Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Online Course
Module 4: Situating DEI within the Humanitarian Sector
Transcript

Hello and welcome to module four of the online self-based course on introduction to diversity, equity and inclusion. In this module, we're going to be talking about situating the DEI agenda within the humanitarian sector. This course is brought to you by One Future Collective in collaboration with ICVA, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies.

Quick Recap

As always, we're going to start from where we left off. In the last module, we looked at some key concepts which makes the DEI agenda what it is and also inform it and give us a good sense of what we should be thinking about when we're thinking about DEI. Here is a quick recap of some of those concepts. The first thing we looked at was power. Power refers to the ability to influence someone else's or another group's behavior, decisions and attitudes. I want to ask you a very quick question. After having done that module, did you get a stronger sense of how much power you hold as an individual or your organization holds as an organization? What is this power informed by? Where do you derive this power from? And where do you lose some of this power? And why do you lose that power?

Second, we looked at privilege. Privilege refers to the rights, benefits, opportunities and advantages that are unearned and enjoyed by a certain group of people. What are privileges that you have or that you have become more aware of in the recent past? What are some privileges that your organization enjoys that maybe you haven't thought of before? Anything coming up? While talking about privilege we also spoke about oppression and how for privilege to exist, oppression also has to exist. Oppression, therefore, is a form of injustice where one group is discriminated against to maintain the power and privilege of another group known as the dominant group.

These are some very simple but very important concepts that we looked at in the previous video? What are some other concepts that really stayed with you or have informed your understanding of DEI so far? I remember also discussing very briefly about intersectionality and instead of giving you the recap for it I want to take a minute to try and rejig your memory and explain to yourself and maybe to your colleagues who you are watching this course with what it means before you jump into this module.

Key Concepts

What are we going to look at in this module? We are going to try and understand what the relevance and the importance of DEI in the humanitarian sector is. All this while we have been talking about diversity, equity and inclusion in fairly broad terms, in fairly universal terms.

But is there anything specifically that the humanitarian sector can gain when engaging with DEI or is there something that the humanitarian sector specifically stands to lose while engaging with DEI. Therefore, what is the importance and the unique relevance of DEI within the humanitarian sector?

Second, we will also try to understand, if DEI is really that important for the humanitarian sector, are there any challenges that organizations may face while trying to engage with DEI as a particular concept?

Importance of DEI within Organisations

I don't want to take too much time to talk about the importance of DEI? I think we have done this in some detail so far as well. But I want you to pause for about 10 seconds and try to recollect for yourself. What are some of the reasons engaging with DEI can seem important or is important? . Does it promote greater creativity? Does it provide more space for innovation? Does it encourage a culture of respect and learning within organizations? Does it encourage a culture of curiosity within organizations rather than one of judgment. Does it improve decision making in any way? And does it involve and influence work processes in any way or format to make them better or smoother? What is coming up for you when I ask you the question, why should any organization, let alone a one that is in the humanitarian sector invest in DEI? And what makes it important?

Try to take a pen and paper, write on what's coming up for you, try to think of a few points, there are no right or wrong answers. Simply take this moment to sit down and try and articulate why it may be important for organizations to try thinking about diversity, equity and inclusion.

Importance of DEI in the Humanitarian Sector

As you're doing that, I also want you to start thinking about why it can be specifically important to be talking about DEI within the humanitarian sector. Humanitarian action by definition has eveloved in scale, depth and complexity over the past few years requiring unique and customized interventions. DEI provides the space for organizations to be able to engage with this depth and complexity by understanding and situating itself in relation to the situation

that it wants to work in as opposed to treating all of these situations as one and the same.

It also fosters intersectional solution building to respond to and address humanitarian crises. No humanitarian crisis has ever affected a certain community the same way.

Every single person within a particular community is affected differently even though the humanitarian crisis may be the same. Go back to the work that you have done.

Does violence impact people of different genders differently? Does it impact people of different age groups differently? Does it impact people of certain religious or ethnic groups differently?

What do they lose access to? What do they gain access to? How easy is it for them to be able to leave situations? How easy is it for them to be able to get the support that they are looking for? And is any of this informed by who they are as people?

D.E.I. within the humanitarian sector and organizations can also enhance the representation and involvement of local communities and marginalized groups in humanitarian work. Considering that a lot of the times your organizations may be separate from the regions within which they are working, or may be situated separately in terms of geographical financial locations but may have a similar background with the communities that you are working in, there may still be a certain level of dissonance and a certain level of difference. Engaging in diversity, equity and inclusion involves putting in resources and investments to ensure that your team is able to represent as many diverse voices as possible and by extension involve and inform them to be involved in your decision making process providing you with many diverse and creative

solutions. It also equips organizations to deal with systemic inequalities and power disparities that impact the humanitarian sector. And finally, it ensures that pressing issues which may get invisibilized are brought up and addressed. Often within the humanitarian sector, because of the urgency of the work involved, it is possible that the interests of very specific groups are prioritized. And this may not be intentional, it may not be a conscious decision that you are making. However, it does tend to happen as a result of the unconscious biases we hold and the universalist pictures of certain humanitarian crises that we have seen in our work so far. This can often result in certain groups' interests being invisibised. This can often result in certain groups not even being considered as people who may require particular aid and support as well. And otherwise, it can also result in a situation where their unique needs are not considered. 07:51 The recent report published by the Humanitarian Advisory Group talks about this evolution of complexity within the humanitarian sector and says that the type of humanitarian crisis has evolved over time.

