



BUILDING PEACE



THE PROBLEM WITH
PARTNERSHIPS

ACTION PACK:

**Episode 4 - “Nothing about us
without us”**



**PEACE
DIRECT**

What to know:

We have an exclusion problem

There are many ways the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors are not inclusive. It starts within our organisations - who we hire, who can see our job ads, what languages we speak, how we support people to be themselves safely at work - but spans multiple aspects of the broader system and sectors.

Whose lives are prioritised?

Dr Véronique Barbelet's research at the Overseas Development Institute demonstrates how humanitarian interventions might miss the needs of marginalised communities: "we're supposed to be saving lives, but whose lives are we saving, if we're only saving the lives of those that are visible to us, those that are accessible to us, and those that are in large numbers?"



Learn more from the research: [*Inclusion and exclusion in humanitarian action: findings from a three-year study*](#)

Non-inclusive decision-making spaces

When international convenings about our sector take place - whether these are policy and advocacy spaces, discussions about decolonisation or policy shifts - they're often organised in the Global North, with little attention given to access for Global South (and) marginalised actors. Representation is requested but not funded or facilitated through accessibility support.



Learn: [How to Organise International Events and Convenings](#).

The fear of imposition leading to exclusion

In our efforts to avoid neo-colonialism and Do No Harm, we might contribute to the erasure of marginalised communities in the contexts we work in. Global North organisations often assume that asking local partners about the inclusion of women and LGBT individuals would be an imposition of our own ideas and beliefs. But women and LGBT people exist in every context. Avoiding including them actually erases them and undermines their own efforts to be included.



Discover the [Queering the Women, Peace and Security Agenda toolkit](#)

Identity as an afterthought

Recognition of identities and their intersections cannot be a 'nice to have' or an afterthought. It is fundamental to inclusion, to understanding and recognising power dynamics, to doing our work well, and to resisting ongoing violence against marginalised groups like women, LGBTQIA+ people, racialised individuals and disabled people in the current climate. As Jamie Hagen explains, "Everyone has a sexual orientation, and everyone has a gender identity, and talking about sexuality and LGBTQ issues is actually for everyone. It isn't just for LGBTQI people."

What to do:

Be more inclusive

Our speakers identified several ways to put inclusion into practice:



Amplify the stories of marginalised communities - inclusion starts with recognition. Demonstrate that you value the work of marginalised advocates and centre and amplify their work through your channels.



Rethink recruitment - reflect on the ways you are recruiting. Is it only in one language, like English? Do you invite applications from non-English speakers, and/or speakers of languages that have relevance to the contexts you work in? Are you posting on LinkedIn only? Have you considered ways to recruit through other channels that better engage marginalised and Global South people?



Fund better - How are your funding structures responding to the realities of communities, especially marginalised communities, such as disability in the Global South? Can you fund smaller and unregistered organisations more?



Organise more inclusive gatherings - think carefully about where you host gatherings - are they always in the Global North? What are the visa requirements of the host country? How accessible is the gathering, in terms of physical access, languages, and for those with non-physical disability? Take a look at this guide to start: [How to Organise International Events and Convenings](#).



Take an intersectional approach, and be locally led in an inclusive way. There are power dynamics and marginalised communities in every context. Make sure your efforts to decolonise and avoid neo-colonialism don't perpetuate exclusion. Are you working with partner organisations that have no women staff? Can you act as a [critical friend](#) to your partner and explore ways to support more inclusive structures and approaches?



Remember that we all have our own intersecting identities that shape our experience, our levels of privilege in different spaces. Neither the Global North or Global South are homogenous.



Tell your story, and find each other. Our sector lacks imagination to envision what trans peace looks like, as Jamie put it. So if that's your work or you're centring marginalised communities in your approaches in another way, talk about it. Let's build a network.

What does this have to do with partnerships though?

Partnerships cannot be equitable or decolonial if they are not inclusive. Peace Direct's guide to Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation identified **some recommendations to support the building of inclusive, equitable partnerships:**

Partnerships are:
“a trusted, collaborative process in which actors with a shared vision and shared goals journey together in humility, openness, transparency, *inclusiveness* and equity towards meeting their shared goals.”
- Godwin Yidana

For Global North actors:

- Draft and actively implement a positionality statement for your organisation in consultation with peers and partners of diverse backgrounds.
- Take an implicit association test/training from [Harvard's Project Implicit](#) or from the [Kirwan Institute](#) for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.
- Ensure that staff from across all levels and across intersecting identities are heard and listened to.
- Develop your practice around admitting mistakes internally and externally and sharing how you are trying to address them. For example, see Médecins Sans Frontières' [report](#): 'Tackling institutional discrimination and racism within MSF'.
- Watch: 'How to become an inclusive leader' with Meagan Pollock on [YouTube](#).
- When recruiting, consider a broader range of skills beyond technical skills or experience – include relational skills, intercultural communication skills, and lived experience. Read: 'Lived experience isn't an optional add-on' in [Peridot](#).
- Unlearn any prejudice you might hold about the value of indigenous knowledge.
- Consider alternative forms of reporting, such as video stories and interviews, including in native languages.
- Take a look at Bond's [guide](#), 'Becoming locally led as an anti-racist practice'.

