Racism, power and truth: Experiences of people of colour in development

"For racism should always be measured by the victim and not defined by the perpetrators with all their good intentions."

– Jacob Holdt

Contents

This report was written by Lena Bheeroo, Pontso Mafethe and Leila Billing.

We'd like to say a heartfelt thanks to the individuals who so generously shared their experiences, providing rich examples of what they have had to deal with. We hope this report gives them a voice that is so seldom heard or respected. We also hope the report allows an honest reflection by organisations and leads beyond well intentioned words to meaningful action.

About the cover graphic

In many Black, brown and indigenous cultures, an open hand symbolises openness, transparency, protection, reassurance and safety.

About Bond

Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development.

We connect, strengthen and champion a dynamic network of diverse civil society organisations to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice. We're working to transform the NGO sector, focusing on anti-racism, locally-led development and gender equity.

Executive summary: Racism still matters in development

Over the past year, there has been a reckoning with racism. The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement after the death of George Floyd in 2020, and global protests against racial injustice have highlighted the pervasive nature of structural racism around the world. We now have the opportunity to reflect more deeply on the colonial roots of the international development and humanitarian system, which continues to insidiously perpetuate racism in the UK and beyond. Employees have demanded greater action on anti-racism, and shone a spotlight on harmful and racist practices within their organisations. This has shown that social justice organisations are perfectly capable of reproducing the kinds of oppressive practices inside their organisations that they purport to transform outside of them.

Organisations need to understand how racism manifests in their cultures, policies and work to take the first steps to becoming actively anti-racist. To support non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on this journey, this report explores the experiences of people of colour working for UK international development organisations, both those based in the UK and overseas.

We set out to explore what enables and prevents people of colour from getting jobs in this sector. We examined their experiences of organisational cultures in UK organisations, and the challenges they face in progressing into leadership positions. We collected qualitative and quantitative data from people of colour working for international NGOs of varying sizes, think tanks, research institutes, consultancy firms and donor agencies. This data provides invaluable insights into what is going wrong with the sector's predominant approaches to diversity and inclusion, highlighting an urgent need to transform organisational cultures to address structural racism.

This report centres on the voices and experiences of people of colour and their input has shaped the recommendations.

Structural racism prevents career progression

150 organisations responded to a sector-wide survey on diversity, equality and inclusion in 2020, and of those, 73% reported having diversity and inclusion policies in place. But despite the sector's public commitments to diversity and inclusion, there are high levels of racism

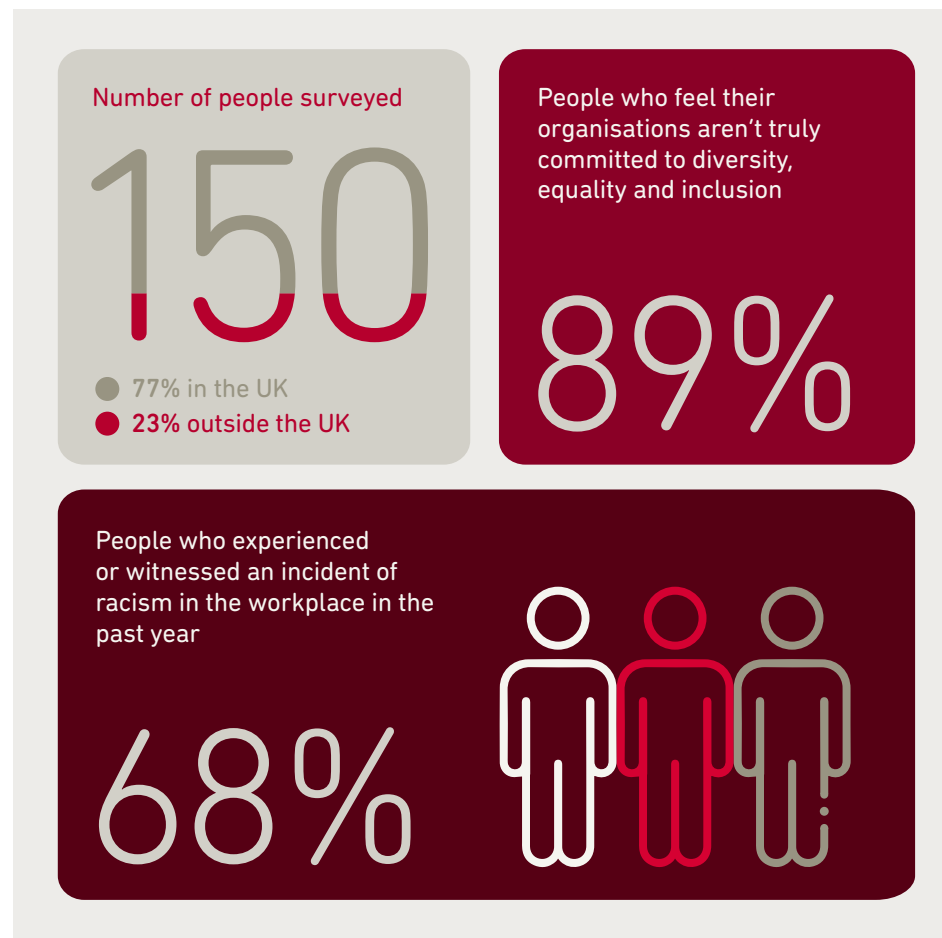|	
Getting in	recruitment, interview processes and gaining a foothold in the sector
Getting on	organisational structures and cultures that value and support diversity
Getting up	career progression and tomorrow's leaders

preventing people of colour from entering and progressing through the sector. In a further survey of people of colour across the sector, 68% said that they had experienced an incident of racism in the workplace within the past year, or had supported someone else who experienced a racist incident. Many of these examples were incidents of overt racism, causing considerable psychological harm and mental health challenges for those affected. In some cases, employees were made to continue working in environments in which they felt unsafe.

Number of people surveyed

150

● **77%** in the UK
● **23% outside the UK**

People who feel their organisations aren't truly committed to diversity, equality and inclusion

89%

People who experienced or witnessed an incident of racism in the workplace in the past year

68%

Our research indicates that people of colour don't have faith in their organisations' work on diversity, equity and inclusion. Only 11% of our survey respondents strongly agreed that their organisations were committed to this agenda.

Organisational cultures are deeply rooted in racism

Racism is not only reproduced within systems, policies and structures, but is also embedded in our organisational cultures. Our informal, often unquestioned ways of working create expectations of how people of colour should work and behave, behaviours that are considered acceptable to treat people of colour, and unwritten rules about people of colour. These expectations are often fundamentally gendered and racialised, and exclude people of colour through the implication they are not good enough, that they don't belong; essentially their "othering".

These racist practices and attitudes are concealed in the "deep structures" of our organisations, woven into the very fabric of the culture and structure of organisations in which we work. Deep structures (Gender at Work) refer to the tenacious hidden sites of organisational power, where white people share positions, decision making and opportunities, with their fellow white networks of privilege and influence. These structures are so powerful, they often override policies on diversity and inclusion. They contribute to an environment in which people of colour are often over-scrutinised, over-sanctioned and under-valued compared to their white counterparts.

The "white gaze" is the dominant mode of perception in our society that measures people of colour against white, Western standards, holding this white Western standard as the model that all should aspire to. We identified ways in which the white gaze was baked into

recruitment, management and promotion processes, resulting in racial hierarchies within our organisations. For example, our research showed 85% of respondents felt that as a person of colour, getting promoted in the sector was not accessible to them – promotion was seen as a reward only accessible to people from non-minoritised groups.

Women and Black people are marginalised in distinct ways

In applying an intersectional lens to this research, we identified ways in which women of colour, particularly those working for UK NGOs in low-middle income countries, are systematically marginalised and prevented from progressing their careers. We amplify the voices and experiences of diverse groups of women in the report.

We found evidence of pervasive anti-blackness within the UK international development sector. While our findings suggest that people of all ethnicities are experiencing high levels of racism and discrimination, Black people experience unique forms of racism. Black people are often at the bottom of racial hierarchy, with white people at the top and non-Black people of colour in between.

There are racialised and gendered barriers that prevent people of colour from gaining promotions on an equal footing with their white, male counterparts. When they do make it into a leadership position, many people of colour – particularly women of colour - face ongoing challenges to their legitimacy and authority, and report feeling tokenised. Many leaders of colour feel unable to lead authentically, because they must adopt white behaviours and they are conscious of trying to fit into what the whit gaze deems appropriate.

People of colour's experiences and expertise are devalued or silenced

Our qualitative data shows how people of colour experience "epistemic violence" at various stages of their journey through the international development sector. Epistemic violence is the damage done to a racialised group's ability to speak and be heard in wider society. It includes devaluing a group's knowledge, experiences and expertise.

Epistemic violence shows up when people of colour's lived experiences of being from, working in and living in lower-income countries are not valued as part of recruitment and promotion processes. Similarly, people of colour face opposition and persecution for voicing differing opinions and perspectives when working in international development.

Recommendations for a diverse, inclusive and equitable sector

The sector's predominant, one-size-fits all approaches to diversity and inclusion are failing. We must tackle racism with an explicit anti-racism lens and practical action. Organisations need to focus on transforming cultures that are unwelcoming and unsafe for people of colour. We provide recommendations for organisations to surface, understand and address the intersectional inequalities faced by different groups of colour, including those based in the countries where NGOs work.

Glossary

A word on language

In the UK government and policy spheres, the acronym 'BAME' dominates the race equality sector. 'BAME' stands for 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' and is a much-contested term. We do not use this acronym in the report on the grounds that it is disempowering in the way that it centres the term 'minority', and on the basis that it separates Black and Asian people from a myriad of other identities, homogenising the experiences of disparate groups of people. In this report, we prefer the use of the term people of colour, despite understanding its limitations.

The writer Kavita Bhanot explains the imperfections, as well as the strengths of this term: "There is something powerful and significant about those coming together, through alliance and solidarity, in the new wave of resistance to white supremacy. Perhaps we need a new self-created political identity to capture this. It is non-whiteness that unites us, but this defines us wholly through what we are not, through whiteness, therefore centring whiteness. This is also the case with 'people of colour'; we are only 'coloured' insofar as the dominant norm is 'white', it was white people who referred to us ('othered' us) as 'coloured' – the word carries a racist history. Also some of us resisting white supremacy are not 'coloured'. But this label seems to be the best option right now."

– Kavita Bhanot

Racism

Racism is… race prejudice and social and institutional power
Racism is… a system of advantage based on race
Racism is… a system of oppression based on race
Racism is… a white supremacy system

Racism is different from racial prejudice, hatred, or discrimination. Racism involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society in question, and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices.

Source: "What Is Racism?" – Dismantling Racism Works (dRworks)

BAME

Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (used to refer to members of non-white communities in the UK).

Racialised people

Individuals and groups who have been subject to a process of racialisation and been ascribed a particular racial category. In this report, we use the term to refer to those that have been negatively racialised or racialised as "other" and we include those who are racialised as a result of their perceived membership to religious communities.

Structural racism

"The set of circumstances artificially created over generations, through European colonialism, and which holds 'whiteness' to be superior. Structural racism affects individuals on a day-to-day basis; one person may be overlooked for a job because someone with a 'more English' sounding name is preferable; another may never get to see someone who looks like them in a role of significance to which they aspire. Structural racism also means that, collectively, people of colour are held back from achieving their cultural, political and economic potential, and are kept distant from power, representation and resources." Laurie Mompelat, Runnymede Trust

Source: Connecting the dots: structural racism in 2019 – Runnymede Trust

Person of colour

The term "person of colour" (plural: people of colour, persons of colour; sometimes abbreviated POC) is primarily used to describe any person who is not considered "white".

Diversity

Includes, but is not limited to, race, colour, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, veteran status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, gender expression, gender identity, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, genetic information, and learning styles.

Anti-racism

Anti-Racism is defined as the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life.

Source: Race Reporting Guide (2015), Race Forward

Intersectionality

"As an analytical tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, in people and in human experiences."

Source: Intersectionality, Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, 2020

Equity

The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all, while striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. The principle of equity acknowledges that, historically, there are under-served and under-represented populations and that fairness regarding these unbalanced conditions is needed to assist equality in the provision of effective opportunities to all groups.

Equity vs. Equality

Equity involves trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives. Equality, in contrast, aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives. Like equity, equality aims to promote fairness and justice, but it can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same things.

Language

In UK government and policy spheres, the acronym 'BAME' dominates the race equality sector. 'BAME' stands for 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' and is a much-contested term. We do not use this acronym in the

report on the grounds that it is disempowering in the way that it centres the term 'minority', and on the basis that it separates Black and Asian people from a myriad of other identities, homogenising the experiences of disparate groups of people. In this report, we prefer the use of the term people of colour, despite understanding its limitations.

Inclusion

Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision and/or policy making in a way that shares power and ensures equal access to opportunities and resources. "Diversity is who is in the room. Inclusion is who has influence in that room. Anti-racism is a mindset, way of being, and goal for a group of people in a room. These are not interchangeable terms."

Source: Namira Islam Anani

Decolonisation

The action or process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent. Processes of decolonisation understand that colonisation is more than just a physical project – it has cultural and psychological components which determine whose knowledge is privileged. Decolonisation involves seeking restorative justice through cultural, psychological and economic freedom. Decolonisation is the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies regarding the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches.

Introduction: Colonial roots and continued cultures of exclusion

All organisations are structured around formal systems in which staff with clearly defined roles and responsibilities are working for the achievement of common goals. Structure helps an organisation define its objectives and culture helps in achieving them. The structure reflects the organisation's strategy that drives policies and procedures which in turn, determine the behaviour of the managers and staff. The culture of the organisation, however, is based on shared values, norms and individual and group behaviour, and is, by its very nature, more informal and based on collective ideas and values. Culture is critical in the achievement of the defined objectives and is a function of behaviour and relationship patterns and is about meaning, and meaning will trump both vision and authority over time. As Peter Drucker said, "culture eats strategy for breakfast".

An organisation's culture determines the organisation's behaviour more than its strategy or structure. Organisational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values and beliefs, which govern how people behave in organisations. Organisational culture includes the organisation's expectations, experiences, philosophy and values that hold it together. It is based on shared attitudes, beliefs, customs, and written and unwritten rules that have been developed over time and are considered valid. Yet it is the one element of organisational life that is least studied, named or, on which work to deliberately change

Iceberg theory

1

2

Culture

3

You

1 Surface
Observable behaviour of others, things we can see and touch etc.

2 Just below surface
Takes some time to recognise

3 Deep structures
'Normal' unquestioned ways of working in an organisation. It may include sets of behaviours which can be fundamentally gendered and racialised

is done. In groups of people who work together, organisational culture is an invisible but powerful force that influences and reinforces the behaviour of the members of that particular group.

It's useful to understand the concept of organisational 'deep structures' and the influence they have on the cultures, rules and values in organisations. The concept was developed by the organisation Gender at Work, and speaks to the 'normal', often unquestioned ways of working in an organisation. Imagine an organisation like an iceberg with the deep structures being what happens below the water line.

These deep structures can be so powerful they override any organisational policies or commitments including those related to diversity, inclusion and equality.

A western history of development

For us to understand the systems and structures that the development sector, along with those in it, operate around, it is worth taking the time to understand the beginnings of the sector, so that we can understand how our environment came to be.

For people of colour, Black, Asian, Latin American, etc. 2020 was not an extraordinary year – historically through colonialism, struggles for independence etc., post-Independence interventionist policies, whether political, conflict-based, via trade or aid, this has been the reality. The beginnings of organised international humanitarian aid can be traced to the mid to late 19th century with the most well-known figure being a Swiss businessman, Henri Dunant, who responded to the plight of soldiers in what is now Italy, Florence Nightingale during the Crimean

War of 1853 to 1856, and various other wars and famines across Europe.

