



Power with

Integrity Action's journey to gender, climate, and social justice



Power with is shared power that grows out of collaboration and is built on respect, solidarity, and collaborative decision making. Rather than domination and control, power with leads to collective action.

Introduction

Integrity Action builds approaches to accountability around citizens. They are different to other monitoring-based accountability approaches because it is not professionals who do the monitoring, it is the regular and often most underserved citizens. We call this 'citizen-centred accountability'.

Our approaches centre around the frequently unheard voice of citizens and support them to get quality projects and services for their communities. Due to the way current systems and processes are set up, as well as societal norms and imbalance of power, citizens often are not, or do not feel able to be, involved in the design and delivery of the services they are supposed to benefit from. They are the end-users, yet their opinions and feedback are left unsaid or ignored by institutions. In other words, **citizens don't have enough power to hold institutions and duty-bearers to account**. This is even more the case for women and girls and other historically underserved groups, as often services are not responsive to their needs and priorities.

Power, and in particular the lack of it, is at the basis of injustice and inequalities around the world. Integrity Action believes that sharing power between institutions and citizens is crucial to [building trust](#). More than that, we believe that in order to design transformative responses to citizens' accountability we need to address injustice, inequality and lack of power whenever we encounter it.

We use the term 'citizen' whilst recognising that not everybody holds legal citizenship of the place in which they live. Our use of the term refers to the role that everybody is equally entitled to play as rights-holding members of the human family (as set out in international human rights law), which may sometimes be in contrast to other roles they hold in their social, political, civil, or economic lives and employment

We acknowledge that in the process of sharing power, our approach requires citizens to contribute their time and efforts to monitor projects and services to ensure that these are delivered to a standard that they are entitled to in the first place.

We also understand that the very same people who are often underserved and overlooked may be those who most lack the time, the mental space, and the resources to be involved in monitoring on a voluntary basis.

Our experience with thousands of monitors has taught us that citizens who have used the approach appreciate its value and are willing to go above and beyond. We regularly reflect with citizen monitors to find the most equitable and sustainable.

Why a Gender, Climate, and Social Justice approach for Integrity Action?

We have tackled inequality in our programmes since 2018, when we published our first Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy. Since then, we have learned and done a lot: our monitors are diverse and represent the voice and needs of all segments in their communities; women monitors, young monitors, and monitors with disabilities have increased their standing in their communities and taken leadership roles in mediating between communities and duty bearers; services and infrastructure monitored are assessed based on their accessibility and inclusivity. **But we know it's not enough.** New challenges and complexities in a highly interconnected world such as climate breakdown, rising insecurity and a decrease in public trust, keep pushing us to learn and do more. Given our work, learning, and capacity, we are focusing our energies on understanding and tackling three distinct but very much overlapping aspects of inequality: gender inequality and social exclusion, power differentials in international development, and climate and environment breakdown.

We believe that these are the most urgent and extensive dimensions of injustice of our times. Why?

- **Gender inequality and social exclusion.** Gender inequality remains the overwhelming injustice of our times. The latest available data on SDG 5 show that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. COVID-19 and the backlash against women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are further diminishing the outlook for gender equality. Violence against women remains high; global health, climate, and humanitarian crises have further increased risks of violence, with women feeling more unsafe than they did before the pandemic. Women's representation in positions of power and decision-making remains below parity. Less than half of data required to track progress on SDG 5 are currently available, rendering women and girls effectively invisible¹.

