

# **TOWARDS EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP AND SHARED OWNERSHIP;**

**A FRAMEWORK BASED ON EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND  
INCLUSION.**

## ACRONYMS

<b>EDI</b>	Equity, Diversity, Inclusion
<b>IDLO</b>	International Development Law Organisation
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>KPSRL</b>	Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law (organisation)
<b>LAC</b>	Legal Aid Clinic
<b>NAFIS</b>	Network Against Female Genital Mutilation in Somaliland
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>PLI</b>	Programmatic Learning Initiative
<b>SROL</b>	Security Rule of Law
<b>VNG</b>	Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (The Association of Dutch Municipalities)

## Introduction

This learning document on effective partnership and shared ownership is part of a series under the **Programmatic Learning Instrument (PLI)**. The PLI is an instrument designed to stimulate and facilitate cross-programmatic learning at both the program implementation level and the portfolio management level. This instrument supports co-created learning trajectories, where stakeholders jointly decide the learning objectives and the pathway to achieve them.

Within the PLI framework, **Media INK** and the **Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL)** are collaborating on a project titled "**Learning Support for the Dutch SROL Program in Somalia.**"

### Dutch SROL Program

The government of the Netherlands, through its embassy in Nairobi, supports the implementation of various programs within the SROL framework. The overarching objective of this SROL program is to contribute to the improvement of the social contract in Somalia and Somaliland. This is achieved through three different projects implemented by three different consortia:

1. **Damal Program:** *Implementing partners: IDLO, NAFIS Network, Legal Aid Clinic (LAC), and Media INK.* The program's objective is to improve the social contract through increased legitimacy of justice sector institutions in Somaliland.
2. **Miisaan Program:** *Implementing partners: Interpeace, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, and Media INK.* The program's objective is to contribute to inclusively developed, locally informed, and widely supported transitional justice frameworks endorsed by key stakeholders in Somalia and Somaliland and integrated with national implementation plans.
3. **Danwadaag Program:** *Implementing partners: VNG, Care, Free Press Unlimited, and Media INK.* The program's objective is to improve the social contract through inclusive and transparent Disaster Risk Management.

The four-year SROL program in Somalia began in 2020. The consortia are currently in their third year and have gained a valuable trove of learnings. The primary aim of the PLI learning trajectory is to support Damal, Miisaan, Danwadaag, and the Embassy in fostering collaborative partnerships and facilitating inter-program learning exchanges.

This specific learning document focuses on how to establish effective partnerships that enhance shared ownership. The programs recognize that effective implementation of interventions cannot be done in isolation. Long-term impact can only be achieved when various stakeholders, including communities, government entities, donors, and implementing partners, understand each other and work together. This way of working requires reflection on how organizations operate and a critical examination of how improvements can be made. In this document, we will share best practices and case studies from the three SROL programs in Somalia. These lessons learned are based on our observations of the programs and conversations with various individuals both inside and outside the SROL program.

Additionally, we'll present a framework to operationalize the learnings. This framework is based on the theory of belonging and presents specific elements that need to be prioritized when examining partnership and shared ownership.

## **Reflections on Current Partnerships within the International development field**

All actors in international development agree on one thing, the current power dynamics within this field are skewed. Power is currently perceived to be top-down, hierarchical in nature, meaning power flows from top-down starting with donors and accountability flows upwards ending with donors. Important questions include: What kind of power are we talking about? Why is it organised the way it is? and how do we change this perceived imbalance in power? A plethora of scientific papers have been written about the first two questions. This learning document will focus on the last question and will try to provide insights and practical tools.

Power is the ability to influence decision-making, mobilize resources, and implement policies. Power imbalances occur when one partner (or a group of partners) can dominate decision-making, control resources, or prioritize policies in ways that disadvantage other partners or are not in the best interest of achieving partnership objectives.

The distribution of power in current partnerships within international development cooperation is often highly uneven. To add to this problem, those with the most power, typically donors, and to a lesser extent, INGOs, are not always the most knowledgeable about the local situation or the necessary changes and how to achieve them<sup>1</sup>.