Other humanitarian responses were carried out by missionaries, diplomats and businessmen towards the end of the 19th century, in response to devastating famines in China and India. The creation of the Bretton Woods agreement centred the most developed and largest economies and created a monetary system which safeguarded them, and did not take into account the economies of low-middle income countries. The idea that development and the structures which protected the major economies and not others was borne of events.

Fast forward to the Biafran War in the late 1960s and the Ethiopia famine in the mid-1980s, among many other examples. In its more modern incarnation, when aid agencies "arrived" in the low-middle income countries in the 20th century after countries had been stripped of their natural resources during colonisation, humanitarian work, it can be argued that humanitarianism was built on the modernist assumption that international actors fulfilled a gap rooted in western notions of skills and expertise. Foreign aid was arguably based on a premise of 'developing' countries having to catch up to the countries which disbursed aid and money. This was generally long after those developing countries had gained their independence from the very countries now delivering development assistance.

The history of the international humanitarian system is specific to Western history, and in particular European and North American one. Right now, we have the opportunity to reflect more deeply on the history of the system, be more aware of its past and recognise the intersections and specificity of diverse experiences. This will ensure

that, going forward, the sector has a sounder basis from which to understand, engage and respect those who were shaped by a different set of historical experiences (Eleanor Davey, 2012).

Over the past year, there has been a reckoning with racism. The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement after the death of George Floyd in 2020, and global protests against racial injustice have shed light on the pervasive nature of structural racism around the world. This reckoning has come in the middle of a pandemic which, in developed countries, has disproportionately impacted upon certain ethnic minority groups (British Medical Journal, 2021). The UK has been no exception.

From the dissent following the infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech by Enoch Powell MP in 1968, to the Brixton Riots of 1981, and the murder of Stephen Lawrence, these events have produced the Scarman (1981) and the Macpherson (1999) reports. The latter was particularly important in holding up the mirror to the UK establishment, forcing it to acknowledge that institutional racism was a fact of life in contemporary Britain. However, previous 'watershed' moments have arguably not opened up the space for conversations about racism, bias, privilege, structural racism and whiteness as much as the Black Lives Matter uprisings of 2020.

These seismic events have not left the global development sector untouched. UK development institutions have responded in a variety of ways to this moment. Some posted 'solidarity statements' on social media. Others started to review their diversity and inclusion policies and hired diversity and inclusion experts. Some organisations working in the sector have shifted from a focus on diversity and

inclusion and now use the language of anti-racism. Legal scholar and historian Jonathan Kahn has written extensively about this type of semantic shapeshifting – what was once called 'diversity' work (i.e., focusing upon getting more people of colour into institutions) becomes repackaged as 'anti-racism'. **When this 'anti-racism' work is not accompanied by a commitment to genuine structural change or redistribution of power, Khan calls this 'recreational anti-racism'.**

Whether 'recreational anti-racism' is at play depends upon the type of development institution one works for. In some organisations, employees have been invited to have 'courageous conversations' about race, power and privilege, where once such discussions might have been confined to less political subjects. 'Listening' sessions have been offered to people of colour to share their experiences of working within the sector.

But to what extent are people's experiences truly informing new practice? Many development organisations made a host of new commitments to address anti-racism. Some institutions – though by no means at all – have started to interrogate the colonial underpinnings of the development project itself, as well as its role in perpetuating global inequalities. Others, meanwhile, remain focused on diversity targets – getting more bodies of colour through the door and into leadership positions.

The UK Parliament's International Development Committee launched its first sub-inquiry (under the Philosophy and Culture of Aid Inquiry) into the impact of racism in the aid sector. Employees from some development organisations have publicly demanded greater action on anti-racism, and have highlighted the harmful and racist practices

within their institutions, showing once again that social justice organisations are perfectly capable of reproducing the kinds of oppressive practices inside their organisations which they purport to transform outside of them.

People of colour working in the sector have started to organise and collectivise to demand change. For example, the Gender and Development Network's Women of Colour Forum published a statement on white supremacy in the sector, which was endorsed by the Bond People of Colour in development group. The statement laid out clear asks and tangible steps to address the colonial roots of the sector and the white supremacy culture it is built upon. Despite this statement, many organisations are still wondering how to take their first steps.

This seems to be a time of immense possibility to make progress on anti-racism. Is this finally a moment when the arc of the universe bends towards social justice? **Progress seems possible, but also fragile. As the conversation on racism has progressed in the UK, so has the pushback.** The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities Report (also known as the Sewell report) published in March 2021 denied the significance of structural racism in the UK, suggesting that racism influenced life chances far less than other factors, such as geography or family background.

Protesters demanding that statues commemorating people who profited from the slave trade be removed, were criticised by those in power as historical revisionists who wanted to 'lie about our history'. Meanwhile, Britain's Society of Editors denied the existence of racism and bigotry in the UK press.

Within the UK's international development sector, it remains the case that for every group willing to publicly expose discrimination in their organisations, many people still feel afraid to speak out about their experiences of racism – even if it is anonymously.

The UK development sector is reeling from swingeing cuts to development aid – from 0.7% to 0.5% of national income, leaving a funding gap of over £4 billion. The ongoing pandemic poses significant challenges to development programmes and alternative funding streams. These dynamics threaten the ability of the sector to deal with the pervasive issue of racism in a root-and-branch way, as leaders manage multiple crises and work on anti-racism risks being deprioritised. Furthermore, the dominant approaches to the work being done are regularly critiqued by those closest to the pain.

Critiques from low- and middle-incoome countries of international development actors' work on decolonisation, dismiss it as a 'buzzword' and a fad. Others have lambasted the way some sector leaders have espoused the rhetoric of anti-racism, yet failed to demonstrate genuine accountability when their complicity in racist behaviour has been surfaced. The hashtag #shiftthepower has become a rallying cry for the UK development sector but makes no mention of race in the discussion on power.

It is within these shifting sands that we worked on this report, which we hope will be a useful resource for those working in the UK international development sector, particularly those in positions of influence, to start, sustain and step up their work on anti-racism.

Our approach and data

This report sets out to explore the experiences of people of colour working in international development in relation to securing roles in the sector, their workplace experiences and career progression. This is about whether people of colour can get in, get on and get up in the sector. In September 2020, we surveyed over 150 people working for international NGOs of varying sizes, think tanks, research institutes, consultancy firms, and donor agencies. We also did in-depth interviews with over 30 people of colour, based in and outside of the UK, detailing their experiences of working for UK development institutions. Their stories provide invaluable insights that we draw upon throughout the report. We have deliberately focused on the experiences and voices of people of colour in the sector.

We want their experiences to be the focus of the report as they provide evidence for the statistics. We recognise the findings are the norm for many, and not isolated incidents, which they may appear to be to non-racialised people.

Working with Bond, the UK network for organisations working in international development, the focus of this report is primarily based upon the responses from people of colour working for UK development institutions. We include those based in the UK, as well as those people in and from the contexts where development programmes and projects are implemented. We have explored the extent to which it is easy for people of colour to gain a foothold in the global development sector

and have their lived experiences of working within the UK development sector valued. We shone a spotlight on some of the key enablers and barriers to career progression and spoke to leaders and former leaders about the specific challenges they confronted, that they believe were a result of their racialised identities.

We compare and contrast these findings with what UK development organisations themselves told us about their commitments to racial diversity and inclusion. We wanted to understand what UK development organisations are doing to address issues relating to racial diversity and inclusion, and how this might square with the lived experiences of people of colour. This report builds upon analysis conducted by Bond in July 2020, which aimed to establish the extent to which Bond member organisations were integrating diversity and inclusion into their work, and whether this was having an impact upon levels of representation of people of colour in their leadership structures. The analysis is based upon feedback from 150 Bond member organisations, which represented 34% of the total Bond membership at the time.

What this report is not

This report is seeking to centre and bring to light the very real day-to-day experiences of people of colour in the sector. Though we operate in the shadow of colonialism, a question asked recently is "why we

do not have more representation leading organisations or in the upper echelons of the sector". This report lays out why, and provides recommendations for moving the sector to being equitable.

Research methods

The findings in this report are based upon two different sets of data. The first are the findings from a request by Bond to its members to share information about their approaches and work on diversity and inclusion in their organisations. One-hundred-and-fifty organisations responded to this request in July 2020, the largest number of organisations engaging in a Bond survey to date.
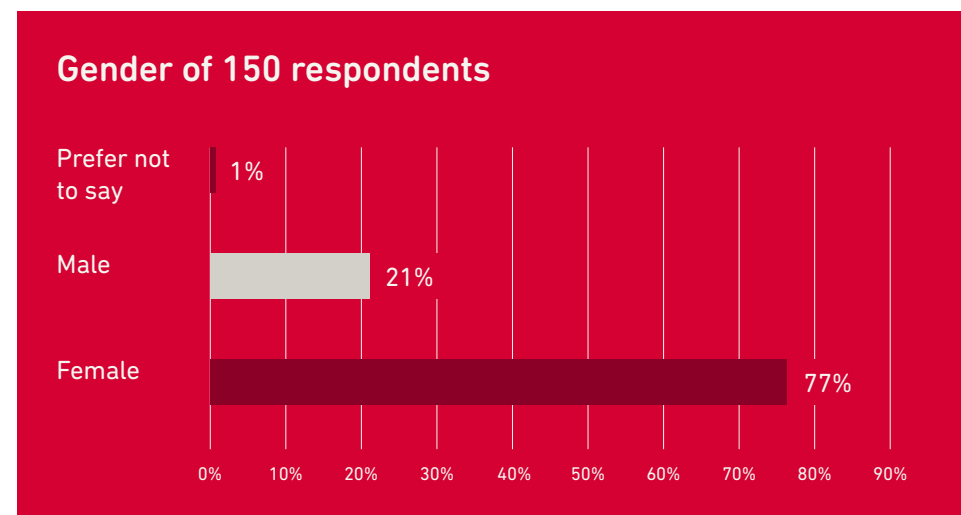
The second data set came from an online survey aimed at people of colour working for UK development organisations - either based in the UK or in contexts where development programming and projects take place, in September 2020. They were asked to fill out a survey to share their experiences of getting into the sector, their experience of working in the sector, and their experiences of career progression.

Our findings are below – we have also included further information about the profile of the respondents to the survey.

We also conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with men and women working for UK development organisations – interviewees were based in the UK and also in parts of the world where development projects and programmes are implemented. Some held leadership positions; others were more junior staff members. We spoke to people with a wide range of ethnicities working for diverse types of development organisations, including think tanks, NGOs of different sizes, and funders.
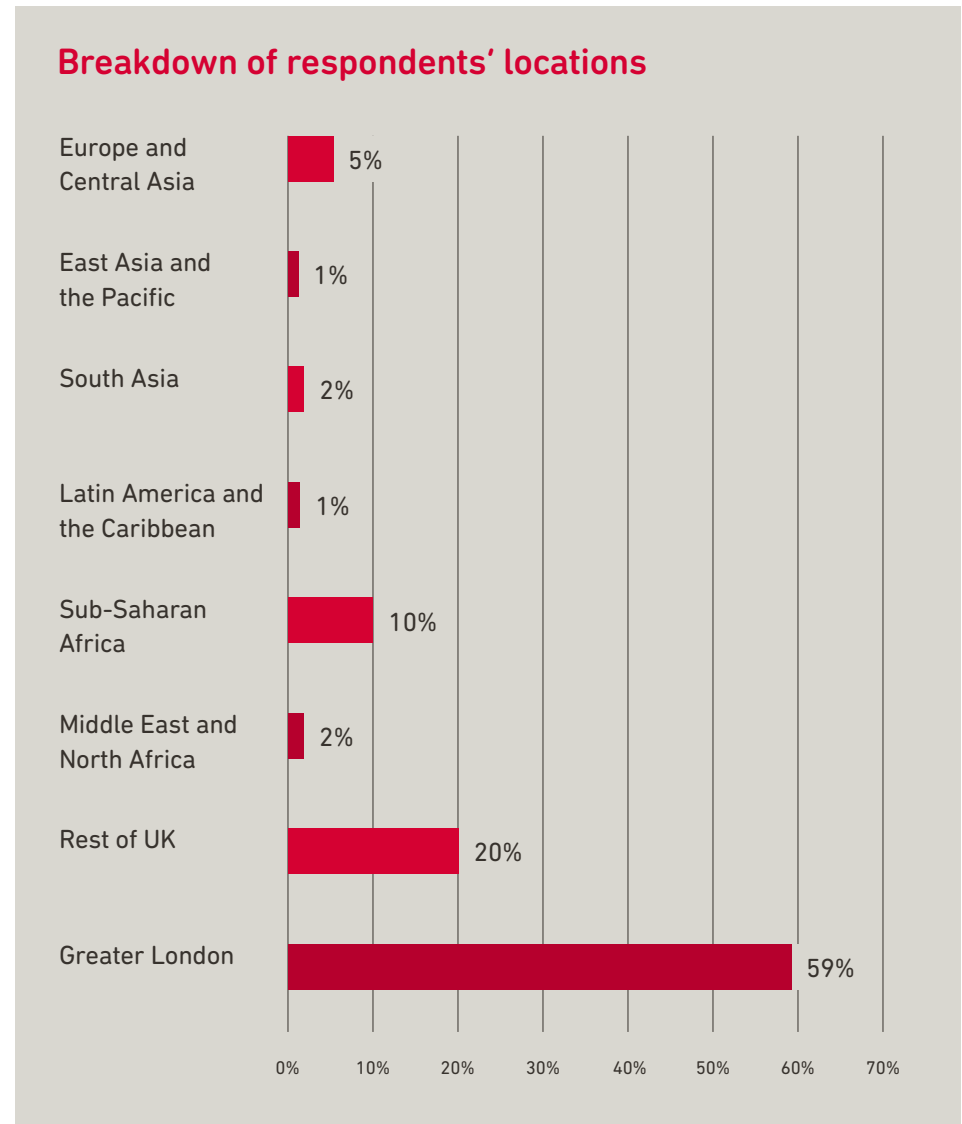
Limitations

There is limited pre-existing research into similar topics in the global development sector that we were able to build upon. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic slowed down our work and may have limited the numbers of people who were able to participate in the surveys. Our sample sizes are not large (approximately 150 people participated in our September 2020 survey and 150 Bond member organisations submitted data for our July 2020 analysis), making it difficult to generalise the findings. Despite the small sample, the report findings strongly resonate with existing research into representation, career progression, racism and discrimination for people of colour working in the charity sector in the UK (ACEVO, 2020; Green Park, 2018, Aid Works and Thomson Reuters, 2021) as well as other research studies (McGregor-Smith Review, 2017; CIPD, 2017; TUC, 2019) exploring the experiences of racialised groups in the workplace. We believe the report includes important and useful insights to help spur reflection and action.