We recognise that gender inequality is deeply impacted by and connected to other forms of inequality and exclusion, such as racial, queer, migration, disability, age, economic inequality, and so much more. So, when we speak about and act for gender justice we also include those groups and individuals that have historically faced exclusion, particularly people with disabilities, young and old people, queer people, racialised communities, and religious minorities. **In our work, gender inequality and social exclusion translate into the inability of women, girls and other historically underserved groups to access services and projects designed to benefit them, as well as to have their voice and instances listened to and acted upon by those responsible of delivering those services.**

- **Power differentials in international development.** We recognise the unbalanced power, resource distribution, and access to opportunities, between organisations based

¹ [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022 | UN Women Data Hub](#)

in the so-called 'Global North' and those in the so called 'Global South', and how these are a legacy of colonialism. Attempts in the past to 'localise' development and 'shift the power' have failed to bring about systemic change and to tackle deeply rooted attitude and practices in the sector shaped by concepts of white supremacy and saviourism, racism, paternalism and patriarchy. Despite the fact that '*discussions about unequal power dynamics in the international aid system have entered the mainstream*'² there is a risk that this too remains another missed opportunity to re-imagine a sector in which partners work in cooperation and solidarity to tackle global issues. Because our vision is for a just and equitable world, where citizens are empowered and integrity is central to vibrant societies, we see it as our duty to contributing to build a **just and equitable international development sector**.

- With **climate and environment breakdown** we mean the harmful changes in the global weather and the environment, as a result of human activity increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and harming nature and its resources. Climate and environmental breakdown have a disproportionate impact on people and communities who are already vulnerable and largely excluded from the rewards of global economic activity. These communities have the least responsibility for human-caused climate breakdown and the least resources to adapt to rising temperatures.

The climate breakdown is not "gender neutral" either. Women and girls experience the greatest impacts of climate change, which amplifies existing gender inequalities and poses unique threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety. They are also largely under-represented in institutions and decision making on climate adaptation/mitigation, governance and resource management. Risks are more acute for indigenous and Afro-descendent women and girls, older women, LGBTIQ+ people, women and girls with disabilities, migrant women, and those living in rural, remote, conflict and disaster-prone areas³. Building on these facts, climate breakdown is an accelerator of existing inequalities and conflicts⁴.

- Finally, we opted for the word **justice**, rather than *equality* or *inclusion*, as we believe it conveys a more powerful message: inequalities are driven by a solid infrastructure made of institutions, laws, policies, norms, attitudes and values. To tackle them, one cannot just focus on promoting opportunities for individual (or organisational) self-improvement, but rather on dismantling harmful structures that have allowed inequalities to thrive, and work towards rebalancing power, opportunities, and access among the people (and the organisations) who have been systematically excluded.

The main goal of this approach is to contribute to and accelerate our mission to help build societies in which **all** citizens can – and do – successfully demand integrity from the institutions they rely on, societies in which **power is shared**.

² [PD-Decolonising-Aid Second-Edition.pdf \(peacedirect.org\)](#) Page 4

³ [Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

⁴ See, for example, [Conciliation Resources Report on gender, cultural identity, conflict and climate change: understanding the relationships](#).

What principles underpin our actions?

These are the three general principles which will frame our actions:

- **Partnerships based on equal terms, trust, humility, respect, and reciprocity**⁵. Our partners are among our most precious resources. We refuse transactional partnerships, and we strive to create longstanding relationships which are detached from funding or programme cycles. It takes a long time to build these types of partnerships and to gain our partners trust and confidence in us, but we believe it is worth it. We take our partnerships seriously and do our utmost to ensure that it is on equal basis.
- **Feminist leadership**. Feminist leadership is not just about women playing leadership roles—it is about leading differently, with feminist values, to advance social justice for all. We endorse the statement that '[feminist leadership must be strong, intersectional, inclusive, and amplify the voices of structurally excluded people](#)'. In practical terms, this means creating a working environment where empathy, physical and emotional wellbeing, and diversity are encouraged and celebrated, power is shared and used responsibly, decisions are taken as much as possible in consultation, leaders are self-aware and accountable for their actions, and show courage as well as vulnerabilities, and zero-tolerance towards abuse, thus modelling behaviour⁶.
- **Being mindful of our own positionality**. We are witnessing an incredible momentum in the global development sector to shift the power from international organisations in the so called 'Global North' to 'local communities'. As a UK-based organisation, we recognise that we are part of a structure that needs reforming, and we want to take responsibility in being part of the solution. We understand the privileged position that we hold in the sector, including (but not limited to) better access to funders and resources, more visibility, ability to travel, to speak the dominant working language, and to navigate the current system. We will use this advantage to amplify our partners' voice and advance their position, particularly vis-a-vis funders. We will also be aware of how privileges can make other people and partners disempowered and deliberately change our practices and behaviours to share power. We will make mistakes on the way; when we do, we will be taking responsibility and address them. We will keep pushing ourselves to do more.

