Economic Instability (Inflation, tariffs) - Govt Regulations - *LAXITY BY CO-OP SECTOR

Worker Cooperatives by Numbers

Latin America and the Caribbean also have significant number of worker cooperatives.

Argentina, Haiti, Chile, Paraguay, etc.

Source: Grassroots Economic Organizing (GEO)



- ❑ Co-operatives employ ~10% of the world's population
- ❑ 27.2 million work in co-operatives, and 11.1 million are worker-members

Source: CICOPA Report, 2017



Re-imagining New Markets & Horizons..

**‘Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.’ — Arundhati
Roy**



Thank You!

“You can’t remake the world without remaking yourself. Each new era begins within. It is an inward event, with unsuspected possibilities for inner liberation....We could use the new era to clean our eyes, to see the world differently, to see ourselves more clearly. Only free people can make a free world.” - Ben Okri