Gender of 150 respondents

Prefer not to say	1%
Male	21%
Female	77%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90%

Where are you based?
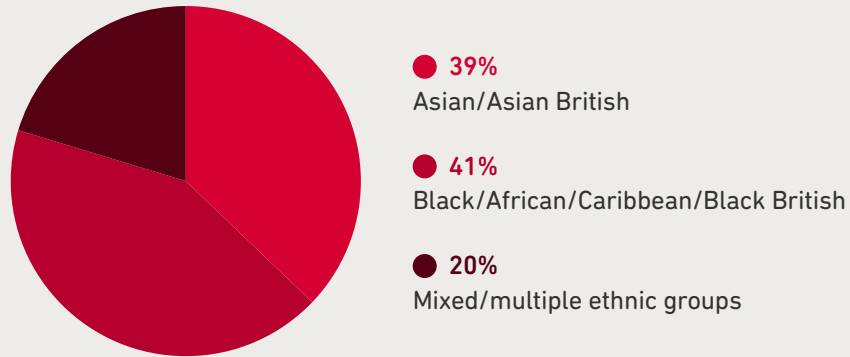
● **23%**
Outside of the UK

● **77%**
In the UK

As we drew closer to publication, 10 interviewees decided to withdraw from the research, citing concerns about the backlash they might face from their employers and colleagues if they were suspected of contributing to the report. Their important insights and experiences were not included in this report. Their decisions are indicative of the fine line many people of colour working in the sector told us they have to tread to avoid pushback, or sanctions, when their behaviour is perceived as being 'out of line'.
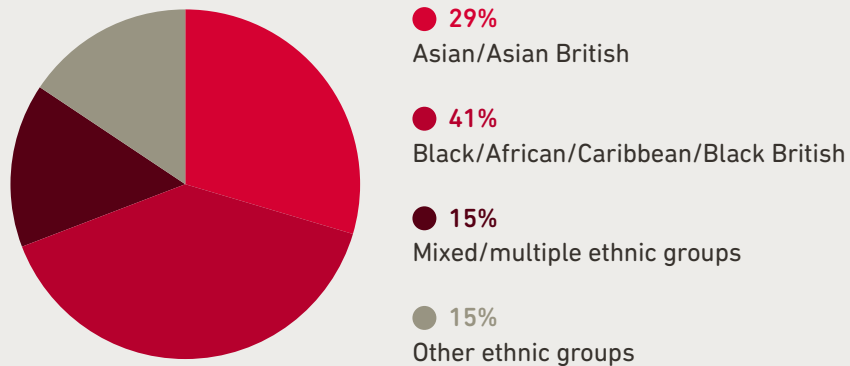
The following limitations should be addressed in any future research studies of this kind: we received fewer responses to our survey from men of colour working in the sector than we did from women of colour, meaning it is possible there are certain dynamics faced by men working in the sector that we were unable to pinpoint. And very importantly, we were not able to consult with as many members of staff working for UK development organisations based overseas as we would have liked. We know that staff based in the countries where development programmes are implemented face unique contextual challenges and we have only been able to touch on a few of them in this report.

Breakdown of respondents' locations

Location	Percentage
Europe and Central Asia	5%
East Asia and the Pacific	1%
South Asia	2%
Latin America and the Caribbean	1%
Sub-Saharan Africa	10%
Middle East and North Africa	2%
Rest of UK	20%
Greater London	59%

Female ethnicity - top line

39%
Asian/Asian British

41%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British

20%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups

Male ethnicity - top line

29%
Asian/Asian British

41%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
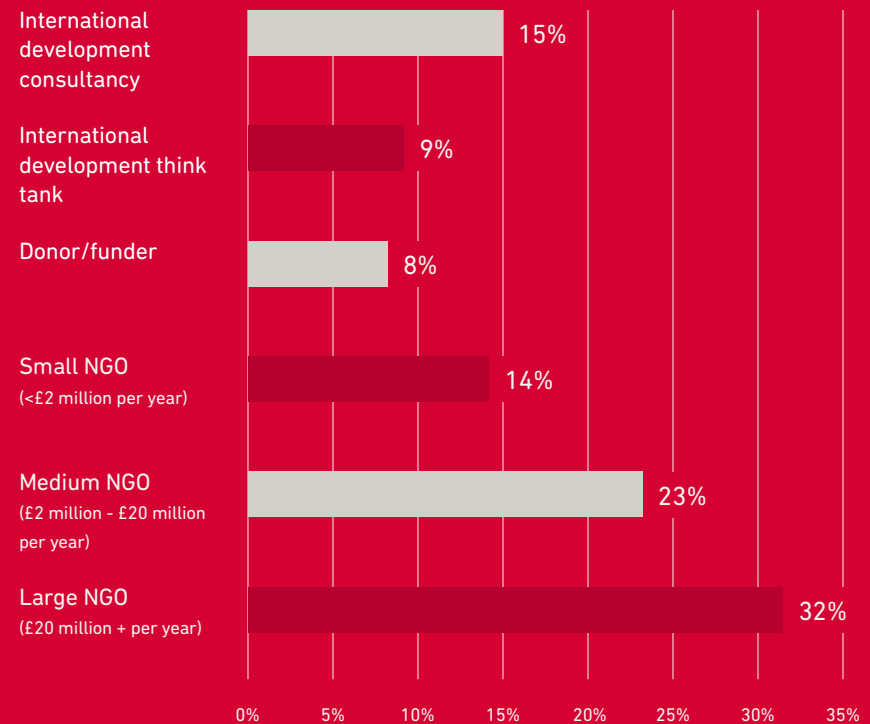
15%
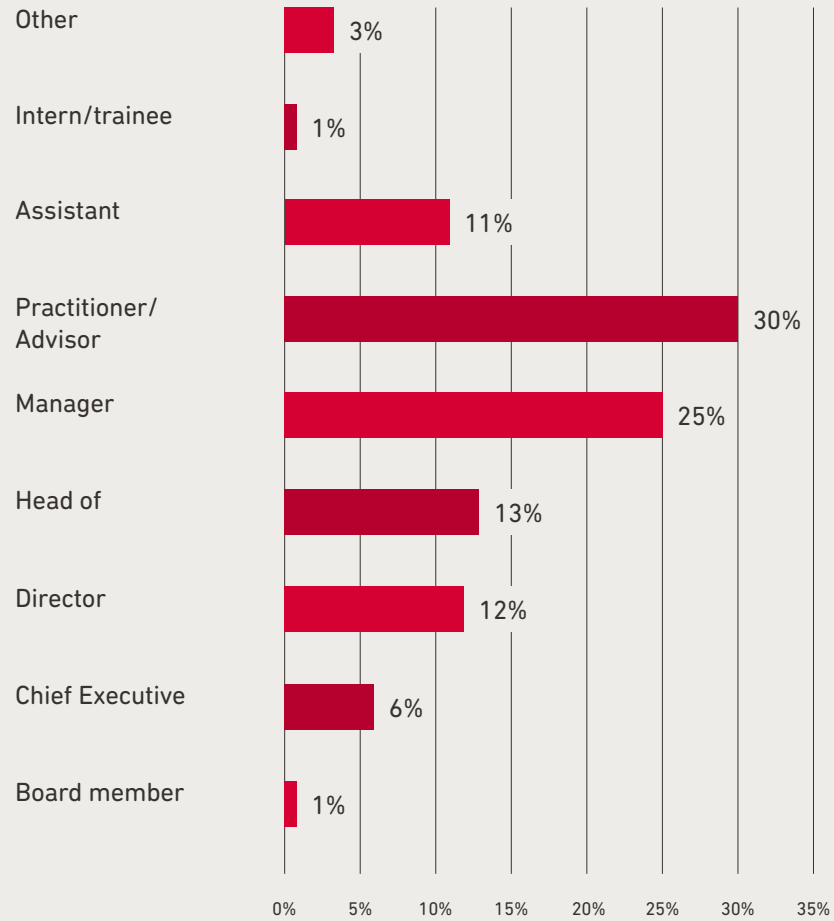Mixed/multiple ethnic groups

15%
Other ethnic groups

Finally, as the two surveys were done separately, we have not extrapolated the findings from one as having a direct relationship to the other. However, they do provide some context to approaches that some organisations have taken in regards to diversity, equity and inclusion and anti-racism work, and the experiences of people of colour working in the sector.

Type of organisation

Type	Percentage
International development consultancy	15%
International development think tank	9%
Donor/funder	8%
Small NGO (<£2 million per year)	14%
Medium NGO (£2 million - £20 million per year)	23%
Large NGO (£20 million + per year)	32%

Seniority

Seniority	Percentage
Other	3%
Intern/trainee	1%
Assistant	11%
Practitioner/Advisor	30%
Manager	25%
Head of	13%
Director	12%
Chief Executive	6%
Board member	1%

Findings: Getting in, getting on, getting up

In July 2020, Bond asked its membership to report on their commitments to racial diversity and inclusion. One-hundred-and-fifty Bond member organisations responded (at that time, this represented 34% of the Bond membership). The results look promising, and suggest generally strong levels of commitment towards diversity and inclusion among the UK civil society organisations who responded to the survey.

73% of Bond member organisations that responded had a diversity and inclusion policy in place. 65% of members collected data on the racial diversity of their workforce. Of these members, 43% were reviewing the data at least once per year; 34% reviewed the data at least twice per year. 63% of members said diversity and inclusion was linked to their strategic planning processes, and therefore had high priority within their organisations.

Meanwhile, since the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, a host of UK development organisations posted black squares in June 2020 to protest racism and police brutality and issued statements and commitments to do more to tackle racism within the sector. How meaningful were these policies and commitments to diversity and inclusion for people of colour working in the UK development sector? Are they having the desired effect? And why did 53% of people of colour responding to our survey disagree or strongly disagree that

their organisations were committed to diversity, equity and inclusion on the basis of race?

We have organised the report around three sections, namely getting in which looks at the recruitment and interview process, getting on which focuses on the experiences of people of colour once in organisations and getting up, which looks at people of colour's experience of career progression in the sector.
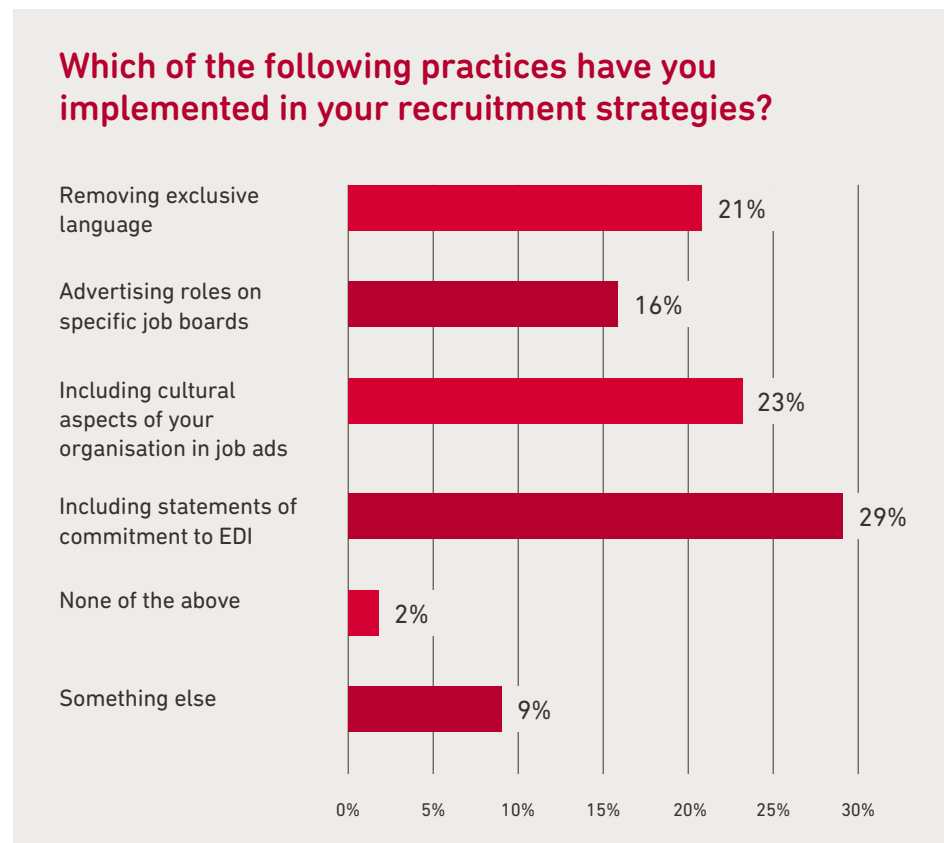
Do you have a diversity and inclusion policy?

No
27%

Yes
73%

Getting in

According to Bond's July 2020 analysis, UK civil society organisations have embarked on a range of steps to ensure recruitment processes enable a more diverse range of people to enter the sector. Some of the steps taken are listed in the diagram below.

A scan of a variety of job advertisements for UK development organisations in April 2021 found that many organisations now openly state their commitment to welcoming a diverse range of applicants.

Which of the following practices have you implemented in your recruitment strategies?

Practice	%
Removing exclusive language	21%
Advertising roles on specific job boards	16%
Including cultural aspects of your organisation in job ads	23%
Including statements of commitment to EDI	29%
None of the above	2%
Something else	9%

"We promote diversity of thought, culture and background... We particularly welcome applications from under-represented sections of the community."

"We strive to be an equal opportunities employer and welcome applications regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or disability."

"We value the strength of a diverse workforce... particular consideration will be given to applicants with lived experience."

"We recognise that diversity and inclusion are a source of strength in achieving our mission. We therefore welcome everyone, trusting what makes us different brings creativity, styles and experience to help us collectively do our best work."

(Excerpts from job adverts advertised on Bond.org.uk/jobs on 26 April 2021)

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"I have faced discrimination on the basis of my race, nationality, ethnicity or religion during the recruitment process for jobs in the international development sector in the past".
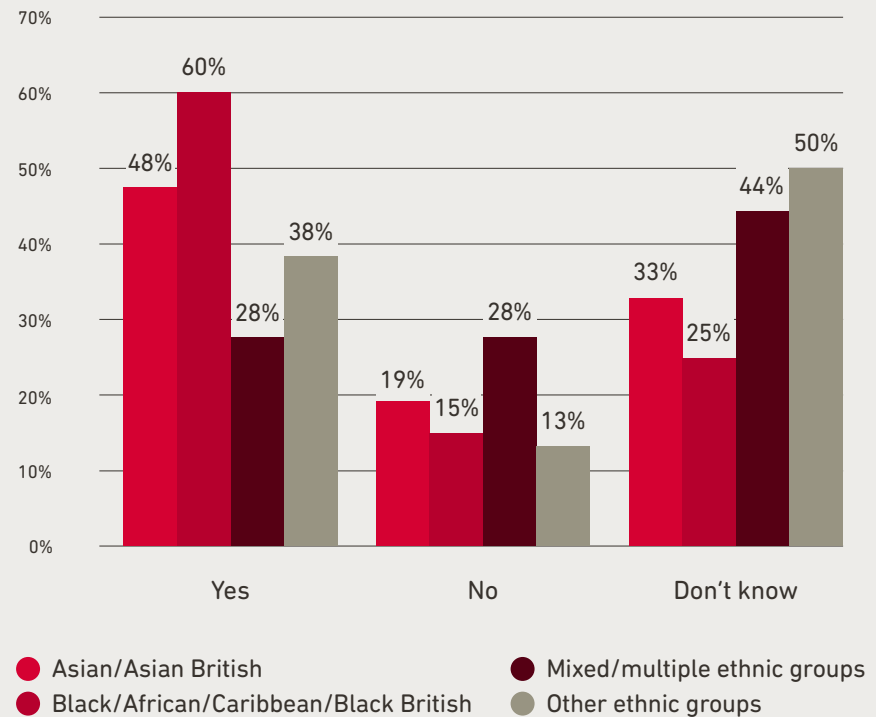
Yes
48%

No
18%

Don't know
34%

Despite these efforts, there is a question about how far this commitment goes. Is it just the message of 'welcoming diverse backgrounds to apply'? Is that where it stops? Our findings suggest that recruitment practices in the international development sector in the UK are producing and reproducing many of the racial and gender inequalities found in wider society. Those based outside of the UK, including those with direct experience of living and working in contexts where development projects and programmes are implemented, face even greater challenges to getting a foot in the door.

