

Fabian Women's Network (FWN) anti-racist action plan: August 2020

A conversation with FWN Black sisters.

The context for the work as raised in the zoom:

- Sisters have felt tired and drained in the last few months. There is a consensus that we need more people involved than Black people to do the anti-racism work required. Many organisations have made statements about change. However, actions speak louder than words.
- Black women retelling their stories is exhausting. Unconscious bias and stereotype of Black women should not be perpetuated in FWN and Fabian publications.
- Black people have frequently told their stories. Reviews on race relations have been commissioned. These have resulted in limited change. It is a perpetual circle and it's tiring.
- Have policy driven conversations about societal institutions and structures that need to be destroyed. Progressive policy proposals about wealth distributions in the UK.

The following action plan was formally agreed by the FWN exec at their meeting on 26 July 2020. It comprises mostly of actions raised by the Black sisters zoom and with a few additional suggestions from executive members. At this meeting we also formally adopted the Fabian Society statement on their anti-racist work: this action plan should be read in conjunction with that, a copy of it is attached to the end of this document.

This document is a living, working affirmation and forms the root to all we do to ensure that our work meets the values and aspirations of this action plan.

Introductory remarks

FWN strives to be an anti-racist, intersectional feminist organisation epitomising the values of sisterhood, solidarity and service. This is at the heart of all our work. We recognise that women do not face the same homogenised barriers to participation in public life and that many sisters are not just confronting patriarchy but other forms of systemic oppression too. Our anti-racist work is ongoing and evolving. Addressing Islamophobia and anti-semitism are within its scope.

FWN ACTIONS

Immediate actions arising:

1. Unconscious bias and stereotypes of Black women should not be perpetuated in FWN and Fabian publications [Action to achieve this – anti-racism training of exec and six monthly audit of outputs/ publications.]
2. Highlighting Black experiences in this country is important. It is very different from the BAME experience. FWN policy work going forward need to focus more on the Black experience.
3. The anti- racism work that emerges from Black people telling their stories needs to be completed by allies. Specifically, for FWN the anti-racism work needs to be conducted by the whole FWN Exec.
 - ACTION TAKEN: FWN exec formally agreed this.
4. The Fabian Society and FWN needs to produce a strong statement of intent in relation to anti-racism work.
 - ACTION TAKEN: FWN's exec committee have formally adopted the Fabian Society's statement – <https://fabians.org.uk/black-lives-matter-statement-from-the-fabian-society/>
5. Black sisters to directly feed into the Fabian Society's Race Task Force. Ensuring that the task force specifically addresses the issues faced by black women. The task force must have a timeline for how long it will run for and what will be achieved in that time.
 - ACTION TAKEN: two Black sisters from FWN Exec are on the task force.

6. Anti- Racism work should be a standing item on the agenda for future FWN and other sisterhood organisations. It should not just be an agenda item for this moment.
 - ACTION TAKEN: anti-racist work now a standing agenda item.
7. FWN to run quick win campaigns such as “No all White panels” Essentially, panel events going forward should not consist of just White speakers. This will give Black women the opportunity to speak more. It will bring forward new expertise and voices. [Note – the Fabians are not a campaigning organisation.]
 - ACTION TAKEN: FWN exec committee formally agreed to have no all-White panels.
8. Publication of more black female writers across the Fabian written media. [Action to achieve this – audit as per point 1 above].

In the next three months (by end of October):

9. Second zoom for all sisters on anti-racist work to be held [FWN exec to organise].
10. Hold FWN training sessions for mentees/members exploring our values of sisterhood, solidarity and service and what this means in the context of anti-racism [FWN exec to organise].
11. Work with external academic to audit Fabian Women’s network and work to produce a report on where we are on anti-racism as an organisation, identifying both good practice and areas for change. [FWN exec pursuing conversations on this].
12. Increasing the exposure of the FWN Mentoring programme to more Black women. Given that there is no level playing field, FWN will proactively ring-fence a set number of places on the mentoring scheme specifically for Black women, who are hugely under-represented.
 - ACTION TAKEN: FWN exec agreed to principle. Need to make recommendation to FWN Mentoring advisory group who handle mentoring scheme recruitment. The number of places reserved will be agreed, partly by analysing available data from previous applicants and cohorts.
13. Black sisters within FWN also need to be spread the word about FWN and the training programme to their wider communities.

In the next six months (by the end of January):

14. FWN to create a training programme specifically for Black sisters, that considers the experiences of Black women.

Policy

During the formulation of any policy ideas, there must be a consideration of how that policy impacts the Black community. Shadow Labour ministers need to make these considerations as well when formulating policies. Further policy areas that FWN and the Fabian Society should focus on:

- Black women and childbirth (inequality and death rates)
- Black children in the judicial system and adultification of black children.
- Black women’s political participation.

Fabian Society actions:

- The Fabian Society should create policy papers and pamphlets on issues impacting Black lives. For example, prison systems, reparations, and the UK’s colonial past.
- The next Fabian publications should be dedicated to the realities of Black lives in the UK today.
- Black sisters to directly feed into the Fabian Society’s Race Task Force. Ensuring that the task force specifically addresses the issues faced by Black women. The task force must have a timeline for how long it will run for and what will be achieved in that time.
- Anti-Racism training for Fabian members and staff.
- Publication of more Black female writers across the Fabian written media.

Appendix 1: Fabian Society statement, also adopted by FWN

“The Fabian Society has a strong and enduring commitment to race equality but we recognise that we do not always live up to our values and we strive to do better.

We abhor the deep-rooted racism and inequality experienced by Black people in the UK and around the world. We know that the Fabian Society is not immune to the forces that perpetuate structural inequality and racial prejudice.

There is more we need to do to make the Fabian Society a welcoming and inclusive network for Black members and employees; and to support the advancement of Black people in politics and society. The executive committee and management team commit to working with our Black members to achieve measurable change over the next 12 months.

As an organisation founded in the nineteenth century we also recognise that the racist prejudices, opinions and actions of many of our past members were not in keeping with the society’s commitment to equality for all, either then or now. We will reflect this in the way we commemorate our history.”