And for Global South actors:

- Explore and critically reflect on how structural racism and neo-colonial attitudes may have been internalised by your staff and may continue to shape your ways of working, as well as how you view your community.
- Explore, recognise and address traits of racism, ethnic divides and discrimination within your own countries that can sometimes wrongly provide excuses for neo-colonial attitudes and inappropriately justify structural, and cultural racism.
- Avoid replicating neo-colonial power dynamics within your own organisation and community, including silencing the voices of marginalised groups and limiting spaces for inclusive decision-making.
- Unlearn any prejudice you might hold about the value of indigenous knowledge, especially from the communities you serve.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure that your organisation is accountable to the communities and constituents you serve. Read: [Dynamic Accountability: Changing approaches to CSO accountability](#).

Building block 3



Communication and language

JOINT PRACTICES

- **Discuss together whether there are any particular phrases or sentences that should be avoided.**
- **Establish reciprocal feedback loops with your partner to reflect on the partnership, cultivating an environment where feedback is valued and encouraged. Feedback channels can also be anonymised so partners can freely express their thoughts without fear of repercussions.**
- **Agree how to cultivate a safe space where difficult issues can be raised without fear of retribution or defensiveness.**

GLOBAL SOUTH ACTORS

- **Don't assume that partners in the Global North will understand your cultural norms around communication. Educate them. Also educate yourself about the cultural norms that prevail with your prospective partners.**
- **Practice communication techniques to clearly express your perspectives, needs and concerns in partnerships with Global North actors. This includes advocating for your interests, setting boundaries and challenging unequal power dynamics.**
 - Look at the Mindtools guide on assertiveness.
- **Recognise the risks of adopting donor language that perpetuates neo-colonial attitudes and removes local agency to secure funding (e.g., referring to communities as 'beneficiaries').**
- **Practice the skill of disagreeing with your partner if/when you feel that the programme design is not being led by you and/or if you are not being consulted on key decisions.**
 - Take a look at the checklist 'Eight steps to effective conflict management' from the Canadian government's dispute resolution process.

GLOBAL NORTH ACTORS

- **Educate yourself around cultural norms in communication in countries in which you have or want to develop partnerships. Take these into account in all of your communications with those partners.**
 - Watch: 'Eliminating Microaggressions: The Next Level of Inclusion' with Tiffany Alvoid on YouTube.
- **Practice communication techniques to clearly express your perspectives, needs, and concerns in partnerships.**
 - Look at the Mind Tools guide on assertiveness.
- **Identify and retire certain language that diminishes the agency of actors in the Global South.**
 - Take a look at RINGO Lexicon and watch 'RINGO Prototype: Language and Lexicon' on YouTube.
 - Read: 'It's time to put an end to supremacy language in international development' by Ann Hendrix-Jenkins on openDemocracy.
 - Look at Bond's language guide, 'Taking British politics and colonialism out of our language'.
- **Practice active listening in conversations with your partners, paying close attention to what they may not be telling you.**
 - Read: 'Active Listening Skills' by Dianne Grande Ph.D. on Psychology Today.
- **Build in time, resources and, where necessary, budget to be able to cultivate relationships that enable honest and open communication to thrive.**

POWER AWARE BEHAVIOURS

- **Carefully assess the language and language style (often based on cultural norms) that you use which may reinforce power imbalances. E.g., 'Financial and narrative reports must be submitted on time' or 'due diligence and compliance processes are non-negotiable' and proactively put in place new guidance for communication.**
 - Look at Africa No Filter's handbook, 'How to Write About Africa in 8 Steps: An ethical storytelling handbook'.
- **Aim to communicate in your partner's preferred language.**



Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation

A practical resource for civil society, donors, INGOs and Intermediaries



The guidance and recommendations in this pack are just a snippet of the advice collated from activists across the Global South and North. To learn more, and find more ways to put decolonisation into practice, read the Transforming Partnerships guide in full, via peacedirect.org