Power imbalances are not something that happened overnight but are a result of a process linked to historical events such as colonization and the maintenance of global inequalities after decolonisation. In other words, power imbalances are directly related to the concept of "The Haves and Have-Nots."

All stakeholders in the field of international development and humanitarian aid agree on the need to change power dynamics to address the inequalities associated with them. Phrases like "shifting the power" and "decolonization" have entered the vocabulary to express the necessity of addressing power imbalances. Many pilots, workshops, and symposia have been organized to usher in this change that would entail ensuring that individuals with lived experiences related to SROL issues and those deeply knowledgeable about the local context have an equal ability to influence decision making and resource allocation. However, no significant change can be observed. It's important to recognize that as long as the notion of "The Haves and the Have-Nots" persists, some imbalances in relationships will always exist. This perspective highlights ongoing challenges in achieving equity and inclusion within partnerships.

The role donor governments play is a complex one. One the one had there are historical actions that have contributed to imbalance in power dynamics and to this day this imbalance is maintained through economic and military policies. On the other hand there genuine efforts to

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<sup>1</sup> Phartos: Association for Dutch International Development Organisations

address human suffering in all its forms. It is easy to get stuck in a abstract discussion about fault and attribution. It's important to acknowledge that donors and international organizations, in the case of the international development, do not inherently work to maintain power imbalances. Often, the opposite is true. However, it's essential to recognize the complexity of donor governments, as their policies and actions can sometimes inadvertently contribute to power imbalances. On one side, donor governments may pursue economic and military policies that can influence power dynamics. And on the other side, they allocate resources to departments of international cooperations to address development and humanitarian challenges within certain political constraints. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that while many elements within donor governments aim for positive change, the broader complexities surrounded by ever changing context as well as choosing the right balance for their own good, can inadvertently perpetuate power imbalances. This confirms that systemic mechanisms contribute to or even exacerbate power imbalances.

- **Proximity to power:** Geographical distance and limited in-country representation play an important role in creating barriers. In general, different stakeholders in the development ecosystem are not in close proximity to each other. Communities have limited access to international organizations, whereas in-country implementers have limited, to no access to donors.
- **Access to information:** The extent to which stakeholders have access to the same information is an important factor that contributes to power imbalance. Information such as funding opportunities, guidelines and procedures, and policy priorities, both in terms of upwards and downward communication, often flows through intermediate agencies (international agencies), effectively solidifying their power base.
- **Limited understanding of norms and language:** A shared understanding of language and norms is a prerequisite for effective engagement and collaboration. However, in the development field, each actor and stakeholder adheres to their own norms and language. Stakeholders who are in close proximity and have regular interactions develop a better understanding than those who do not. Those controlling the levers of power bear the responsibility of creating the space to develop common, inclusive language and norms.
- **Existing biases and assumptions:** There are unspoken assumptions and biases that underpin the current harsh realities, such as the bias toward in-country organizations. These biases range from reasonable assumptions to outright discriminatory tendencies. Discussions disqualifying in-country organizations often start with the statement that they don't have the same level of experience or policies and procedures in place. However, there is almost always an undertone of presumed guilt of corruption and other unethical behaviour. These assumptions, coupled with donors' risk aversion, fundamentally perpetuate power imbalances.

## Foundations for effective partnership and shared ownership

The above observations provide a snapshot of a more complex ecosystem. As mentioned, numerous discussions and initiatives aim to address these issues. However, these initiatives often remain in the abstract. In this paper, we aim to go beyond the abstract and offer a framework to operationalize change. Before we dive into this framework, we want to highlight three principles underpinning the proposed framework.

Decolonization is often offered as an alternative concept to change the current ecosystem, emphasizing reparation-based ideas. This concept derives its weight from the idea of dismantling existing colonization in the international development world. The foundation of this concept is the normative predication that the current ways are wrong. Even though this concept might the consequences and aftermath of historic injustices, it is important to examine whether it offers a way out of the current systemic shortcomings.

