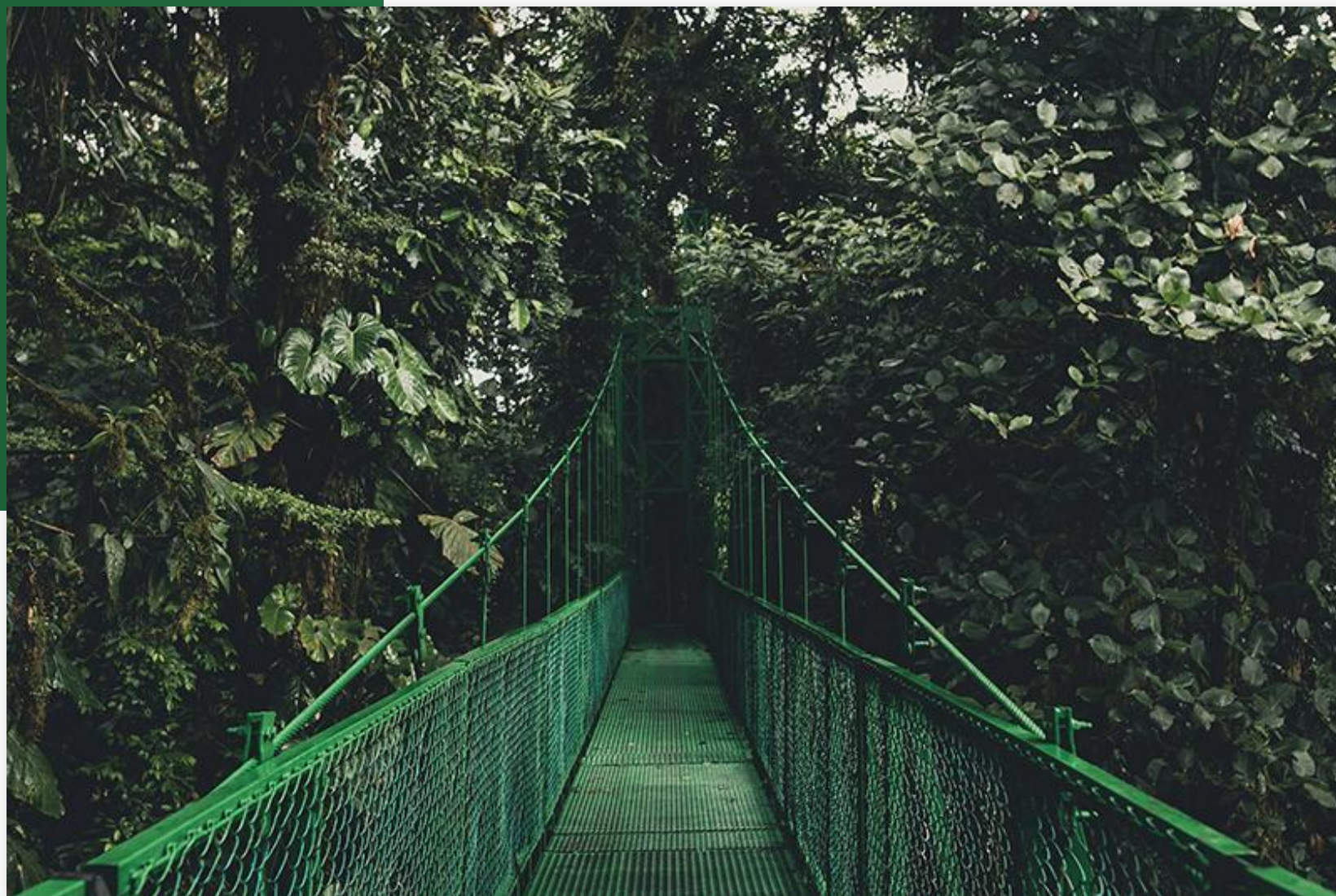


SUMMARY

IDC Inquiry: Racism in the aid sector

August 2022

Updated: February 2023



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OVERVIEW OF THE INQUIRY

The IDC launched an inquiry on the [Philosophy and Culture of Aid](#), with a specific focus on racism in the aid sector, in February 2021 and recently published its findings in a [report](#) in June 2022.

The Equity Index contributed to public consultation processes, including a [submission](#) to the International Development Committee (IDC)'s inquiry on racism in the aid sector and a submission to inform the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)'s strategy development. Our Co-Founder Lorriann Robinson also gave oral evidence before Parliament as part of the inquiry, which you can watch [here](#).