48% of our survey respondents said they had faced discrimination based on their race, ethnicity or nationality during recruitment processes. Black-African, Caribbean or Black-British people were the most likely to say they had experienced discrimination during

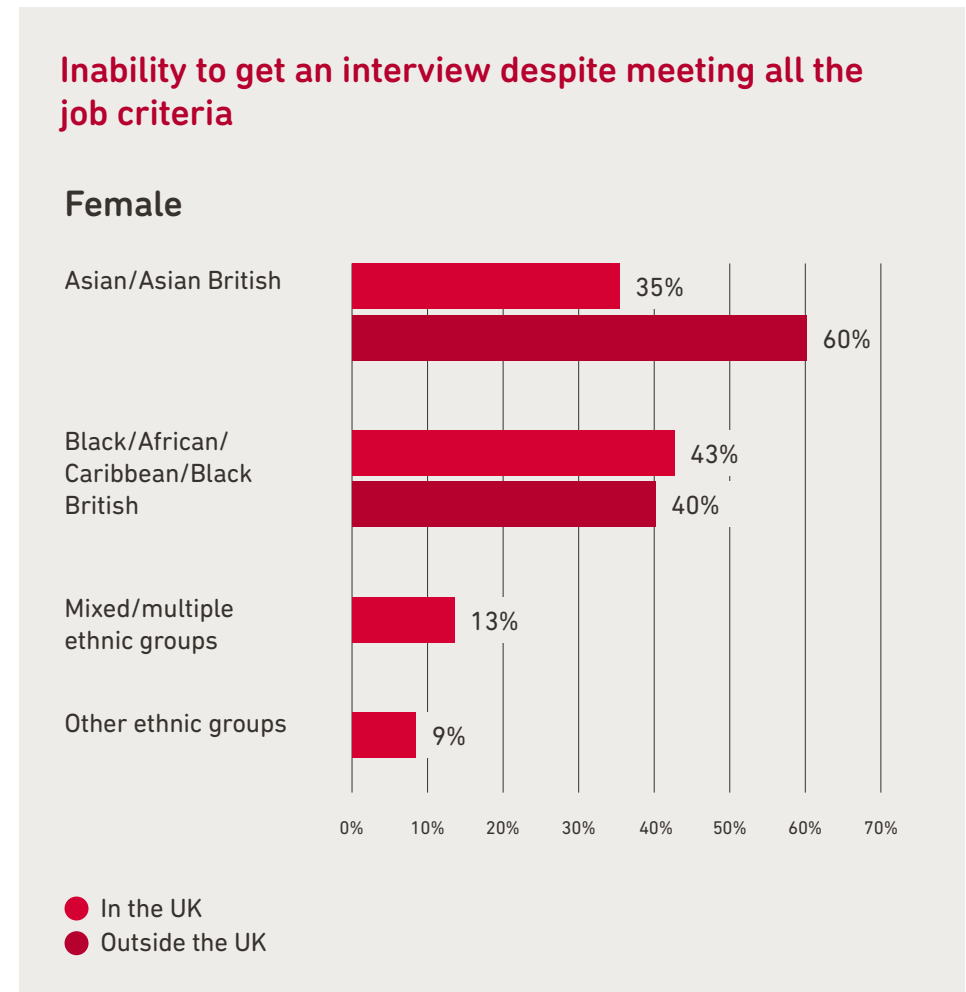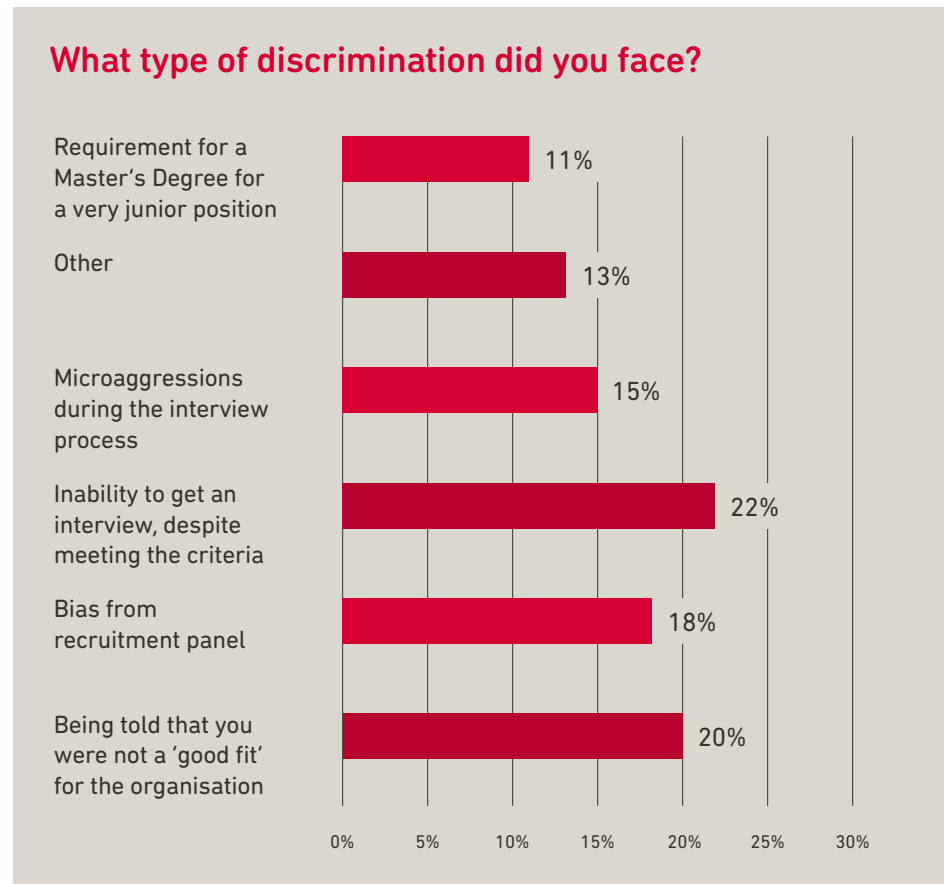## Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

"I have faced discrimination on the basis of my race, nationality, ethnicity or religion during the recruitment process for jobs in the international development sector in the past".

Legend:
- ● Asian/Asian British
- ● Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- ● Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
- ● Other ethnic groups

recruitment processes: 60% said they had been discriminated against. Of these, 72% were Black women. 48% of Asian/British Asian respondents said they had faced discrimination during the recruitment process and the rates were also high for people with multiple ethnicities.

Black women living outside the UK, including those in countries where development projects and programmes are implemented, reported particularly high levels of discrimination during recruitment. 78% of Black women based outside the UK said they had faced discrimination when applying for roles at UK NGOs.

The most common form of discrimination cited by survey respondents was their inability to get an interview, despite meeting all the criteria for the job. And of those people who had failed to get interviews, 70% were women of colour.

What type of discrimination did you face?

Type	Percentage
Requirement for a Master's Degree for a very junior position	11%
Other	13%
Microaggressions during the interview process	15%
Inability to get an interview, despite meeting the criteria	22%
Bias from recruitment panel	18%
Being told that you were not a 'good fit' for the organisation	20%

Inability to get an interview despite meeting all the job criteria

Female

Group	In the UK	Outside the UK
Asian/Asian British	35%	60%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	43%	40%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	13%	
Other ethnic groups	9%	

● In the UK
● Outside the UK

"I'd done everything I possibly could to enable me to get a job working in international development. Growing up, I'd always been told by my immigrant parents that I'd have to work twice as hard as my white counterparts. Naively, I thought that if I did just that and diligently followed the tips, I'd read about how to break into the sector there wouldn't be any barriers to me. For example, I speak a second language, I'm well-travelled, I'd volunteered at the local refugee centre during my undergraduate studies, I'd been involved in international youth activism, I'd gained experience of working with civil society in Afghanistan, I'd studied for a Master's at a top university and I'd done internships. But after my Master's degree I struggled to find work. Through Facebook and conversations with my former classmates, I learnt that peers who were white and middle class had gotten really good jobs much quicker than my non-white peers who were finding it almost impossible to secure employment. Some overseas students decided to return to their home countries to find employment."

– Female interviewee

"I have applied for roles in the past and I didn't even get an interview. I have met people that got those roles and I recall once that one of them was my former student. He got the role with less than 2 years of experience when I had over 10 years."

– Survey respondent

"One job said it was to have an advanced level of Spanish and Portuguese. It was given to one of my contemporaries who didn't speak either. I know I was more suitable for the job as I had several years of relevant experience and he was fresh out of uni. I checked his LinkedIn profile out, that's how I knew."

– Survey respondent

"I grew up between the UK and Africa – the latter where my family are from. I was born, had lived in, been to school and worked across southern Africa, and when I returned to the UK, I had some strong international development experience under my belt. I'd worked for a big international organisation leading large, multi-country donor-funded projects and managing relationships with civil society and government. I started looking for jobs in the international development sector – I applied, applied and applied for jobs, increasingly ones I may have been over-qualified for, often hearing nothing back. I figured I must be doing something wrong as I wasn't familiar with the UK sector – maybe I wasn't filling out the application forms right? I asked friends who worked in third sector recruitment for help – but they said my applications were strong. In hindsight, I wonder if my "foreign sounding name" might have had something to do with it?"

– Female interviewee

What's in a name?

Other survey respondents reported having to change their name in order to get an interview in the first place, though that did not always lead to an interview, either.

> 'I think having a non-Christian name gets you fewer interviews'.
>
> 'I think having a non-white identity/name etc is definitely not an asset'.
>
> 'I had to change my name to get interviews in the sector'.
>
> – Survey respondents

Furthermore, according to some survey respondents, if English isn't your first language: 'you are interpreted as being 'thick'' and 'accent has a big part to play in getting roles in the sector. If you don't sound 'right' you aren't the right fit'.

The white gaze in recruitment

Dominant assumptions about what counts as 'expertise' or 'knowledge' are embedding racial hierarchies within recruitment processes. Our findings suggest that a 'white gaze' is pervasive across hiring practices. What do we mean by this? The scholar Robtel Neajai Pailey explains:

> "The 'white gaze' of development measures the political, socio-economic and cultural processes of Southern Black, brown and other people of colour against a standard of Northern whiteness and finds them incomplete, wanting, inferior or regressive. In essence, white is always right, and West is always best."[1]

Our exploration of recruitment dynamics suggest a pattern of devaluing of candidates' experiences of living, working and first-hand knowledge of the contexts in which development programming takes place despite the "talk" by development organisations of valuing lived experience:

> "Although I am Arab and speak Arabic, and have lived and worked in many different countries around the world, this was never brought up during interviews. I was never asked how I could use my language skills and cross-cultural understanding as an asset for the organisation. This is quite surprising as most humanitarian organizations work in Arabic-speaking countries."
>
> – Survey respondent

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

"I believe staffing in the UK international development sector is representative in terms of race, ethnicity, nationality and religion of the communities in which it works".

● 3% Yes　　● 94% No　　● 3% Don't know

1　Decentring the White Gaze of Development by Robtel Neajai Pailey (2019)

One interviewee has started to challenge the idea of judging 'capacity' by white, Western standards. He shows how devaluation of local knowledge is systematically embedded into recruitment practices in countries where programming is implemented:

> "I've started questioning why certain roles have to be designated as 'expat only'. I visit a specific African country every year, and every year, I ask why middle management positions need to be only available to expats. I've been told more than one year in a row that this is because there's no capacity in the country. I don't buy it. INGOs are hiding under the guise of 'capacity' to justify our own existence in these countries! And if there's still no 'capacity' after several years of us being operational in the country, what does that say about our work?

Interviewees for this report highlighted how the white gaze and its pervasiveness in recruitment practices is producing a very specific type of culture within development organisations. One female interviewee told us:

> "Recruitment is designed to reproduce a very specific culture. [You need] an advanced degree (which you rarely use), multiple languages, a string of (un- or low-paid internships), a few well-known INGOs or big NGOs on your CV, maybe a stint in academia. All experience that, funnily enough, is most often found amongst a subset of white populations. It's the perfect way to ensure reproduction...make it all about what you've done, but not what you can do."

Some respondents based outside the UK mentioned that their university degrees from institutions in low-middle income countries were not as equally valued as those from western academic institutions. This form of credentialism – the valuing of knowledge and expertise only if accompanied by specific forms of status such as elite universities – was pervasive in the accounts we were given by interviewees.

> "If you're not white and Oxbridge-educated you're not 'relatable'."
>
> – Survey respondent

Nepotism and cronyism were also repeatedly cited as being barriers to entry into parts of the sector.

> "Jobs continue to be given to 'friends' of those with power. If you know someone, you're far more likely to get in."
>
> – Interviewee

Occupational segregation

Our findings also suggest there are certain areas of work that people of colour find it particularly difficult to break into – programming and development communications are examples. One female interviewee said:

> "There are about 80 people in my department – out of them, only three people are Black, and perhaps five or so are south Asian.

We have no staff from the Middle East – despite the fact our work has a huge footprint there – or East Asia. I've noticed that there are certain parts of the organisation that are incredibly difficult for people of colour to get into: the meaty, front-facing programming and humanitarian roles go to white people. Why is that, when people of colour often have incredibly valuable insights into the regions where the work is taking place?"

"Development communications is an incredibly white space. Every interview I've ever been to has been an all-white panel. I go into these interviews fearing that I'm not going to get the job because I look so different to the panel – I'm mixed race, and I often wonder what must it be like for other people who aren't half-white."

– Female interviewee

Gendered barriers to recruitment

Women of colour in particular spoke about the prevalence of 'old boys' networks'.

"'Old boys' clubs will have the final say on recruitment and will block recruitment and promotions from any group – especially women and especially women of colour – who don't look/sound/ think like they do."

– Survey respondent

"[My experience has been] British white usually male leaders feeling they could not trust or take risks with someone 'different'."

– Survey respondent

It is important to understand the intersectional inequalities and particular assumptions and stereotypes Black women encounter when it comes to securing a role in an international development organisation. Here are the perspectives of two Black African women who speak about the marginalisation, as well as 'othering' that is commonplace:

"There are preconceived ideas about HOW or WHAT is expected from AFRICAN women. It has been difficult explaining that not all of us living in the UK are refugees, asylum seekers, or migrant workers. Some of us were BORN in the UK. That like my English colleagues we have chosen a career in international development because we also believe and think we have something to offer, that these choices should not be a limiting factor."

– Survey respondent

"The bias is a huge barrier to entry that's hard to overcome – you have no influence over whether they even give you, a Black woman from Africa, the time of day."

– Survey respondent

Having other types of intersecting identities that differ to those of the dominant groups in the development sector in the UK poses additional barriers:

> 'It is always very evident when I come into a room for an interview that I have a very different culture and way of speaking and being than the people in the room. That perception is doubled, as soon as I mention my lifelong health condition (when I do mention it). If I do get past this "outsider" hurdle and I am hired, I then undoubtedly feel the difference in how my managers treat me, as compared to others.'
>
> – Survey respondent

Respondents based outside of the UK, in the countries where development programming is implemented, told us about the additional structural obstacles they come across when it comes to being considered for a role in a foreign/UK NGO in country, which include unequal benefits packages, dual salary structures, lack of support for visa applications, as well as differential treatment and bias.

> "The bar is always set higher/out of reach for country office-based staff as opposed to the London based Staff."
>
> "British white usually male leaders feeling they can't trust or take risks with someone 'different'. [There is] lots of conscious and unconscious bias."

> "People with UK passports were given better packages and the salary offered in the UK is much more for the same role offered outside."
>
> – Survey respondents

As some interviewees and survey respondents highlighted, establishing the presence of discrimination in recruitment practices can be difficult. Discriminatory practices can be covert and so normalised that they are hidden or 'invisible'. 34% of survey respondents said they 'didn't know' whether they'd faced any discrimination during recruitment. Some of these respondents had suspicions but were reluctant to be definitive either way:

> "You know – it's impossible to answer with confidence [whether I've been discriminated against when I've applied for a job], and there will be always the doubt that it was my fault that I'm not getting jobs. The responsibility of proving these biases are difficult to pin down on the individual level, though research done and published on these issues have told us that discrimination is actually happening."
>
> "[Whenever] I don't get a job… it makes me question myself and the process itself. What part of this is because I'm Muslim? Because I have brown skin? You start to doubt yourself and this kind of treatment affects your confidence."
>
> – Survey respondents

Getting on

Structure and systems

As individuals encounter organisations, they come into contact with dress norms, stories people tell about what goes on, the organisation's formal rules and procedures, its formal codes of behaviour, rituals, tasks, pay systems, jargon, and jokes only understood by insiders and so on. The iEduNote article 'Organizational Culture: Definition, Characteristics, Roles, Types' refers to two types of culture: high context and low context culture which relates to how an employee's thoughts, opinions, feelings, and upbringing affect how they act within a given culture.

