

INTEGRITY ACTION'S GENDER AND SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH



How we help build a just and equitable world

April 2021

Integrity Action's vision is for a just and equitable world, where **all** citizens can – and do – successfully demand integrity from the institutions they rely on.

Since 2016, we committed to mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion across the organisation and in all programmes, and we achieved many good results: [our vision, mission, values and operating principles](#), together with [our organisational Theory of Change](#), have incorporated equality and inclusion; our staff and partners have taken on board lessons; all our programmes consider inequalities and intentionally address them; our safeguarding policy and mechanisms have been upgraded; our technology is becoming increasingly inclusive; and discourse and practice within the organisation have changed for the better.

But we know we can and need to do much more.

Growing inequalities across the world and global events such as safeguarding scandals, Black Lives Matter protests, the #CharitySoWhite movement, and the COVID-19 pandemic have taken the world and our sector by storm and highlighted structural issues within it. At this historic juncture, we believe we all need to lay the groundwork for a major re-shape. In the light of this, Integrity Action's approach to gender equality and social inclusion must be reframed too.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR?

1. Justice rather than equality

The progress and gains we have made have helped us understand that if we are to make a meaningful difference, we need to tackle the root causes of inequalities and the infrastructure that has allowed them to thrive in the communities we work for, in our organisation, and in our own sector, and to work towards a **systemic** redistribution of power, opportunities, and access for all people through the dismantling of harmful structures. **This, for us, will mean working towards gender and social justice.**

2. Inequalities are interrelated

Gender inequality cannot be tackled as a standalone issue. Nor can climate, racial, economic, social, and geographical inequality. All forms of discrimination and exclusion are

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Martin Luther King



interconnected. It is a fact that when a natural disaster or a pandemic strikes, it will hit the poorest worst. And among the poorest, women and girls will be affected the most. Women with disabilities are often less likely to reap the benefits of a formal education than disabled men, being marginalised not only by their disability but also by their gender. Gender justice cannot be achieved without addressing other forms of exclusion, bigotry, and oppression, such as racism or ableism. It is therefore crucial to always **use intersectional lenses** when designing, delivering, and evaluating initiatives, as well as when we relate with each other, our partners, and the people that we are trying to serve.

3. No organisation is an island

Integrity Action's work has inspired some partner organisations to do better for themselves. On the other hand, we have been inspired by the work of other organisations too. This domino effect, albeit small, suggests that while working on ourselves we need to showcase our success - and our failures - among our peers, in order to inspire change in others, as well as to keep learning from one another. We are witnessing a momentum among like-minded organisations and donors who are trying to change attitudes and practice within our sector, from programming to funding, people's mindsets, and power relationships. **We can - and should - contribute with our experience and ideas** to create critical mass and make a long-lasting and systemic change.

4. Doing good... better

While the global development sector is paying more attention than ever before to the importance of decolonisation, it is simply not enough. Genuine, substantive change in how the sector operates, and who holds the power, has failed to materialise. Hegemonic understandings of development and who it should serve continue to dominate. Racist, paternalistic and patriarchal attitudes do not just belong to a few "bad apples" in the sector - they are "baked in" to how the sector works and affect a diverse range of outcomes including funding decisions, career progression and programme design. All this means that, even if one person has good intentions, they are severely limited by the system they work in.

This tends to translate into practices that do not put the needs of the people that the sector wishes to serve at the centre. For instance, organisations in the countries that traditionally fund aid interventions are overrepresented in conferences, funding applications, and awards; agendas and priorities are often dictated by headquarters and funders; resources and decision-making power tend to condense in funder countries; experiences and leadership of organisations in the countries where development assistance is delivered are often ignored; voices that raise these issues are often sidelined or dismissed. Integrity Action has a duty to contribute to **re-imagining our sector** and to once for all ending those practices that do not put the needs of the people we are trying to serve first.

5. When less is more

The COVID-19 pandemic has - among other things - revolutionized the way we work. Integrity Action, like many others, had to adapt to this new normal by coming up with quick solutions. We could not visit our projects and partners, nor could we provide face-to-face training. After months of working from home, we decided to give up our office and have our staff working from home for the foreseeable future. The big winner of this has been - undoubtedly - the environment. We are now keen to not go back to business as usual, and to build on this positive outcome by **re-thinking our ways of working to contribute to climate justice**.

WHAT IS OUR APPROACH?

We will strive to be **transformational, both in our organisation, programming and sector.** Transformational for us means proactively seeking structural change that aims at a more equitable, representative, and accountable world. It means imagining new ways of working that are fairer to the world and the people who live in it. It means not returning to business as usual if business as usual is unjust. It means that we will not keep quiet and won't be sitting on the learning that we gather along the way.

IN OUR PROGRAMMES. We see development as a global challenge, not something that organisations located in the countries that traditionally fund aid interventions deliver to countries that most often receive development assistance. We will work with partners to support locally-led agendas and solutions. We will listen to what our monitors, partners and the communities we work for have to say, act on their recommendations and continuously improve our initiatives. We will step aside if we are not adding value or if local actors can deliver the same or greater value.