SUMMARY OF INQUIRY FINDINGS



(i) Working with partners in-country	• Racism manifests in decisions around whose expertise is most valued across the sector. Institutions based in the Global North often work on the assumption that they represent the ‘gold standard’ and this leads to ‘local’ partners having to adapt their way of working. • Language matters, and the current dominance of English in the sector ‘locks out’ national actors who operate in local languages.
(ii) Communications and storytelling	• Development language should be reworked. Much terminology used is rooted in colonialism and as a result ‘others’ the communities where programmes are delivered. It reinforces ideas that ‘the West’ is the ideal that should be aspired towards.
(iii) Data on racism and diversity in the aid sector	• The report notes that “different forms of discrimination that permeate in British society manifest in the aid sector too.” • The scale of racism experienced by staff who are Black, Indigenous and People of Colour was presented in written submissions to the inquiry, and has also been evidenced in recent surveys by actors in the UK charity and international aid sectors. • The majority of HR departments and leaders are ill equipped to deal with such incidents.
(iv) Building an equitable and inclusive aid sector	• There are considerable barriers to entering the aid sector for candidates from diverse backgrounds. • FCDO contracts structurally disincentive implementing partners to hire local staff, particularly in project roles. • “It is the responsibility of those in the sector who hold the most power to increase diversity, inclusion and transparency, and be accountable for the steps their organisations are taking to dismantle structural racism.”

SUMMARY OF INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) Working with partners in-country

- The FCDO should consider whether applications for funding must always be submitted in English – especially in bids for small projects administered by embassies, which are to be undertaken by local civil society organisations.
- The FCDO should increase the amount of UK aid funding that goes directly to locally led civil society organisations. It should reconsider how it conceptualises and calculates risk and work with local civil society organisations to undertake the due diligence and administration associated with bidding for FCDO contracts.
- The FCDO should apply these same principles to do no harm when it removes funding, as well as when aid programmes are initiated.
- The FCDO should consider how it can restructure its funding commitments to give long-term certainty to local civil society organisations to ensure funding that has been committed cannot be suddenly withdrawn at short notice.

(ii) Communications and storytelling

- Fundraising appeals should depict positive, realistic stories and wherever possible use local filmmakers.
- The aid sector should have a conversation that includes the communities it works with to develop positive and inclusive working terminology, the FCDO should consider how it can lead this work.
- Guidelines on informed consent for obtaining and using images should be observed just as thoroughly in relation to individuals from the communities that aid organisations work with, as they are in the UK. It is unacceptable for images to be used and re-used without the subject's express consent.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS



(iii) Data on racism and diversity in the aid sector

- Aid organisations must ensure their working practices and programmes are mindful of the intersecting identities of their staff and the people they serve.
- All aid organisations should have effective processes in place to tackle instances of racism when they occur. They should also be able to measure and assess whether those processes are working.
- The FCDO should require organisations that it funds, which employ more than 50 staff, to publish their diversity data. This should not act as a barrier to small organisations in receiving funding. The FCDO should work with small organisations to identify ways to increase opportunities for staff from underrepresented groups.
- Aid organisations, including private sector contractors, with more than 50 staff should measure and publish their ethnicity pay gap data in order to be held accountable. It will also help them to identify if there are inequalities in their workforce that should be addressed.
- The FCDO should undertake a review of its reserved department status to identify whether its security considerations warrant the decision not to hire foreign nationals.
- The FCDO should publish the first tranche of inclusive data this year and set out a timeline for when it will be able to publish further data relating to race, ethnicity and income.

SUMMARY OF INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS



(iv) Building an equitable and inclusive aid sector

- Donors and aid organisations should reduce barriers to entry by ending the use of unpaid internships and paying all employees the living wage and removing unnecessary stipulations in job applications such as years of experience in the international aid sector and higher degrees that disadvantage individuals from under-represented backgrounds.
- All aid organisations, including private sector contractors should reflect on their diversity data and seek to understand if their recruitment practices need strengthening to support talented candidates from diverse backgrounds. We need sector-wide cooperation to share best practice and identify how the recruitment process can better facilitate candidates from diverse backgrounds to enter core roles in the aid sector.
- Aid organisations, including private sector contractors, should publicly acknowledge that racism exists in the sector and prioritise anti-racism work that tackles the underlying culture of their workplaces and not just the racial diversity of their staff. This will include making space for open, honest and often difficult conversations. It also requires them to welcome ideas and approaches suggested by staff who are Black, Indigenous and People of Colour.
- Aid organisations and private sector contractors with a large enough leadership team should appoint senior leaders with the remit to tackle racism and increase diversity, equity and inclusion in their organisations, with the full support of the senior leadership team.
- We urge the FCDO to recognise their important role in determining levels of pay across the sector and commit to undertaking a full audit of its pay structures to assess the impact of them on staff hired in-country.
- The FCDO should use its position to facilitate sector-wide conversations about how aid actors can improve diversity, equity and inclusion and being anti-racist

THE EQUITY INDEX RECOMMENDATIONS

UK Government

- **Address the UK's historical role in contributing to the 'under-development' of countries** around the world and the UK's leading role in trans-Atlantic slave-trade, colonialism and other forms of exploitation, a concept explored by Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and many other work(s).
- Positively respond to the call from the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) **10 Point Reparations Plan**. It remains a deep source of hurt that UK slave owners were compensated at the end of slavery, but enslaved people and their decedents are still ignored.
- **Reframe the focus and objective of UK aid and development policy** away from a neo-colonial approach that uses the aid budget to further the UK's strategic interests to an approach rooted in the notion of mutual interests, rights, equity and justice, which acknowledges that a progressive approach to aid and development is just one way in which the UK can repair some of the damage it has contributed to in the global South.