North America and Western Europe are generally considered to have low-context cultures. A low context culture is one in which things are fully (though concisely) spelled out. Things are made explicit, and there is considerable dependence on what is said or written. Low-context culture means that organisations in these places have direct, individualistic employees who tend to base decisions on facts.

In a low context culture, more responsibility is placed on the listener to keep up their knowledge base and remain plugged into informal networks. High-context cultures are the opposite in that trust is the most important part of business dealings. There are areas in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa that can be considered the high context.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

"I believe POC staff bring value to the UK international development sector".

- **96%** Yes
- **1%** No
- **3%** Don't know

A high context culture is one in which the communicators assume a great deal of commonality of knowledge and views, so that less is spelled out explicitly and much more is implicit or communicated in indirect ways. Organisations that have high-context cultures are collectivist and focus on interpersonal relationships. Individuals from high-context cultures might be interested in getting to know the person they are dealing with in order to get a gut feeling on decision making. They may also be more concerned about business teams and group success rather than individual achievement.

As mentioned above, Bond's survey from 2020 showed that 73% of Bond members have diversity and inclusion policies and are committed to both diversity and inclusion.

What happens then, when racialised groups are successful in landing a job in international development? How included do they feel? Our survey findings paint a rather bleak picture. They indicate that racism and discrimination is commonplace.

The majority of respondents to the survey had experienced an incident of workplace racism within the past year, or had supported a colleague of colour who had undergone such an incident. These findings correlate with those in ACEVO's research into racism in the charity sector in the UK, in which 68% of respondents (335 out of 489 people) said that they had experienced, witnessed or heard stories about racism in their time in the charity sector.

Our qualitative data points to organisational cultures that are not only non-inclusive, but that are reproducing racism, sexism, Islamophobia, and other discriminatory organisational norms.

Our survey data suggests that daily experiences of differential treatment and marginalisation remain ingrained in the cultures and practices of development institutions.

Survey respondents and interviewees gave countless examples of how they felt they had been treated differently to their white peers, and described how this had an adverse impact on their career progression. Once again, our findings strongly resonate with ACEVO's Home Truths report findings from 2020, in which people of colour in the UK charity sector gave examples of how they had been unfairly denied development opportunities or acting-up responsibilities as compared to white peers.

"I feel like I have been treated less favourably than my white, male counterparts. For instance, I started as an intern, but since receiving a job in the organisation (2.5 years ago) I haven't been able to shake my intern responsibilities and have been continuously moved around internally from role to role without my consent, which has hugely impacted my professional development in a negative way. The two white male interns that were hired after me for the same internship have since received stable, steady jobs within the organisation, managing to get rid of all their intern responsibilities immediately even when I still retained mine, and have not once been pushed to move roles internally."

– Survey respondent

69% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that had been able to take leadership on internal initiatives as much as their white peers had

65% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had had equal access to mentors as their white peers

71% of respondents said they had fewer opportunities to represent their organisations externally than their white peers did

50% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had had the same training opportunities as their white peers

"In terms of support and supervision, I felt that my manager was unsure how to relate to me compared to my white colleagues in a similar position, therefore I felt I had slightly less supervision/ support."

– Survey respondent

"My first job in international development was with a small non-profit consultancy. I already had a Master's degree and experience of working within the civil service where I did challenging work. When I got to my new job, I was expected to do very menial jobs – cleaning the fridge and replacing the toilet rolls when they ran out. I kept pushing to do more challenging work but didn't get anywhere. Around the same time, I joined, a white male graduate joined as an intern. Almost immediately, despite the fact that I was better qualified than him and I was a permanent staff member rather than an intern, he was given substantial amounts of responsibility. For example, he was meeting clients and given the types of opportunities I had been fighting for. Not only this, but another woman of colour in the office had a key specialism in the thematic area he was allowed to work on - her specialist skills were not being recognised either. His work was often flawed, which we called out from time to time – but his performance was never critiqued by senior leaders, though I would sometimes be scolded for not replacing the toilet rolls in the staff loo."

– Female interviewee

Another interviewee described how she had to pay for her own training, even though she was a full-time employee of the organisation.

"I was trying so hard to complement my skills so I could progress, but there was little focus by the organisation on how they could support me to progress. I even had to pay for training out of my own salary – which didn't seem in line with the organisation's stated principles of promoting women's leadership or its so-called feminist values."
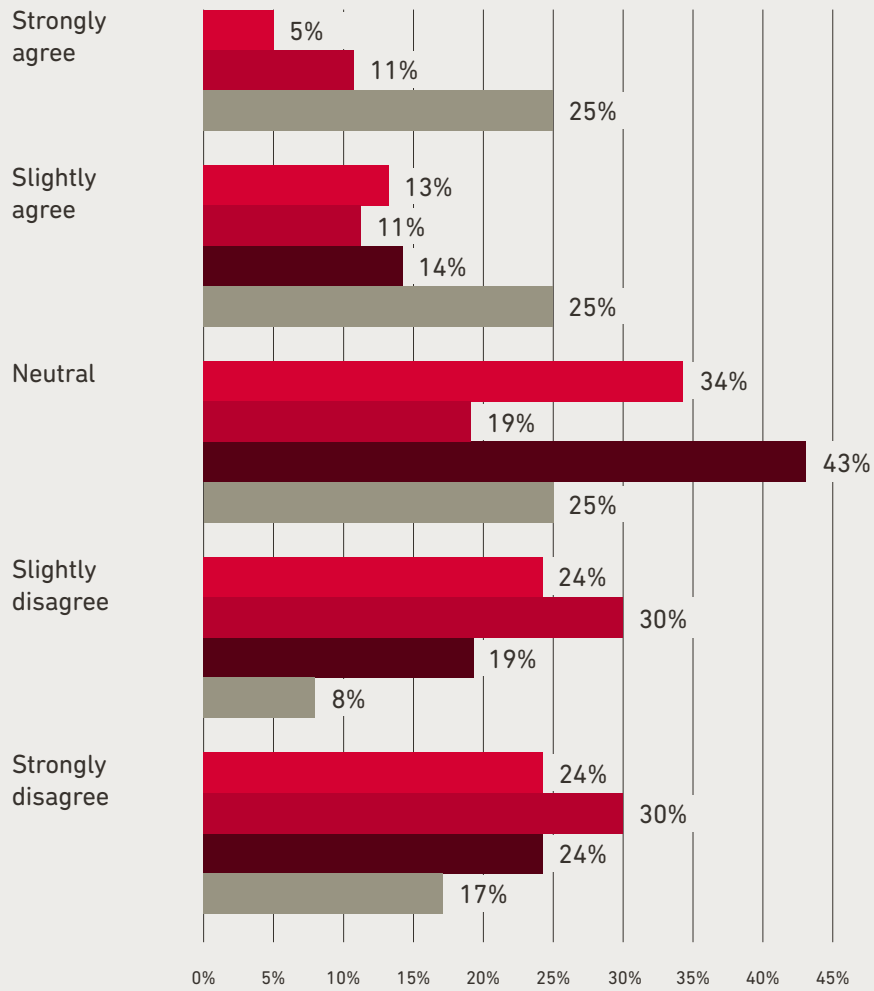
Out of all groups, Black women were the most likely to strongly disagree that they had equal access to mentors as their white colleagues, once again, suggesting the presence of intersecting race and power relations that tend to position Black women unequally with other groups in the workplace. 60% of Black women strongly disagreed or disagreed they had equal access to mentors as others in their organisation. One Black female interviewee told us:

"Where are all my role models? Senior managers in my organisation are about 95% white. I've been looking for a mentor who looks like me for almost two years, but they are few and far between... And let's not forget also that BAME people are not a homogenous group – there's a hierarchy going on. As a Black woman, my legitimacy and credibility are called into question a lot."

A lack of access to mentors compared to others was also described as a significant issue by Asian women, as well as men of colour. Mentoring can be incredibly helpful for career progression, especially when mentors play a more proactive role akin to sponsorship by putting their mentees in front of influential people, and by advocating for them when promotion opportunities arise.
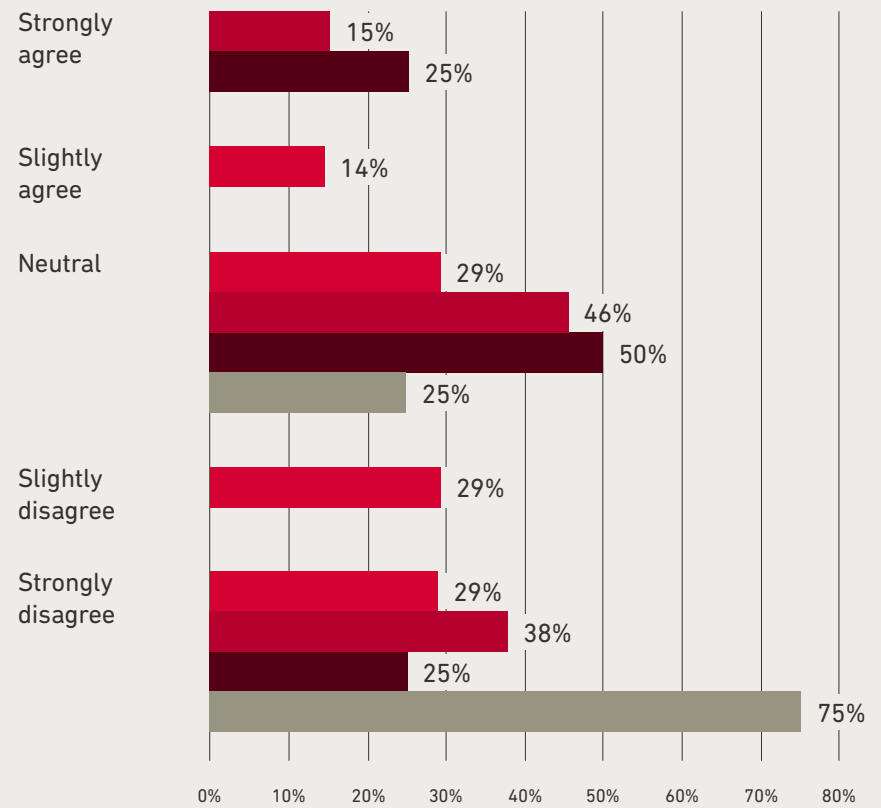
Female
Do you have access to mentors?

Strongly agree
- 5%
- 11%
- 25%

Slightly agree
- 13%
- 11%
- 14%
- 25%

Neutral
- 34%
- 19%
- 43%
- 25%

Slightly disagree
- 24%
- 30%
- 19%
- 8%

Strongly disagree
- 24%
- 30%
- 24%
- 17%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30% 35% 40% 45%

- ● Asian/Asian British
- ● Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- ● Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
- ● Other ethnic groups

Male
Do you have access to mentors?

Strongly agree
- 15%
- 25%

Slightly agree
- 14%

Neutral
- 29%
- 46%
- 50%
- 25%

Slightly disagree
- 29%

Strongly disagree
- 29%
- 38%
- 25%
- 75%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

- ● Asian/Asian British
- ● Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- ● Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
- ● Other ethnic groups

Incidents of racism

68% of survey respondents had experienced an incident of workplace racism in the past year, or had supported one of their colleagues to deal with such an incident. The most common reported form of racism was that perpetrated by line managers.

"[I've had] a mix of microaggressions, bullying and outright racism and xenophobia [from my managers] over the years. One manager had a whole "white saviour" complex that was patronising to me and didn't help my progression as she thought it would be too much for me."

– Survey respondent

"After an external meeting, where I felt I was being quiet as I was listening, [my line manager] said to me during my one-to-one "you know what the problem is, you take up too much space". During my first week in the job, he spoke with a disapproving tone when I mentioned that my boyfriend at the time worked in the City implying that he should instead be fighting for social justice because he's Black. When this manager left, his replacement was even worse. He started treating me like a glorified secretary and described me as 'hostile' and 'abrupt' whenever I raised issues with him... He also accused me of being a supporter of Barack Obama, as if this was a disciplinary offence! He trawled my social media feed and... accused me of supporting Hamas."

– Female interviewee

These dynamics can be very difficult to challenge, because of the power relationships that exist:

"A former colleague of mine had just returned from a refugee camp. I asked her how it was: 'Fine she said, but I can't stand the hijab. It's so oppressive to women.' She went on a rant about this, knowing that I am of a Muslim background. It's hard to push back on this, especially when the person is very senior."

– Female interviewee

Reporting racism

Our findings paint a picture of senior leaders and HR departments in NGOs not being fully equipped or effective in dealing with incidents of racism. According to interviewees, informal complaints are oftentimes not taken seriously, and formal grievances rarely result in an outcome that complainants find satisfactory. We found cases of employees having to continue to work in environments and with colleagues who made them feel unsafe. One female interviewee raised a complaint against her line manager about racism and Islamophobia:

"I spoke with [my manager's] line manager who was the head of the programme on which we both worked which seemed to have little effect on his behaviour and so I raised a grievance against him – within days, he issued a counter grievance, in which he accused me of discriminating against white men and described me as not being a culture fit... What was disheartening but not surprising was the organisation's response. Managers, HR and the external investigator hired failed to effectively deal with

the issues I'd raised. All of them including my fellow union workplace representatives and Unite the union itself seemed to lack an understanding of what Islamophobia is and how racism exists in the workplace. The whole process took around four months. It was afterwards that I was told that it was likely that the external investigator was friendly with the management in the organisation. I had had doubts about how neutral she was. I was shocked that the organisation and the external investigator took the serious and unfounded accusations made against me seriously but not seriously enough in the beginning to call on all the witnesses I'd provided and also to ensure my safety following the investigation. One of the outcomes of this grievance recommended 'not to discuss issues relating to race in the workplace'! I found this ridiculous because the team I was a part of worked on social justice issues so how could we not discuss race? Following the grievance, I was expected to go back to being line managed by him and resume my one-to-ones with him. I did not feel safe sitting alone with him in a room because his grievance had showed me what he was capable of."

Another female interviewee described the difficulty of issuing informal complaints against her line manager, because racist behaviours can often be covert and insidious.

"[My manager's behaviour] was affecting me badly, but I was determined to find a way to resolve it. Someone more senior got involved and I asked for a mediated conversation with her and eventually HR got involved. They quite rightly told me to

be a specific as possible with my complaints – but because her behaviours were often covert, and not explicit, it was really difficult to do this. I was having trouble sleeping, it was affecting me at work and weighing on me outside the office. After a couple of meetings with HR where I shared my experience (there was crying involved, and I've never cried at work!), HR's recommendation was that I go on sick leave. There was no clear idea of how the underlying problem would be solved – instead, I'd been treated as the problem in this situation, despite the fact that another Black female colleague was having an identical problem with the same (white) manager."

Structural racism and staff in low- and middle-income countries

We were unable to consult with as many staff of UK organisations working in the countries where programmes and projects take place as we would have liked to. However, as mentioned above, those who did respond to our survey gave examples of differential treatment, dual salary structures as well as barriers to promotion. These dynamics are long-standing and have been raised in the past.

Tindyebwa Agaba and an anonymous co-author described their own experiences of working in the aid sector in 2018, writing about

"a hierarchy of worth, with workers from the low-middle income countries, especially if they are Black, valued the least... Equality is a charade in this sector.