IN OUR ORGANISATION. We know that injustice, discrimination and inequalities need to be fought from within. We will work as a team to increase diversity among staff and trustees, and to eliminate any injustice we identify in our systems and practices.

IN OUR SECTOR. We are part of a movement that wants to re-imagine the global development sector. Within this movement we are committed to decolonise the sector and to truly and practically push it to relinquish power and resources. Some mechanisms, like the sector's funding architecture, might take longer to change than others; but we will strive to shift the power that we hold towards the communities we work for and the civil society organisations where our projects are located. We will make space for more collaborative fora where experts and partners from the places where our projects are located can lead the conversation.

To achieve all this, we will first and foremost keep educating ourselves on matters of inequalities, injustice, power and privilege. We need to examine and be aware of our own privilege and how to use it to steer the sector in the right direction. We are ready to have and facilitate difficult and uncomfortable conversations. Every new thing that we learn on the way will be used to convince others that a systemic change is needed.

We are doing this not for the optics or for the organisation's own benefit. We are doing it because it is the right thing to do. We therefore commit to not occupying space unnecessarily or making performative acts.

We will allocate the resources needed to deliver on our promises because we believe that they are pivotal to our existence and not just something we wish to have.

To do all of the above we will be taking risks, like trying approaches that have never been trialled before, and we will hold ourselves and others accountable to the promises made.

WHAT DO WE PROMISE TO DELIVER?

A. PROGRAMMING

1. Designing and delivering initiatives where **participation of and accountability to local voices** and above all the most marginalised people in society are at the core. Every new programme will be measured against Integrity Action's Gender and Social Responsive Assessment Scale to guide us to do better each time.
2. Working with partners to ensure that we **'do no harm'** by mitigating the risks related to shifting the power towards the most marginalised.
3. **Sharing evidence and learning** with – and asking for critique from – the institutions, the individuals and the communities we consult during data collection.
4. Recognising the value **of applicants based in or close to the countries where our work takes place** when contracting evaluators, researchers, and other consultants, with the aim of both reducing emissions and shifting the power, in line with Integrity Action's tool for scoring proposals.
5. Setting a threshold and **measuring the carbon footprint** for international flights in each new initiative.
6. Applying **participatory, responsible, appropriate and ethical** principles and practices to our **evaluations and research** projects, as set in Integrity Action's approach to evidence and impact as well as Integrity Action's quality evidence criteria.
7. Ensuring that **data is collected and analysed following** the [OHCHR Principles](#) of participation, self-identification, transparency, privacy and accountability, and undergo screening to identify and correct equity issues and weaknesses in collection, analysis, interpretation and communication.
8. Continuing to improve the **accessibility and inclusivity of the tech tools** used in our initiatives.

B. ORGANISATION

1. Training staff and Trustees on **unconscious bias, positionality and privilege, and concepts of justice**.
2. Designing a **fairer hiring process** to increase staff and Trustee diversity.
3. Implementing the recommendations around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion from the [Charity Governance Code](#).
4. **Collecting data** on staff demographics and wellbeing, and yearly analyses on pay gaps.
5. Working with staff to ensure **good work-life balance**.
6. Continuing to conduct inductions for new staff and Trustees, and refresher training for current staff and Trustees on **safeguarding principles and practice**, as well as ensuring that our partners' safeguarding measures are adequate and fit for purpose.
7. **Recruiting new Trustees from different geographies**, and including from countries where our projects are based.
8. Continuing to be **mindful of the resources we use**, for example by encouraging recycling, discouraging waste, and minimising paper use at home or in the office.



9. **Considering the environmental and wellbeing impact of working from home vs working from an office** when the circumstances allow IA to return to office-based work safely.

C. SECTOR

1. **Co-creating all new initiatives with our partners, wherever they are based, whatever their size.** We will not relegate our partners to the role of mere implementers of what we think would work. If invited to take part in existing programmes, we will ensure that our approach to gender and social justice fits into the initiative and, if not, we will renegotiate our engagement.
2. Taking part in initiatives aimed at shifting the power towards the communities we work for, and **addressing harmful practices and attitudes** that prevent a true power shift within the sector.
3. Ensuring any events we hold or speak at have a **balanced gender representation**, and voices that have first-hand experience of the issues being discussed, and that we speak up/push back if this is not the case.
4. Ensuring that **our communications are just, ethical, inclusive and respectful** of the communities we work with.
5. Using our privilege to **increase our partners' visibility** by inviting them to participate in panels and other opportunities to promote their work.
6. Sharing whatever we learn around gender and social justice with peer organisations and continuing to **engage with like-minded organisations** in initiatives aimed at re-imagining a better, fairer, and more effective global development sector.

TIMELINE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Most of these promises are not one-off deliverables; they need to be embedded in Integrity Action's everyday practice. We believe that urgency has to be balanced by actions that are well thought out and internalised by everyone, otherwise long-lasting and transformative change will not be possible. For this reason, we have not put a timeline on our promises. We will, however, be accountable by publicly reporting our achievements, lessons learnt and adaptations every year.

Literature

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