

Embedding Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Global development organisations have committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to attain a 'more sustainable future for all'. Central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs is the pledge to leave no one behind, ensuring inclusiveness and equity are integral to achieving the goals. Aligning development co-operation commitments with the Paris Agreement on addressing the global climate emergency shifts our world towards a more sustainable and resilient path, inclusive of all communities where the voices of marginalised groups are heard and included in policies and strategies.

Development assistance has undoubtedly made a difference in supporting countries to make progress towards the SDGs and address the global climate emergency. Embedding diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) is central to driving this transformative change. A key aspect of DE&I is ensuring that marginalised communities themselves own the development agenda and define their needs and aspirations for progress. This approach moves the focus away from representation and global narratives or priorities to shape international development to reflect the groups' perspective.

Many organisations have begun to reflect on how they develop their strategies, who leads them, where that leadership is based, and how they can create and instil a culture of inclusion and respect backed by processes that support it. This can involve revised organisational strategies, policies and practices, ongoing DE&I efforts, and reflections on and changes to long-established ways of working.

SRI Executive is a long-time partner to leading global development organisations and recognises the considerations and ongoing transformation required to redesign a more equitable and inclusive future for the sector.

Examining Theories of Change and the assumptions that underlie them

Removing barriers and ensuring that marginalised groups play a role in setting the aspirations and agenda that drives impact begins with organisations independently assessing and reviewing their theories of change and strategies through the lenses of intersectionality, anti-colonialism and anti-racism.

Doing so begins fundamentally with a deep reflection to realise what needs to change and how. Organisations can examine their understanding of the development issues they prioritise, their levers of change, and why they have these understandings. Who is setting the agenda? Whose voices are included, and is everybody truly being heard?

SRI Executive has experience working with organisations to revise and refresh their Theories of Change and develop transformative Strategic Frameworks through a highly participatory and values-based approach that builds a culture of inclusion.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion within recruitment

An initial step in shifting the balance of power in the global development sector is to ensure people from diverse backgrounds are represented across an organisation and, critically, within leadership teams.

As a move in the right direction, organisations are examining DE&I in several ways. One is to re-assess their recruitment processes, focusing on key requirements for open positions and the analysis behind the "fit" for a role. Many organisations are broadening their horizons to search for talent from less traditional career pathways. They are also elevating the role of regional functions and relocating critical leadership and oversight positions physically closer to the groups with whom they work. Doing so provides a pipeline of talent that recognises these groups' needs and facilitates decision-making among people who are part of the marginalised community.

In SRI Executive's more than twenty years placing exceptional leaders within global development, we have seen first-hand the value leaders with diverse lived experiences can bring. We are innovative in finding alternative ways to connect with and recruit strong candidates. Furthermore, we work with organisations to build effective leadership teams that mirror the behaviours and culture they wish to see.

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Assessing ways of working and organisational culture

Organisations are increasingly examining their internal cultures and ways of working, recognising there are systemic and normative barriers to participation for staff members from diverse backgrounds. There are several ways by which organisations can further develop an inclusive and equitable culture, and steps that management can take to ensure that their workplace is diverse.

The initial phase of this work is to undertake an organisational culture assessment from a DE&I perspective, the findings of which can lead to the development of a shared vision for a more inclusive organisational culture and an agreed roadmap to get there.

An organisation's leadership is primarily responsible for ensuring that the shared vision and values are understood, respected, and upheld by all staff and volunteers. It is critical for leaders in positions of power to recognise that bias-conscious or unconscious- impacts organisational decision-making. It influences how staff are treated in the implementation of policies such as career advancement or performance management. Furthermore, when people in management positions model and mirror healthy communication norms and behaviours, they shape an inclusive organisational culture.

SRI Executive supports organisations through training and coaching for senior management to become more aware of their own biases and understand alternative communication norms and behaviours that create safe spaces for discussing ideas or feedback. We work with organisations to create incentives and establish organisational buy-in to these behaviours through workshops and include them as competencies in performance reviews for leadership and management. SRI Executive also works with organisations to install functions or positions that are solely responsible for DE&I to provide an objective lens to ensure that these values are upheld across all organisational processes.

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