⁵ We have taken onboard recommendations from consultations held by Peace Direct with over 200 participants from 70 countries and across the humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors. To know more, please read [Peace-Direct-Transforming-Partnerships-Report-English.pdf \(peacedirect.org\)](#)

⁶ We have been inspired by the [10 principles of feminist leadership](#) as devised by Action Aid International.

Where will we apply justice lenses?

Whilst we commit to withhold the principles of justice as outlined in this document, we also recognise that our resources are limited. We want nonetheless to make a realistic contribution and have therefore devised attainable actions.

Our initiatives

We want to design and deliver transformative programming, where inequalities and injustices are analysed, and solutions are factored in within the entire programme cycle and beyond.

Action 1. Our own [Gender, Climate, and Social Justice Responsiveness Scale](#) will inform us whether our initiatives are unequal, blind, sensitive or transformative. A total of 17 indicators will look, among other things, whether gender, social and climate justice are a deliberate project objective, to what degree programme design is informed by the views of the people who are benefitting from it (and among those, by women and groups historically underserved), whether an environmental assessment was carried out, the diversity of programme staff, accessibility of safeguarding mechanisms, presence of feedback loops. We will use this scale to assess any initiative we are part of, whether led by us or we are partners in a consortium.

Action 2. By recruiting women, girls and historically underserved groups as citizen monitors, we will attempt to challenge discriminatory norms and practices and shift power within their own context.

Action 3. We will have a growing focus on climate and environment, by developing a new stream of work that makes space for citizens to ensure that climate funds are spent economically, efficiently, effectively and achieve equity. We recognise that the people we work with are frequently the most disadvantaged by climate change; we therefore commit to supporting women, girls, and groups most vulnerable to climate breakdown to have a say in climate mitigation and adaptation activities.

Our organisation

We know that injustice, discrimination and inequalities affect workplaces in our sector. We will work to eliminate any injustice we identify in our systems and practices.

Action 4. We will work towards increasing diversity amongst staff, the executive team and trustees and be publicly accountable on the actions we have taken and the results. We will review our recruitment practices and look at the most appropriate publicly available tools to track diversity, representation, and equality in the workplace.

Action 5. We will adopt a list of feminist leadership principles and measure whether staff wellbeing and satisfaction are positively affected by adopting those principles.

Action 6. We will review all our systems, processes, policies and ways of working, to ensure that they are aligned to our commitment to justice. All staff will have individual objectives aimed at promoting justice as part of their annual appraisals.

Our sector

We welcome the recent attempts to 'localise' international development while maintaining caution not to contribute to make this effort a performative exercise. We are committed to transforming our sector and leading by example, by relinquishing our power and resources in favour of the civil society organisations we partner with.

Action 7. Through our Partners Survey, we will listen to what our partners and the communities we work with have to say, act on their recommendations and continuously improve our initiatives. Results of the survey will be publicly shared annually.

Action 8. We commit to partner with organisations which share our values around gender, social and climate justice, whether they are at the beginning of their journey to improve practice or ahead of us. In both cases, we will learn from each other and together, we will find ways to transform power relations towards greater equity. We also commit to increase our partnership with organisations, movements and groups led by women and historically marginalised groups, and work with them in solidarity to support locally-led agendas and solutions.

Action 9. We will lead by example to practically contribute to transforming our sector for the better. We will share the learning we gather and the tools we develop. In global platforms, such as events and written materials, we will make space for partners, elevate their voices, and work in solidarity with them.