Humanitarian crises these days are more complex and protracted. For example, conflict in Syria, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo, the Rohingya exodus from Myanmar and natural disasters exacerbated by climate change. Each of these require deeper analysis on the risks and conflicts, context-specific responses, and thus diverse teams representing affected countries and communities to address these complex issues.

Does this translate into action?
This provides a very well-rounded image about why it is important for organizations to engage in DEI-related initiatives. If there is so much push for DEI within the humanitarian sector, and there is so much evidence which talks about why DEI is important. I want us to think back to our own organisation. Organisations that we may know personally, professionally, work within the sector, and ask ourselves the question "Does this really translate into action?"And while you are thinking about this I want us to look at some of the stats which are coming out.

Survey conducted by New Humanitarian
Recently, there was a survey that was conducted by the New Humanitarian, in which there were 21 organizations who participated. Only 9 out of these 21 organizations claimed to have made any progress on the DEI agenda. They also made another survey which was now directed not towards organizations but aid workers and these were some of the results.
Two-thirds of 150 aid workers said that organizational response to demands for internal racial justice have been inadequate. 40% of aid workers responded saying they would be uncomfortable raising issues of DEI with their management. More than 20 aid workers expressed that they have considered leaving their job due to racial discrimination.
As per a study that was published by the Humanitarian Advisory Group, only 42% of humanitarian workers believe that their leadership teams are inclusive and even less than 38% believe that they are led by diverse leadership teams.

What then is the challenge?

Now, why are we speaking about all this and why is it relevant that there are all these statistics and all these figures that are coming out? The reason we are talking about this is because as we have seen, investing in DEI can have a lot of positive impact. Not just in how you engage with the communities where you are trying to extend aid, but also within your internal organization.

Key challenges with respect to DEI in the humanitarian sector

- Fear of speaking up and discussing issues related to DEI
- Lack of trust in reporting mechanisms and protection systems for whistleblowers
- Unsustainable funding or lack of funding altogether
- Lack of power and authority to make decisions and actual changes with people responsible for DEI
- Diminished prioritisation of DEI
- Lack of integration of DEI within organisational culture, operations, leadership and programming
- Lack of ecosystemic interventions towards achieving DEI

While it is important for you to try and build a diverse workforce, it's also important for us to build an inclusive and equitable workforce. So that the employees working within the organization feel welcome, feel involved, and feel motivated to continue working. This requirement of diversity is then underpinned by the fact that DEI in turn contributes to innovation. It provides necessary local context and it helps organizations build a situational analysis and develop solutions and interventions which are suitable to the local context with whom they are working. If there is so much evidence of why DEI is important, what has been the challenge that has led to the kind of survey responses that we have seen in the past few slides.

Key challenges with respect to DEI in the humanitarian sector

Here is a list of some of the challenges that we have come across in our research and work so far. This is by no imagination an exhaustive list of the challenges and we really invite you to come forward and try and think of what some of the other challenges are that can exist within your organizations.

It may also be helpful to try and get a sense of what these challenges are by holding one-on-one confidential protected conversations with people within your team to try and develop your own understanding of what they may be.

However, what are some of the challenges we have seen that have emerged across some of the literature work we have done in the past? First, there is a general fear of speaking up and discussing issues related to This fear of speaking up can be addressed through many different situations such as ensuring that the culture is one where such concerns are welcomed to be brought up.

But the fear of retaliation was the number one reason that was suggested as a key challenge across the different literature as well as organisations.

The second, which is associated to the first in some way, there was a lack of trust in reporting mechanisms and protection systems for people who did actually eventually speak up.

Even in cases where employees were comfortable speaking up and sharing concerns that they were having, they expressed a serious lack of trust in these reporting mechanisms. Organizations have also reported that there is very limited funding available for them to be able to divert their internal resources to work agenda such as DEI. Not all organisations have personell which have and hold individuals in leadership positions who make decision about DEI without following long bureaucratic decision making processes.

There is also a diminished prioritization of DEI within the larger organizational prioritization and while it is important to realize and recognize the fact that we are all doing very important work, it wouldn't be feasible or even sustainable for us to view DEI as something lesser than. It's important that we try to think of DEI as an equal if not more important agenda point.

DEI is also seen as something that is a standalone area of work, something that is delegated to a very particular industry within the organization. And while that can be important from an accountability point of view, from an expertise point of view, it's important that DEI concerns are mainstreamed across all organizational operations and programming.

Finally, something that is not really relevant from an organizational standpoint, but more from an ecosystemic standpoint, is the fact that there is a lack of ecosystemic interventions towards achieving DEI. Having an ecosystem which is constantly talking about DEI shares expertise about DEI, influencing your decision-making, motivation, and wheel-building within the organization in relation to DEI can all also play a very significant role in encouraging organizations to engage with DEI.

Reflection Questions

As we come to the end of this module, I have a few reflection questions I want to leave you with. Given all of the evidence so far and the conversations we've had so far, do you think DEI is important for the humanitarian sector? The reason I'm asking you this question is because having this clearly articulated can go a long way in you being able to build the will and the motivation and the articulated inspiration required to get your organization to start thinking about DEI.

Does your organization do anything pertaining to DEI? Do you have an initiative? Do you speak about linear communications? Have you heard a complaint about DEI? Do you have processes to file complaints against DEI? Anything else?

Are there any additional steps your organization can take to address these issues and improve DEI within the organization? What do these steps look like and what do you need to make these steps a reality? You may be answering these questions, basis your location, basis your resources, basis your status in many different ways and forms. But I want you and I invite you to be as honest and as reflective as possible as this is a space for you to start looking in words and start also articulating what you need to be able to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion within your organization.

Thankyou and see you soon for the next video.