

From disparity to dialogue: A conversation with Adenike Adesanmi, Professor, Seneca Business

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At Seneca Polytechnic, we want to ensure that the stories and contributions of Black and racialized individuals are not only recognized but also celebrated in meaningful ways.

To commemorate Black History Month, we spoke with Adenike Adesanmi, Professor, Seneca Business. She's an Applied Research Principal Investigator on a project looking at Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISE) - organizations that support people facing exclusion from the labour market – and the impact they have on Black and racialized communities. Here is what she had to say.

Tell us a bit about yourself and the inspiration behind the Seneca Applied Research project – Impact of Social Enterprises on Racialized Communities.

My background cuts across business, finance and economics. I have in my over eight years in the postsecondary space functioned as a professor, a seasoned researcher and a book editor. One of the areas I consider while joining an institution is the strength of its commitment to research.

I read about Seneca Applied Research and hoped to work with them. I received an email from Cristina Italia, Director, International Training & Development, who asked if I would be interested in working on this project. I'm excited about the research. It's a four-year study that evaluates the impact WISE have on Black and racialized communities.

Black and racialized communities in Canada have faced several challenges over the years. In 2019, it was confirmed that Blacks and other minorities are the lowest-paid employees in Toronto*, which is the world's most diverse city. While some social enterprises in Canada aim to help these communities, it is unclear how effective they are. Recently, I read an interview where someone admitted to not understanding the contributions of these communities to Canada's development.

The government has made efforts to assist Black and racialized groups in the country, including equipping them with skills and knowledge to be well-integrated into the labour market. The [Economic and Social Development Canada \(ESDC\)](#) is the government agency responsible for improving the standard of living and quality of life of all Canadians. They aim to promote an efficient and inclusive labour market, with a focus on workplace equity that

ensures the inclusion of women, Indigenous people, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities. This research project specifically assesses the level of integration of Black and racialized communities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Walk us through the goals of the study and what you hope to achieve.

The project aims to assess the impact WISE have on Black and racialized communities in Canada. This objective will be attained by initially examining the defining features of the enterprises that cater to these communities. Subsequently, the project will assess the demographic attributes of individuals served by the organizations. Finally, it will evaluate improvements in areas such as employment, mental health, overall well-being, and various socio-economic outcomes. The project's outcomes will be disseminated to the WISE, providing them with information about best practices to enhance service delivery.

Could you provide insights into the methodology and approach that will be employed to conduct the study.

The study is designed using a multi-method approach, incorporating qualitative, quantitative and observatory methods. The research team will assess participants' impact through their experience, surveys and interviews.

The six-member team comprises a project manager, two principal investigators and three research assistants. The team recognized the need for a partner on the project and brought in Buy Social Canada, which helps with the recruitment of the social enterprises.

The ESDC has generously provided funding for all aspects of the project, which started in April 2023. During the first year, the Seneca Research Ethics Board was consulted, and WISEs and their clients were recruited. All of this has been nearly completed, and we are now in the data collection process.

What do you hope the outcomes of this research will be?

The research outcome would create a sense of community among the WISE, enabling them to share best practices. It would also trigger discussions within minority communities about the government's efforts towards inclusivity in the labour market. All this would result in more equitable and inclusive opportunities for Black and racialized communities.

As we commemorate Black History Month, how can we ensure that the stories and contributions of Black and racialized individuals are recognized and celebrated all year through?

Organizations need to incorporate diverse voices in all aspects of their operations, including leadership, marketing materials and decision-making processes. Diverse hiring practices

should also be implemented, with efforts made to actively seek out individuals from different backgrounds.

In addition to this, organizations should highlight the stories and achievements of individuals from Black and other racialized communities within their workforce. It is important to establish a culture that values and recognizes the contributions of all individuals, regardless of their background.

An open dialogue about diversity and inclusion should be encouraged within organizations, fostering an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives.

***Further Reading:**

1) Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. (2023, January 18). The Daily – Racialized Canadians are less likely to find as good jobs as their non-racialized and non-Indigenous counterparts early in their careers. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230118/dq230118b-eng.htm>

2) Buy Social Canada. (2023, November 3). Buy Social Canada | Social Enterprise & Social Procurement. <https://www.buysocialcanada.com/>

3) Applied Research - Seneca Polytechnic, Toronto, Canada. (n.d.). <https://www.senecapolytechnic.ca/innovation/research.html>

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