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CANDIDATE STATEMENT

I visited Puerto Rico with the NCBA CLUSA Board of Directors a few weeks ago. The trip aimed to meet coffee producers who were part of a larger cooperative association called *La Liga de Cooperativas de Puerto Rico*. I was also curious about how cooperatives in a U.S. commonwealth are similar or different from co-ops in the United States and what Cooperators of Color are doing to build an inclusive economy. With the assistance of NCBA CLUSA staff, the co-ops received a multi-million dollar grant intended to help farmers develop sustainable coffee production businesses. The farmer cooperatives have four things in place:

1. *Cooperativism* - They participated in the cooperative to do what they could do individually.
2. *Resources* - They received a \$15 million grant and expertise in growing the proper coffee bean. The variety of the coffee trees was essential as a way to manage the impact of climate change.
3. *Address Climate Change* - The Island is hotter and dryer. Coffee berries burn in the intense heat. The berries needed shade to grow in the heat and protection from rainstorms.
4. *Address Barriers to Inclusion* - The farmers explained that they faced some barriers from government agencies whose forms were usually in English. Sometimes, the applications are in Spanish, but the guidelines and reporting matrix are all in English. These are some barriers people face to the cooperative inclusive economy.

I also noticed that the cooperatives in Puerto Rico had an origin story not anchored in the European Rochdale origin story. Their story centered Puerto Rico's rich post-colonial history and identity. I felt very proud to learn from these cooperators and even more proud to know that the staff and board of NCBA CLUSA supported this work without reservation. It is clear that the mandate of NCBA CLUSA is to bring more cooperators to the table like *La Liga de Cooperativas de Puerto Rico* has done on the Island. I was inspired to apply those lessons to my cooperative board work.

For the NCBA CLUSA board to apply these four lessons, the board must identify the barriers to including cooperatives in the inclusive economy. NCBA CLUSA must tell a story of inclusion. As a member of the NCBA CLUSA board, I will tell stories of inclusion and lift issues of equity and inclusion in cooperatives in my hometown of Minneapolis, nationally with my cooperative clients, and internationally. Issues of inclusion of marginalized identities (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) will always need attention. Yet, the NCBA CLUSA board can do more to address barriers to an inclusive, cooperative economy. NCBA CLUSA must be in the business of removing barriers to cooperation like the ones experienced by the Puerto Rico Farmers Co-op. During our trip, someone said that the obstacles—laws, rules and

regulations—keep people out of cooperatives as much as unconscious bias. As a board member of NCBA CLUSA, my commitment is to support the expansion of the cooperative business model and eliminate all barriers that prevent access to the inclusive economy for historically marginalized people.