How will YOU be able to check how we are doing?

A list of 9 focused actions and how they will be tracked can be found below:

No.	Area	Theme	Action	Accountable	FY'24	FY'25	FY'26	FY'27	Where is the evidence?
1	Programmes	G ⁷ , C, GD	Assess all initiatives against Integrity Action's Gender, Climate, Social Justice Responsiveness Scale	Head of Ops	✓	✓	✓	✓	Annual Report and IA website
2	Programmes	G	Ensure that 50% of citizen monitors are women and that we collect case studies on monitors' journey from historically underserved communities	Head of Ops	✓	✓	✓	✓	Annual Report
3	Programmes	C	Establish a green accountability programme where citizen-centred accountability amplifies all citizens' voice in climate adaptation and mitigation	Head of Progr Devt		✓			Annual Report and IA website
4	Organisation	G, GD	Increase diversity amongst staff, the executive team, and trustees	CEO/Chair of the Board		✓	✓	✓	Annual Report and IA website
5	Organisation	G, GD,	Deploy and publish results of a staff survey which uses feminist leadership principles to measure staff wellbeing and satisfaction with IA workplace	CEO		✓	✓	✓	Annual Report
6	Organisation	G, GD	Upgrade policies, processes and ways of working in line with our position on justice. Revise at least 1 policy/process each year.	Head of Ops		✓	✓	✓	Annual Report
7	Sector	GD	Deploy a partner survey to assess trust and satisfaction levels among partners	Head of Ops		✓	✓	✓	Annual Report
8	Sector	GD,G	Increase the number partners who have a commitment to Gender, Social, Climate Justice and/or who are led by women and/or historically marginalised groups	Head of Ops		✓	✓	✓	Annual Report
9	Sector	GD	Maintain our leadership position in the sector on topics related to Gender, Social and Climate Justice	Head of Ops	✓	✓	✓	✓	Annual Report

⁷ Themes: G=Gender, C=Climate, GD=Global Development

What does success look like?

By the end of FY2027:

All of our programmes will be scoring **Sensitive** or **Transformative** in our Gender, Climate, Social Justice Responsiveness Scale. This will translate into:

- ✓ citizen monitors being diverse, with **50%** of them being women;
- ✓ having evidence that the monitoring journey increases self-confidence and standing in the community of women monitors and monitors coming from underserved groups and that they were able to have their voice listened to by duty bearers;
- ✓ establishing a green accountability initiative where citizens – including women and those coming from underserved groups – will have a voice on how climate funding and promises are delivered.

Our staff and trustees will be diverse and equal and will be able to bring their true selves into the organisation. Our position on justice will be reflected in our policies, processes, structures, and ways of working. This will have a positive impact on the way we deliver our programmes, share decision-making, position in the sector, interact with our partners and project participants, **lead by example**.

The Sector will recognise our name as thought and practice leader in the efforts to shift power to the communities where our initiatives are based. Organisations see value and therefore seek our partnership, as it is based on **trust, respect and solidarity**.



How will we be accountable and to whom?

We will publicly report on the status of the 9 actions in our annual reports and have a general review at the beginning of each financial year to ensure that we keep pushing ourselves. This way, anybody can hold us accountable on our promises.

Integrity Action believes that we are ultimately accountable to the communities we work with. However, we also believe that the civil society organisations with which we partner are the priority group to whom to demonstrate accountability. They represent the interests and needs of the communities we work with in our initiatives. We will strive to choose the most suited partners and work with them in solidarity to devise mutual accountability systems and deliver transformative initiatives, but we will remain one step behind them when it comes to engaging communities directly. Always mindful of our positionality as a UK-based organisation, we will share responsibility with our partners around safeguarding, safe programming, and **accountability to communities first and donors next**, keeping being supportive and critical of each other when needed. We believe that this is how we can walk the walk in a truly reinvented global development sector.



GET IN TOUCH. We welcome any feedback or comments on this approach. Please reach out to us by emailing info@integrityaction.org