The realities:

Hazardous conditions – Black workers more likely to be put in harm's way.

Housing conditions – better for whites than for Black colleagues.

Promotions – white workers promoted over more competent Black colleagues with years more experience.

Complaints about these and other injustices – ignored and dismissed."

Lydia Namubiru has written about the pressure Ugandan staff felt to assimilate into British and US NGOs in her country, as well as the structural racism experienced by her and her colleagues:

"Ugandans felt much of the organisational culture they were expected to embrace was outright racist. We were angry about unequal pay between white colleagues and their Ugandan counterparts (the payroll leaked once, but we also could tell from their lunches & gourmet coffees)."

Deep structures

The concept of organisational 'deep structures' comes in very useful in helping us to understand some of the rules and values that are maintaining the subordinate position of people of colour, and sustaining white privilege, in so many international development organisations.

Developed by the organisation Gender at Work, the concept of deep structures refers to the 'normal', often unquestioned ways of working in an organisation, which form part of the culture of our organisations. If we imagine an organisation like an iceberg, the deep structures are what happens underneath the water line. Deep structures include a set of expectations of behaviour that can be fundamentally gendered and racialised, and which marginalised groups, including people of colour, are constantly having to negotiate and resist. These deep structures can be so powerful they override any organisational policies or commitments to equality.

What are some of the deep structure dynamics that are constraining the ability of people of colour to assert their rights in our organisations?

Devaluing the knowledge and expertise of actors in low and middle-income countries

Several interviewees and survey respondents spoke about how it was normal in their organisations for racist attitudes and assumptions about implementing partners and staff in the countries where programmes take place to pass unchallenged. These types of dynamics have their legacies in colonial times, when devaluing of local knowledge, culture and expertise was part of the colonial project. Our interviewees and survey respondents described how capacity continues to be judged according to Western, namely white, standards.

"When I once challenged the way a senior leader was speaking about one of our implementing partners, they asked me why I was getting so upset. I told her that I felt her derogatory

remarks about the partner as being 'unstrategic' and 'incapable of holding their own in an international meeting' were offensive to me, as I was from the country where the partner was based. Her response was, 'But I don't think of you as being from XYZ country. I don't even see you as being mixed race – you're mostly British now, aren't you?"

– Female interviewee

"Although I have not faced discrimination in the workplace, I have definitely felt a hidden discrimination against local partners across Africa, for example 'low capacity' being used as a kind term for stupid, used when it comes to them not fulfilling our complicated reporting requirements."

– Survey respondent

"I've seen that I'm treated by colleagues as if I have different levels of expertise and knowledge according to whether my hair is braided, or whether it's straightened, Western-style."

– Female interviewee

Once again, these findings resonate with those in the ACEVO 2020 report, which found that 147 people of colour (out of 199) had been treated as intellectual inferiors by their white counterparts (page 15 Acevo report).

Some interviewees gave examples of overt and normalised racism against staff working in countries where development projects are implemented.

"I had a meeting with two humanitarian aid workers who were back in the UK after being deployed in a fragile area. I asked them about their local team and how they were working together. 'I can't stand their bad breath, 'one of them said. 'God knows what it is they eat, but I almost bought them all some toothpaste and told them to go home and use it.' The other aid worker laughed in agreement."

– Male interviewee

"We were doing a strategy planning day in our organisation. We had to do a 'realistic' role play involving some stakeholders we worked closely with. Our instructions were to be as honest to real life as we could be. Someone acted out the role of a government advisor in an African country – they played to racist stereotypes about Africans being corrupt, lazy, and uncaring about the welfare of the people in their communities. Everyone in the room found this hilarious. The more offensive the role play became, the more people laughed. I was dying inside. Why was I the only one seeing this? There was me and other person of colour in the room. She looked uncomfortable. Neither of us said anything."

– Male interviewee

Expectations of 'gratitude' and subservience from people of colour

Interviewees and survey respondents gave examples of how organisational norms demanded they demonstrate 'gratitude' and 'compliance' to have a job in the international development sector. If they did not perform gratitude for being granted 'access' to the sector, they would face sanctions.

> "You're constantly having to work harder to prove that you've earned your position and you're good at what you do, or somehow made to feel that you should be 'very grateful' for the opportunities you've been 'given'. It's like you've never really earned anything, you've just been lucky enough to be 'given' the opportunity!"
>
> – Survey respondent

These expectations can sometimes be gendered – women may face increased expectations of compliant behaviour in the form of 'gratitude' and be stereotyped as 'angry' or 'difficult' if they do not conform.

> "As person of colour, and a woman in particular, I think there is a lot of expectation on us to put our heads down and 'get on with the work', almost being grateful to be working in the sector and not speak out too much/raise issues/demand more rights as a worker. A lot of unwritten rules in the sector are racialised, and it is really difficult to point that out without being seen as difficult or a troublemaker."
>
> – Survey respondent

> "You're stigmatised as an angry brown woman if you don't conform"
>
> – Survey respondent

In her book White Tears/Brown Scars: How White Feminism Betrays Women of Colour, the writer Ruby Hamad explains how stereotypes such as the 'angry Black woman' date back to colonial times and were carefully constructed in order to rationalise the subjugation of women along with their lands. As our interviewees and survey respondents have indicated, these stereotypes continue to hold currency in our workplaces, and are mobilised in order to keep women of colour 'in their place'.

A few of our male interviewees had also experienced these expectations of 'gratitude':

> "I encouraged my white colleagues to attend an event by someone who was researching the concept of whiteness in international development and wanted to speak to white people about it. The person convening the event had publicly said on social media that very few white people had signed up, so I wanted to let my colleagues know that this would be a good opportunity for the organisation. One colleague became defensive and angry about this, despite them planning on attending this after I pushed them to, critiquing the convenor of the event because 'people would have to give up their time' to attend it, and even suggesting this person should be grateful for white people 'volunteering their time', rather than blaming white people for not coming."

This expectation of gratitude and submission can be even more pronounced when younger people of colour are involved, said one interviewee who has extensive experience of working on youth activism in global development. Marginalisation and exclusion within the organisation can be a consequence.

> "I realised very quickly that if you're a young person of colour who is also politically conscious and don't fit the mould of being a 'model minority', then senior leadership teams feel very threatened by you. The young people and I of colour I worked with … felt the brunt of being excluded from the top tables of discussion, despite the fact that, on paper, our organisation championed youth engagement. I noticed that the reasons given by senior leadership teams for not allowing more youth representation in key meetings were racialised. We were told that young people were too 'loud' (this is something Black people hear a lot) and we were told we were not used to being part of a 'professional environment'. The more literate we were with anti-oppression theory and practice, the less the organisation would welcome you."
>
> – Male interviewee

The function of being grateful and submissive is 'knowing one's' place' in a carefully constructed racial hierarchy, as one survey respondent told us.

> "Socially [colleagues] exclude you or sometimes are offended

if you come across as any better than you should be, e.g. If you are well travelled or have been well educated in the west, white colleagues may resent this. the only Black person they are comfortable with is the one beneath them in terms of education and economic status."

These norms can be so powerful, they lead to many people internalising their importance. One survey respondent told us:

> "My parents are working class I was raised by my mum who did not speak English when she came to the UK and did not go to school… I feel I should be grateful to be in my position considering my background. I know this sector is dominated by well-educated individuals, often with language skills and experience overseas I do not have – this increases my reluctance to request more training/progression, I do not want to appear ungrateful."

Hostility towards meaningful collective action by people of colour

While many of the larger development organisations may have employee resource groups for people of colour – sometimes called BAME networks in the UK context – our research findings suggest there can be reluctance and, at times, hostility, towards people of colour who organise and advocate for an increased focus on anti-racism in their organisations.

> "It took us two years of fighting to finally get approval to set up a BAME network in our organisation."
>
> – Survey respondent

> "I wanted to set up a network for people of colour in the large INGO where I worked. But I met with resistance: I was told it would be a lengthy process, that HR would have to approve it and that anything we did shouldn't undermine or compromise the existing gender network that existed in the organisation. As a brown man who cared about feminism and other forms of oppression, I just couldn't understand this approach!"
>
> – Male interviewee

Sometimes, pushback comes just from requesting increased representation of people of colour, rather than collective action.

> "I organised a big event on women's leadership and wanted to include strong BAME representation on the invite list. But I faced resistance from my manager on this – she was keen to include strong female representation, but when I asked for equal numbers of invites for the organisation's BAME network, I was overruled. This points to a broader issue of how the issues of race were seen as being in opposition to issues of women's rights in the organisation."
>
> – Female interviewee

As a couple of the examples above illustrate, space for work on anti-racism sometimes gets pitted against work on gender or women's

rights, making it hard to build alliances and ensure broad-based solidarity or mutual support. Our interviewees and survey respondents point to another trend – namely, for 'class' or another social justice issue to be mentioned by white leaders whenever claims are made for a greater focus on racial justice in an organisation. Concepts like 'intersectionality' and understanding of how systems of oppression intersect, and cannot be separated out from each other, are poorly understood across much of the sector – and sometimes actively resisted. (See next section below for example.)

> "When I've tried to champion diversity in NGOs, I was told by a white colleague that 'diversity is not just about race'. Instead of challenging it, I apologised and talked about other diversity issues in an attempt to give myself credibility and legitimise myself in front of others. Of course, people of colour know that diversity isn't just about race – but statements like these are said to simply shut down a discussion about race, prejudice and bias, in the first place, while putting people of colour on the back foot – something they've had to do throughout their careers."
>
> – Male interviewee

Marginalisation of women of colour in 'feminist' spaces, or spaces for women

Women of colour gave multiple examples of how they did not have meaningful access to the spaces in their organisation that could have supported them to progress and claim their rights, as they had been marginalised from them. Often, these were organisational women's networks in larger institutions.

"I would take part in various women's platforms in this NGO, but there was limited BAME representation in the groups, and whenever I raised an issue, I was viewed as 'problematic'; I was even accused of being 'aggressive' – something women of colour are often told when they disagree... I wanted to play a meaningful role in these women's platforms but was told that I could only do admin responsibilities. My problem with these groups was that they didn't want to take on issues relating to intersectionality. They felt threatened by the organisation's BAME network – which I was also a member of - and never showed any allyship with us. Even when you work on women's rights, with people who are self-proclaimed feminists, there is a lack of solidarity, support and allyship."

– Female interviewee

The below example shows how this marginalisation can take place after claims for a more equitable distribution of power.

"During a recruitment process for a senior position, women working in our country offices in Africa stressed the importance of recruiting locally. However, the head of HR, a white woman, interpreted this as an attack upon her professionalism and ability to do a good job and started crying. All the other white women in the meeting rallied around her, and the colleagues in Africa, who had raised an important issue about local leadership, were sanctioned and told to apologise in public to this person. They faced considerable isolation and exclusion by the head of HR after that."

– Female interviewee

Devaluing communication which deviates from normative notions of whiteness

"I can only work in a policymaking environment because I sound like I belong, I'm able to code switch... So, you navigate and try to find your way through, all while talking in euphemisms so you can inject some change. I would love to speak openly about decolonisation and decolonial practice, but I can't use these terms with most organisations I work with. I have to frame everything in a way that isn't going to scare white development or foreign policy organisations. This has an impact – not only is it mentally exhausting to do the 'double-think', but it also affects the quality of the work."

– Female interviewee

Another interviewee explained how code-switching – the way we adjust our style of speech and vocabulary in order to assimilate or 'fit into' our environment – takes a heavy toll. It requires that people of colour (and, indeed, other minoritised groups) bear a heavier cognitive load than others and may leave someone feeling like they have to dissociate from their identity.

"Using the 'right' language (white, middle-class, southern) and coding is such a vital part of being able to progress in the international development sector. Not being able to speak the 'right' language, or code-switch, is often used to keep people of colour and working-class people behind and prevent them from progressing in their career. As a result, I've learned to assimilate and make others around me feel comfortable, learning that words like 'interesting' take on a different meaning from the literal one I was taught growing up. It took a lot of effort to learn this new 'language' which forces you to abandon your culture, and class. I had to learn English as an immigrant to the UK, no one told me I would have to learn another. We talk about no one behind left behind in the sector, but some of us are told to leave ourselves behind and become another; we do this every day we show up at work."

– Male interviewee

"I know how to speak the coded language and I conform to the 'white' social norms I need to in order to get by. So much so, that a very senior [white] leader once told me over dinner: 'You know, you don't behave like a typical African'. I asked him what a 'typical African' behaved like. He said, 'you're confident and you speak your mind'. It was clear he expected all Africans to be submissive and behave in the same way."

– Male interviewee

Cultures of micromanagement

Women of colour interviewees and women responding to our survey gave a pattern of feedback highlighting the extent to which they faced micromanagement from their line managers, and lacked the autonomy needed to be able to thrive in their roles. ACEVO's 2020 research into racism in the UK charity sector also found that people of colour were subject to excessive surveillance and scrutiny by colleagues, managers or supervisors.

"I experienced daily microaggressions from my manager. I was micromanaged in a way that others in my team were not – she would silently pop up behind me when I was working to see what was on my computer screen; she never respected my lunch breaks; and she would undermine my capability in front of other people. Other people noticed it, too – but no-one said anything on my behalf."

– Female interviewee

"I also feel I get overly corrected on things like grammar and jargon though my role is technical, and I am a native English speaker"

– Survey respondent

One interviewee described the mental toll this type of micromanagement had on her.

"[My manager] insisted on scrutinising work in a way that undermined me – I'd write routine reports and letters and she'd insist on reading and editing them before they were circulated. Her comments were mostly grammatical nit-picking and micro-management of a sort I had never experienced. From the get-go, I tried to understand her concerns and worked to find ways to address them… The most difficult thing about how she acted towards me was that her behaviour and why it sat wrong was very hard to pin down – her tone was often patronising, and she would dismiss my expertise. It was utterly exhausting. I would question myself – was I imagining things? Was I going mad here? It wasn't until I spoke to the other two Black women in my team, that we realised we all had the exact same experience… [A white] woman [line managed by the same person] was treated very differently – she was given lots of stretch assignments, autonomy and responsibilities that the Black women hadn't."

– Female interviewee

Microaggressions

Microaggressions can be described as brief and commonplace verbal, behavioural indignities – intentional or unintentional – that communicate slights and insults to a particular group or person.[2] They can be enacted through daily interactions, as some of our interviewees explain:

"My name doesn't give away my ethnicity. People often assume they'll be meeting a white person before meeting me in person. I notice their reaction as they gauge the person being presented in front of them, trying to suppress the myriad of emotions, ranging from shock to embarrassment at their own ignorance, which can't be hidden from me as they then force a smile. I was once representing my organisation at an international human rights conference in Istanbul. Upon approaching a white member of the group on the first day to check in (I had not met them before) to introduce myself – I was waved away disparagingly in the German for 'no' as if I was going to accost the man for some spare change."
– Male interviewee

"Very senior people working in this sector have such biased assumptions that all Africans live underprivileged lives. I remember having a conversation with a very senior leader, in which I was calling out the level of elitism in the organisation and the sector as a whole. He was genuinely surprised to hear allegations of elitism: 'We're not elitist – after all, you work here,' he told me."
– Male interviewee

2   https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17516773/

Getting up

There is no comprehensive, sector-wide data on levels of representation of people of colour in the UK global development sector. Green Park's 2018 research into diversity in leadership of the Major 100 UK Charities concluded that 15.8% of the leadership in UK international development NGOs were Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic, but the types of organisations surveyed were by no means representative of the diversity of the UK development sector which is made up of numerous smaller and medium-sized organisations. Bond's survey of 150 members in July 2020 suggests that people

of colour are represented in certain types of leadership structures. For example, they were represented in between 22–25% of boards of trustees across organisations of different sizes but they remain underrepresented when it comes to holding the powerful Chair position in a board or, indeed, at CEO levels.