THE EQUITY INDEX RECOMMENDATIONS



Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)

- **Make equity central to the FCDO's mission and objectives**, and systematically review all policies, funding decisions and programmes for their impact on equity (building on but stretching beyond the inclusion of equity at the programme level in the former DFID's value for money framework).
- Begin an honest conversation internally to reflect on why, five years after the UK and other governments committed to targeting more funding directly to organisations in the global South through the Grand Bargain, **the UK has not come close to the target of spending 25% of humanitarian funding directly with and through Southern organisations.**
- **Prioritise equity in FCDO procurement.** As with the 'value for money' and safeguarding agendas, donor governments have considerable ability to influence the practice of their contractors through their procurement rules and priorities. To date, the FCDO has not required its contractors to have an equitable or anti-racist approach. Adopting such an approach could be transformative.
- **Measure UK and other ODA spending on tackling racism.** In recent years, the UK has been a powerful voice in calling for a stronger gender focus in aid spending. Unlike gender, there is no comparable way to measure, track, assess or compare donor spending on anti-racist initiatives.
- **End the FCDO's 'reserved status' for development-focused staff** to enable the organisation to hire new staff with nationalities outside of the UK. Development decisions must be informed by people with both policy expertise and lived experience of the countries where the FCDO operates.

THE EQUITY INDEX RECOMMENDATIONS

International Development Committee

- Ensure issues of racism and equity **remain on the IDC's agenda** throughout this Parliament.
- **Significantly increase the number of Black people invited to give evidence to the IDC.** Our examination of experts who have given evidence to the IDC since 2019 has found that in six different inquiries (excluding this ongoing inquiry) only 11 were People of Colour (PoC) and just 4 out of 58 experts were black, including the FCDO minister James Cleverly.
- Recommend that all development agencies be required to collect equity related data (for example data on gender and ethnic pay gaps) **make these available publicly.**

SUMMARY OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO INQUIRY



- The FCDO published its official government response on 23 January 2023, which can be accessed [here](#).

(i) Working with partners in-country

- The FCDO does not value international expertise over local expertise; our contracts include a requirement for the primary contract holder to leverage the use of small and local organisations over the program's duration.
- The FCDO is currently training staff in 43 languages, and there is no FCDO requirement for bids always to be in english
- The UK has reiterated its commitment to a more-locally led approach to development and humanitarian assistance as part of its International Development Strategy. It is working to advance localisation through several programmes and initiatives, alongside its central programming.
- Early programme closure guidance for programme teams also specifically factors in Do No Harm principles, with the Programme Operating Framework containing Exit Plan templates and guidance for all FCDO staff.

(ii) Communications and storytelling

- The Government is committed to dismantling harmful narratives, swaying public opinion and producing communication products that contribute towards ending systemic racism in the sector.
- Organisations which deliver UK Aid Match appeals are required to follow the principles outlined by The Narrative Project, a research and communications tool that is focused on changing the development narrative in the UK by giving guidance on how to communicate about development.
- The FCDO is exploring taking part in conversations surround terminology in the sector.
- The FCDO has a consent form and guidance related to the use of photos; it continues to remind staff about this and ask for confirmation from all delivery partners that they also obtain consent before using images.

SUMMARY OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO INQUIRY CONT'D

(iii) Data on racism and diversity in the aid sector

- The FCDO signed the *Business in the Community* [Race At Work Charter](#) to ensure that minority ethnic employees are represented at all levels in the organisation; they are focused on ensuring the progression of Minority Ethnic staff towards the higher grades. For UK-based staff, they aim for parity at all grades with the UK's economically active minority ethnic population (14%).
- The FCDO is launching a new Dignity and Respect at Work Policy in December 2022 which aims to respond robustly to bullying, harassment and discrimination, including on grounds of race. The policy has fairness and justice at its heart to ensure an objective complaints process for all staff by building in obstacles to biased decision-making in the process, such as ensuring no all-male or all-white panels.
- The FCDO does not currently publish ethnicity pay gap data. The Cabinet Office is expected to issue guidance on the ethnicity pay gap in 2023. Currently, diversity information is published via the Gender Pay Gap and the FCDO Annual Report and Accounts.

(iv) Building an equitable and inclusive aid sector

- They have partnered with nationally recognised diversity experts in an attraction campaign, promoting the FCDO as an inclusive employer. This attracted candidates who would not have been eligible to apply prior to our review of entry grade positions.
- The FCDO operates its resourcing and recruitment in line with the Civil Service Recruitment Principles which includes selection being made on merit, and the process being fair and as open as it can be.
- The FCDO will continue to look for opportunities to use its convening power, as well as its delivery expertise, to support the sector to explore how to make development programmes and related processes more inclusive.