Over the past year, we have seen calls for the leadership structures within UK NGOs to become more representative of the communities where the majority of their work is implemented.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

"In my experience race, ethnicity, nationality or religion has been an asset when it comes to applying for roles and working in the international development sector".
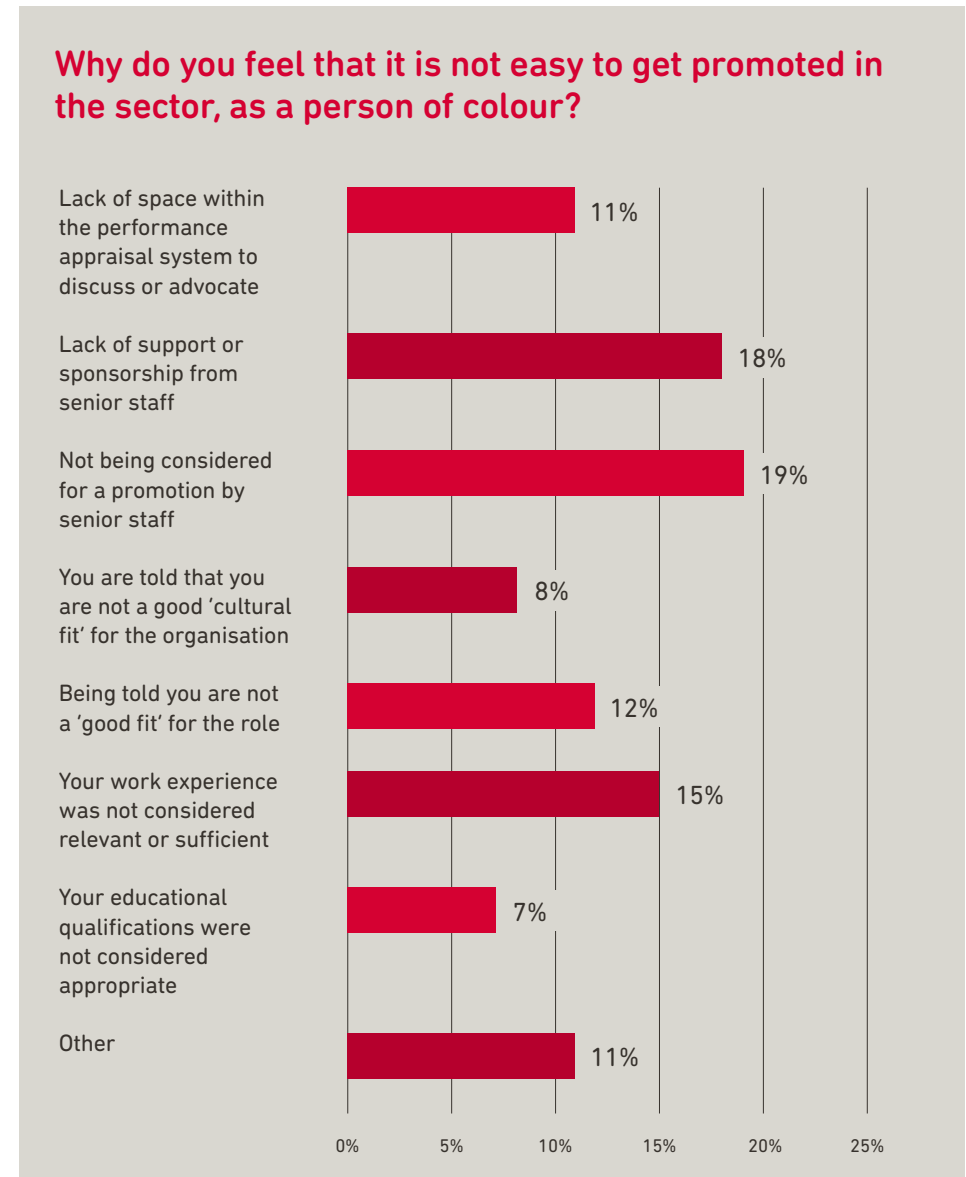
● **25%**
Yes

● **59%**
No

● **16%**
Don't know

"People need to hear not just diverse, but differing perspectives. Contrary to mainstream myths, solutions to our greatest shared challenges are not born in the boardroom nor the pages of a proposal. The falsehood that we are singular, that we can just ideate or consume our way to a better world without fundamentally transforming the roots of the economic and political systems that drive inequality and environmental destruction—is one we have to actively fight against right now."

– Jennifer Lentfer

There is an overwhelming sense from the people of colour we surveyed that it is harder for them to get promoted into leadership positions than a person from a non-minoritised group. Men (90%) and women of colour (84%) felt that there were additional barriers to promotion for them because of their racialised identities. People living outside the UK, working in the countries where development programmes are implemented, also reported facing challenges in securing promotion opportunities.
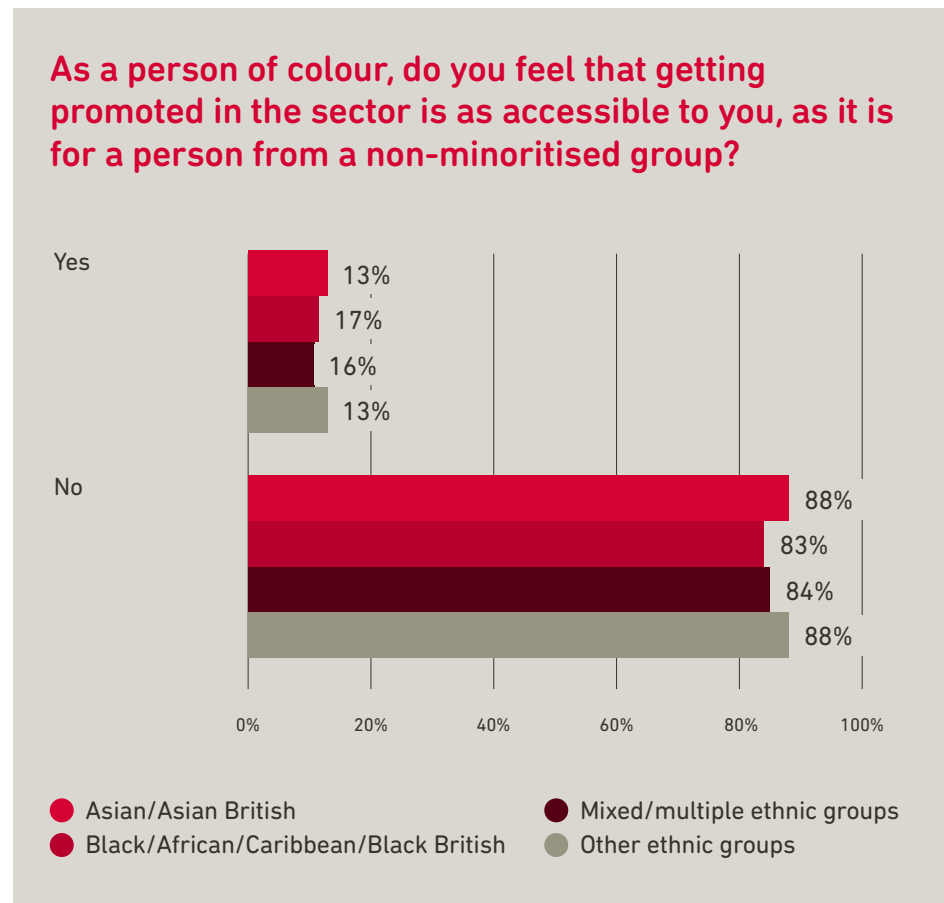
The graphic below outlines the main reasons survey respondents gave for their inability to secure a promotion.

As a person of colour, do you feel that getting promoted in the sector is as accessible to you, as it is for a person from a non-minoritised group?

Yes
- 13%
- 17%
- 16%
- 13%

No
- 88%
- 83%
- 84%
- 88%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

● Asian/Asian British
● Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
● Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
● Other ethnic groups

Why do you feel that it is not easy to get promoted in the sector, as a person of colour?

Reason	%
Lack of space within the performance appraisal system to discuss or advocate	11%
Lack of support or sponsorship from senior staff	18%
Not being considered for a promotion by senior staff	19%
You are told that you are not a good 'cultural fit' for the organisation	8%
Being told you are not a 'good fit' for the role	12%
Your work experience was not considered relevant or sufficient	15%
Your educational qualifications were not considered appropriate	7%
Other	11%

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25%

Survey respondents and interviewees told us:

"[I have been] constantly overlooked for leadership opportunities. When one did become available, I was paid over £9k less than my white counterpart doing the same role."

– Survey respondent

"Applied for promotion seven times, all of those went to white colleagues."

– Survey respondent

"Over the course of my career I've interviewed for about six internal jobs – each time I've hoped to be able to progress internally in the organisation I was in. However, I've never once been offered one of these positions – they always go to candidates who happen to be white. And I don't understand, how am I less qualified than someone external? When I have the knowledge, the experience and understand the project as an insider. Is racism at play here? I don't know. But it makes me question myself and the process itself. What part of this is because I'm Muslim? Because I have brown skin? You start to doubt yourself and this kind of treatment affects your confidence."

– Male interviewee

"In terms of progression into leadership I was always the last one on the list or to be asked as I wasn't seen as management material – yet how could they know that?"

– Survey respondent

One survey respondent shared their experiences of how it had been impossible to get a leadership position in a London office, and that after years of lobbying, they were offered a leadership position overseas. They said:

"It's almost as if a person of colour can't manage white colleagues in the UK, but are able to manage colleagues from lower-income countries."

Lydia Namubiru has powerfully written about the dynamics she and other Ugandan staff faced when it came to securing managerial positions in NGOs in Uganda.

"We were angry that while it had taken each of us as many as three formal interviews to land our jobs, our white colleagues spoke of running into each other at Kabira country club and chatting. Next thing, or so it seemed to us, they offered each other high power jobs, as bosses of the rigorously hired local staff. Where Ugandan staff needed higher degrees and years of experience to be managers, for our white colleagues,

only a higher degree sufficed. So, they told stories like, "I was interning in the U.S office when this project came through. I had assisted on research for the proposal, so I was asked if I wanted to come to Uganda and run it."

Gender and progression

Women of colour gave examples of some of the gender power relations that prevent them from having access to leadership opportunities.

"Majority of the male managers that I have worked for have felt threatened by women of colour - often favouring those who look and think like them where there are shared interests and backgrounds. They collude with them to create a very hostile environment."

– Survey respondent

"I have always had white women as my manager, and they have never seemed interested or cared about my career progression into leadership – as if they were worried about having to share power with another woman. Instead, it was made very difficult for me to progress and even pass probation sometimes."

– Survey respondent

Survey respondents spoke about cultures of credentialism being embedded into leadership recruitment processes – meaning it was

not just about your race, but also your levels of privilege and status, including whether you attended the 'right' Western universities.

"Despite [my organisation] saying that they want a diverse and inclusive workforce. the majority of new hires, especially for senior leadership roles, are from overwhelming privileged white backgrounds. Everyone has been to an elite university."

"At the organisation I work for, there is diversity in terms of race and diaspora, class and language, but only at more junior levels. At management or higher it's almost exclusively white, middle class, and British. There doesn't seem to be much appreciation for difference, and my INGO works a little like an old boys' network, where Directors have all attended the same Oxbridge unis, and all have the same sorts of friends and backgrounds."

Others spoke about how anti-Blackness was prevalent in senior-level recruitment.

"There is an underlying prejudice towards Black people in international development generally, but especially for leadership positions. Where there is decision making involved, these roles are kept to other races."

– Survey respondent

"There is an underlying prejudice towards Black people in international development generally, but especially for

leadership positions. Where there is decision making involved, these roles are kept to other races."

– Survey respondent

Some survey respondents gave examples of how Black people within the sector can face unique types of exclusion and isolation that can significantly affect career progression.

"Also, on a personal level, there is often lack of understanding about the challenges about being a POC, more specifically a Black person, and even more specifically a Black woman in international development, the dual identity associated with being a member of the diaspora, and often you have to advocate for yourself alone which is exhausting. Culturally, there might be some behaviours that as a Black person aren't seen as being associated with "leadership", and also the general burden on being a minority in this space isn't understood or acknowledged, and supervisors are often white men/women who can't fully relate with your background and the challenges you experience in navigating life and the professional space – this impacts the type of mentorship you can have, and also career progression."

– Survey respondent

"I have to think seven times before applying for a job. I cannot leave my current job, even when I know it is not good because I am worried that I will have to take a lower-paid job just to be

considered; it's nearly impossible to move across or up into leadership as a Black manager."

– Survey respondent

Experiences of leaders of colour

In 2018, the Pay and Equalities Survey 2018, published by the charity leader's body Acevo, found that just 3% cent of charity chief executives were from a Black, Asian and minority ethnic background, compared with 14% of the population nationwide. The statistics are even more stark for women: just 2.25% of senior leaders within the sector were women of colour and only 2.9% of trustees, according to data gathered from the top 500 charities by income by the diversity agency Inclusive Boards.

Developing opportunities at the start of their careers is not necessarily the answer to getting more people from diverse backgrounds into leadership roles. "Many initiatives are tackling the beginning of the pipeline at junior level, with an assumption that if you get that end sorted people will trickle up," says Srabani Sen. "But if there is still unconscious bias about who comes up the ranks, it doesn't matter how much effort you put in at the bottom of the pipeline, it will never change what the top of the sector looks like." Srabani is the new chair of trustees at ActionAid UK, who has 30 years of experience in the not-for-profit sector, including three CEO roles and three chair roles.

As part of this report, we spoke to people of colour who had succeeded in stepping into leadership positions at UK development

organisations and who were either currently in a leadership position in a development organisation or had been in the past two years. There were some key similarities in their responses, outlining how leaders from racialised groups face distinct challenges once in post. Our findings tell us that fixating on leadership headcounts without intentional effort to change workplace cultures and structures will not translate into inclusive outcomes.

Ongoing challenges to authority and legitimacy

Assuming a more powerful position within the racial hierarchy in an organisation can lead to pushback. Interviewees holding/who had held leadership positions in UK development organisations gave examples of how they faced different types of resistance from more junior staff, who often did not see them as legitimate leaders.

"Another common thing that happens to me is that people who are junior to me treat me in a disrespectful way – they will assume the expert position and often 'whitesplain' to me. One junior staff member was co-ordinating an important multi-stakeholder meeting and asked me to run a session that I felt someone on my team was better placed to run. I told her this – which she wasn't happy about. After this meeting, it would have been usual for me, as the most senior staff member in the room, to close the meeting. She didn't let me do so. I don't think she would have done the same thing if I had been a white male. Another time, I was visiting a country office where there were three unassigned desks for the use of senior staff whenever they needed them. I sat at one of these desks because, as a

senior staff member, I am entitled to. The next day, the Deputy Country Director – a European woman who is junior to me – told me not to sit at that seat as she needed it. I refused to move – it was clear that she felt she was more deserving to be in that space than me."

– Male interviewee

"As a Black woman, my legitimacy and credibility are called into question a lot. When I became a manager, I was questioned by the people I managed constantly – it was as if they were testing me to see if I was up to the job. My white colleagues were not treated the same way."

– Female interviewee

Limiting autonomy and access to power

Survey respondents and interviewees gave examples of how their autonomy or decision-making power had been curtailed in ways they had not expected once in leadership positions. Often, these dynamics were exacerbated for those people working outside of the UK, as headquarter offices in the UK continued to hold the reins of power.

"90% of country directors are non-white but strict controls are placed on our ability to operate. Desk officers at headquarters levels usually take decisions, particularly on finances."

– Survey respondent

Some leaders spoke about their inability to do their work as they would like to, and how they were tokenised in their leadership positions.

> "[I felt like] window dressing. The organisation only saw me as an asset on their leadership team to improve statistics."
>
> – Survey respondent

Recruiting more people of colour into leadership positions can become about generating the 'right image', as if it is part of a branding exercise, as this woman, a leader in a medium-sized NGO explained:

> "My organisation recently got the chance to participate in an amazing media project that would have given us and our cause some brilliant exposure world-wide. The documentary makers were interviewing many people in our organisation. The most obvious person to speak in this documentary would have been the someone senior in the organisation who had lengthy experience in many countries and across many organisations working on the issue. But as the weeks went on, it was clear that the optics didn't look good. Every leader being interviewed bar one was white – and the comms director clearly felt uncomfortable about what this said about our organisation. Rather than it being an entry point for the senior management team to have a substantive discussion about diversity in its senior ranks, instead they decided to ask me, one of the few women of colour in the office, to take part even though the topic at hand was nothing to do with my job. To my shame, I didn't

> protest – I guess I was excited to have my few minutes of fame. But now on reflection, I wish I'd called out their tokenism."
>
> – Female interviewee

The scholar Sara Ahmed has researched diversity and inclusion in institutional settings, and describes how a narrow focus on just ensuring racial diversity tends to tokenise people of colour.

> "Bodies of colour provide organisations with tools, ways of turning action points into outcomes. We become the tools in their kit. We are ticks in the boxes; we tick their boxes."
>
> – Sara Ahmed, On Being Included, p 153

Cognitive diversity is overtly welcome but covertly unwelcome

Our findings show that stepping into a leadership position does not give you kind of the freedom to speak and act that you might have been denied when you were more junior. The term 'epistemic violence'[3] explains how marginalised groups can be silenced and prevented from speaking and being heard in ways that they would like. The leaders we spoke to gave examples of epistemic violence curtailing their ability to do their work authentically.

---

3   https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17516773/

"The sector thinks it wants and welcomes cognitive diversity, but only in as far as the status quo is not shaken. Part of my role has been to pursue thought leadership on specific topics. But I have been told my approach is too radical – because of how I have brought critical race theory into my work - and that I should dissociate myself from the organisation when sharing my ideas externally. There's just no spaced for lived-experience-based policy work, which is disheartening. This has meant that I do all my thought leadership outside of work – even though it should be directly relevant to the job I am doing in my organisation! I was once told by a senior white manager that white supremacy was not a valid construct. I've tried to deracialise the way I present some of my work to be able to cope better with the organisational culture – but other people know I'm holding back and not being authentic in what I say. You start to pander to the white leadership, and you start to act in ways to please them. Your work becomes based around their needs, rather than what you truly believe will lead to change."

– Female interviewee

"So, you navigate and try to find your way through, all while talking in euphemisms so you can inject some change… I have to frame everything in a way that isn't going to scare white development or foreign policy organisations."

– Female interviewee

Conclusions

Over the last year particularly, the spotlight on racism has shone a light on the experiences of communities of colour across the world, and for those who have and continue to experience it, it has been traumatic. There have been several reports produced focusing on issues of racism and diversity, equality and inclusion in society and also the charity sector and it is now in the open. This focus has provided a voice and space for affected communities to share their experiences, highlighted the issues and provided better understanding of the prevalence and impact, and suggested recommendations to address the issue. Despite this, the question of how much has, can and will change for people of colour in the international development sector remains.

The history of the sector, and the focus of much of the work in countries that have until very recently been under colonial rule, are factors that should not be overlooked in the understanding and discussion of how race manifests in the work of the international development sector. Thomas Lawson, Chief Executive of Turn2us says:

"We are all working in our sector because we want the world to be better – that can sometimes stop us from accepting we might think in a racist way," says Lawson. "When we think about racism, we think about an individual consciously doing an act against a person of colour…People can justifiably say 'that's not how I think' – but that's not how racism works. It's incredibly real and structural, and we must name it for what it is – subconscious racism."

International development organisations should do more to critically reflect upon the colonial legacy of their work – they must speak about it publicly and acknowledge how their current structures perpetuate components of colonial practice, instead of shutting down, side-stepping or shying away from such issues in public.

It is common parlance in the charity and international development sector to talk of excluded, marginalised and disadvantaged communities, particularly in describing "beneficiaries", in project design, and fundraising communications, and to talk of the value placed on "lived experience", but to see people of colour as "other" in our UK based organisations. As Karin Woodley, CEO of Cambridge House, says:

"We need to switch from referring in the passive to people being excluded or disadvantaged, to saying these are people that we exclude."

While we don't have a figure for the number of people of colour working in the UK development sector, the commonality in experiences from the data for this study suggests that discrimination and racism is widespread throughout the recruitment and interview process, in the daily working lives of people of colour and in their opportunities for career progression.

Our data and the case studies from people of colour working in the international development sector demonstrate that racism is real, structural and pervasive. The majority of people of colour who attended a Bond event for People of Colour in February 2020 described sector DEI policies as a 'fig leaf' for systemic problems which "disguise the reality of the situation facing people like us in the sector." Racism is embedded and reproduced in the organisational cultures of many international development organisations. As the data already reveals, representation continues to be an issue which has the effect of discouraging POC from feeling they can thrive in the sector – there are a lack of role models and visibility. PoC who participated in a Bond meeting in February 2020 felt that speaking about injustice was becoming a substitute for having to do anything concrete about it.

Anti-Blackness is a huge issue - despite the oft stated value of lived experience by the sector, the experiences of Black people of colour working in the sector show a pattern of marginalisation, prejudice and exclusion. Racism intersects with other systems of oppression in ways that systematically exclude certain groups in very distinct ways. Black women in particular spoke of the impact of racialised and gendered discrimination at all levels of organisational hierarchies making it imperative for the sector to understand and get to grips with intersectionality across its work. People of colour "agreed" that there

remain high levels of resistance to naming 'racism' as a problem in the sector – when it is addressed, it is often couched in the language of unconscious bias, which serves to decentre discussions about conscious bias, as well as to shift focus from discussing systemic racism.

Silencing and epistemic violence is commonplace. Several of the case studies spoke of how people of colour felt unable to formally or informally speak about and/or formally share their experiences of racism with organisations. Very few felt HR departments either understood or were equipped to respond to and address race related grievances when raised by people of colour and instead often supported the same management against which the complaints were being made. This despite many organisations publicly stating their commitment to diversity, equality and inclusion suggesting a disconnect between organisational systems and organisational culture.

> The word "diversity" is deployed liberally in mission statements but often fails to materialise in working practices or show up in staff demographics. Without policies to back it up, "diversity" and its sibling "inclusion" can become buzzwords – a parody that triggers eye rolls from staff of all backgrounds".
>
> – Kimberly McIntosh

Recommendations: Policies, systems and culture

The survey findings pointed to a need for significant work to address issues of racism in the international development sector and we have shared what we believe is necessary to make organisations truly safe and inclusive places for people of colour. The recommendations have been over a year in the making, drawing upon ongoing consultations with the Bond People of Colour in Development Group since February 2020.

> "It's important to be able to talk openly about prejudices so that as individuals we can become more aware of them and begin to consciously address them."
>
> – Amanda Mukwashi, CEO of Christian Aid

Policies

Individual

1   Familiarise yourself with organisational recruitment and interview policies and approaches and, where they are explicitly or implicitly discriminatory, speak out.

2   Read and re-read your organisational policies on anti-racism and diversity, equity and inclusion and feedback to ensure they remain relevant and implemented.

Organisational

1   Start processes to end inequitable pay scales between roles in lower income and higher income countries. Project Fair principles and standards is a good place to start and follow the Change Collective recruitment guidance.

2   Institute public ethnicity pay gap reporting and occupational segregation information.

3   Set quotas for representation of people of colour at different levels and across different teams in your organisation and hire accordingly.

4   Put in place a career progression process that anticipates and mitigates biases about people of colour serving in management and leadership positions.

5 Ensure HR departments are equipped to support people of colour and that they don't further traumatise those who raise issues. Specialist training will be required to make this happen.

6 Embed commitments to anti-racism into staff performance reviews and appraisals.

7 Vet prospective line managers for their commitments to and understanding of anti-racism.

8 Publicly commit to ending cultures of credentialism – the valuing of knowledge and expertise only if accompanied by specific forms of status such as elite universities, in your organisation – and move away from a focus on formal education as essential criteria in job postings wherever possible.

9 Use a vetting process to identify partners and suppliers that share a commitment to anti-racism and racial equity.

10 Audit organisational policies with an intersectional lens – seek support from experts to help you do this.

11 Review and embed anti-racism into partnership policies covering relationships with organisations in low- middle income countries, and external suppliers.

12 Racism is not a HR problem. It is everyone's problem. Ensure the HR department is equipped to deal with anti-racist policies and practices but also that the whole organisation considers anti-racism as a collective responsibility.

CEOs and Boards

1 Develop mechanisms to ensure that at least 50% of your Boards and SLTs are made up of people of colour by 2025 and report on progress in organisational annual reports.

2 Critically review decisions to allocate roles in low-middle-income country offices to staff from high-income countries.

3 Don't shy away from publicly discussing how racism and anti-Blackness manifests in your organisation, taking into account the ways in which racism intersects with other forms of oppression, such as sexism.

4 Ensure senior leadership and Boards consider anti-racism as a leadership responsibility and hold your CEO accountable for all measures relating to performance on race equity.

Sector

1 Tracking and annual performance reporting of the sector on anti-racism targets in recruitment, experiences and career progression of people of colour in the sector.

2 Share examples of how anti-racism and an intersectional lens can be embedded into a variety of different types of organisational policies.

Systems

Individual

1 Consider your own positionality within the sector – reflect on your levels of privilege and power and where you stand within a racist system. Take steps to interrupt racist dynamics in your interpersonal interactions

2 Support opportunities for people of colour to be mentors – protect their time to enable them to do this - and be mentored by people of colour in the sector.

3 Seek to understand people's lived experiences of racism in your organisation, including how people's experiences of racism may intersect with other forms of oppression.

Organisational

1 Be explicit about the difference between diversity, equity and inclusion and anti-racism. Specifically name racism and anti-Blackness as an issue in organisations and identify specialist support to walk alongside you to address it.

2 Go beyond diversity in your HR processes and make staffing decisions that better reflect the contexts in which your organisation works

3 Review the types of data being collected on recruitment and progression in surveys. For example, people of colour

are often concentrated at certain grades and in specific departments (e.g. finance). Understand which functional areas are doing poorly on diversity, equity and inclusion and seek out and implement measures to address.

4 Ensure equity in opportunities for training, mentoring, sponsorship and internal and external organisational representation.

5 Go beyond claiming your commitment to "results" or "locally-led development" and clearly acknowledge the racism at the root of the development challenges and the prejudices that affect decisions and approaches in the present.

6 Commit to increasing the percentage of organisational funding going directly to local organisations, and invest in research and knowledge production led by local actors.

CEOs and Boards

1 Where possible, commit to sponsoring people of colour – which means investing time with them, opening doors for them and connecting them to your network. It also means championing them publicly and putting them forward for opportunities.

2 Ensure equity in opportunities for training, mentoring, sponsorship and representation – ensuring staff working

in low-middle income countries are centred in equity frameworks.

3 Carve out budgets and provide formal recognition to those people of colour in your organisation doing anti-racism and diversity work. Don't expect just one or two staff in your organisation to do all the heavy lifting on the anti-racism agenda – there needs to be organisation-wide change and anti-racism and diversity should be part of your leadership team's goals.

4 Ensure all teams are embedding anti-racist practices into their work across all areas.

5 Understand and reflect upon how racial bias may be affecting decision-making at higher levels – seek to find ways to meaningfully involve people of colour in strategic decision-making.

Sector

1 Bond should strengthen the types of data it collects on diversity to generate a more nuanced picture of the state of the sector and create an annual reporting system tracking recruitment sector wide statistics on people of colour in the sector, in different departments and at different levels.

2 Document, recognise and celebrate good practice in the sector – for example, introduce an anti-racism award which

is decided on by people of colour, or establish a system akin to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index.

3 **DON'T** address diversity, gender or other forms of social division in silos or in isolation of each other – otherwise specific groups of people will fall through the cracks.

4 **DO** understand and address racism and how it manifests across gender, ethnic background, geographical location, class and disability and work to ensure the sector gets to grips with intersectionality.

Culture

Individual

1   Listen to and understand people's lived experiences of racism in your organisation without defensiveness or denial.

2   Don't place the burden of improving your understanding of racism and race issues on people of colour. Self-education is key. Read the work of people of colour, and in particular women of colour.

3   Critically reflect on the levels of power and privilege you hold in relation to others and take concrete steps to share power and support the creation of more inclusive organisational cultures.

4   Challenge and encourage each other to be brave individuals in organisations and to be open about their journey towards anti-racism.

Organisational

1   Accept that an explicit anti-racism lens is necessary for transforming organisational cultures

2   Take steps to identify and surface the 'deep structure' dynamics in your organisation, and how they reproduce racial and other forms of inequalities. This will involve surfacing 'elephants in the room' and the types of subjects that are usually 'undiscussable' and 'uncomfortable'. Ensure there is support and psychological safety for people of colour as you go through this process and seek specialist support from experts to do so.

3   Do not rely upon consultants and experts who are the 'usual suspects' to support you to do this work. Seek out those consultants who are people of colour based in low- middle income countries who can help you to decentre how the 'white gaze' operates in your organisation.

4   Encourage organisational cultures where critical feedback is welcomed, accepted and acted on without defensiveness or risk to those voicing concerns. Ensure line managers can embed strong practice when it comes to receiving feedback from their line reports.

5   Create spaces where staff can critically reflect on the types of knowledge and expertise that are valued and devalued in your organisation and its work. Take steps to address racism in knowledge production

6   Racism is not a HR problem. It is an everyone problem, ensure that the organisation understands this, and that addressing racism is beneficial to everyone.

7   Commit to transformative training on an ongoing basis that does not shy away from interrogating power and privilege – one-off or annual anti-racism trainings will not be

transformative, and neither will trainings that centre white comfort and virtue (i.e. unconscious bias trainings).

8   Embed feminist understandings of intersectionality into all anti-racism trainings and education initiatives.

9   Institute regular anonymised pulse checks with people of colour in your organisation to ensure organisational cultures feel safe and inclusive.

10 Create spaces for people of colour peer groups for support, influencing, and collective action. Support people of colour to engage in these groups by providing protected time for them to do so and resource these groups accordingly.

11 Don't place the burden of driving the change on people of colour, many of whom have been traumatised by dominant organisational cultures.

CEOs and Boards

1   Acknowledge that there are gaps between what your organisation says is its culture, and the reality, and seek to close the gap.

2   Commit to patience and long-term resourcing – organisational culture will not be transformed overnight; it is a multi-year and on-going process.

3   Commit to individually and, collectively in boards, building anti-racist practices.

4   Understand your organisation's role in upholding or dismantling systems that exclude people of colour from positions of leadership – interrogate how networks of privilege such as old boys' networks may be systematically excluding certain groups from progressing in your organisation

5   Ensure senior leaders in the organisation are ultimately accountable for organisational culture change initiatives – AND people of colour must determine what success on culture change looks like.

6   Create spaces for senior leadership teams to critically reflect on how practices of exclusion show up in leadership teams, and take steps to ensure leaders of colour can thrive in leadership positions.

Sector

1   Improve understanding of the history of the international aid sector and the role played by colonialism in shaping it.

2   Document and share good practice on organisational culture change initiatives with the rest of the sector.

bond

Bond is the UK network for organisations working
in international development. We connect and
champion a diverse network of over 400 civil
society organisations to help eradicate global
poverty, inequality and injustice.

Visit our website for the latest news and views
from the sector, useful resources, funding
opportunities, jobs and training.

Find out more at bond.org.uk