The concept of decolonisation reinforces values of 'us vs. them,' oppression, and victimhood, among others. We believe that such normative-driven ideas don't lead to long-term effective change. Instead, we should be vigilant not to become victims of decolonization. We advocate for collaboration and working together based on shared ownership rather than the concept of decolonization. Shared ownership creates space for all to contribute based on their added values and common understanding. Fundamental to this shift is **transforming accountability** from a vertical (hierarchical, starting at the donor level) to horizontal shared accountability. Horizontal shared accountability recognizes that all have a stake and legitimacy to contribute. This requires donors, international organizations, and in-country organizations to reevaluate the way they operate. Finally, such change **requires shifting partnership from Instrumental to Transformative**. Implementing partners (donors, international, in-country) often work together as a means to an end, creating an instrumental partnership that doesn't go beyond the surface. Current contractual and funding mechanisms are based on this instrumental partnership. By prioritizing shared ownership, partnerships should be based on the principles of **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**. With the help of the framework, we aim to operationalize.

This framework builds on the lessons learned from the current programs implemented in Somalia under the Security and Rule of Law Program. These programs include Miisaan, which focuses on transitional justice, Damal, which addresses access to justice, and Danwadaag, focusing on governments. These programs are funded by the Dutch government at the Embassy of Nairobi and use an adaptive learning approach. The Knowledge Platform for Security and Rule of Law (KPSRL), through its Programmatic Learning Initiative, has been supporting these programs. This document is part of the Program's Learning Initiative products and builds on experiences in Somalia.

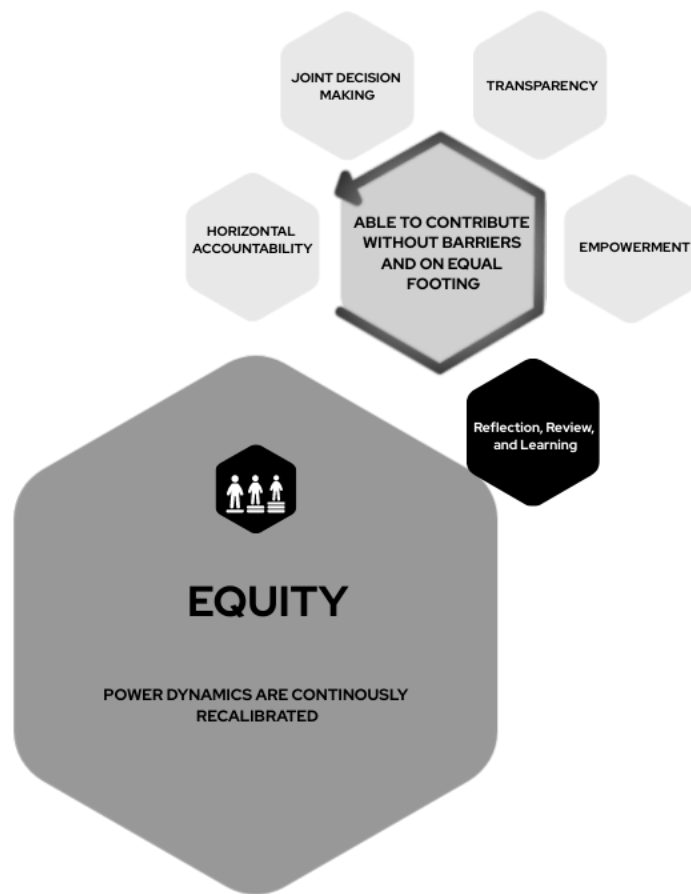
# Equity

***Power dynamics are continuously recalibrated***

**Equity** lies at the heart of the proposed partnership framework, emphasizing uniform access to information, guidelines, and materials among all stakeholders. It's not just about sharing resources; it's about ensuring that communities are informed and engaged. Equity means that no single stakeholder holds exclusive information, preventing imbalances.

**Transparency** is key to achieving equity, as it prevents information hoarding and fosters a level playing field for all involved partners. Commitment to equity ensures that everyone, regardless of their role, has equal access to knowledge and resources, promoting fairness and collaboration within our partnership.

In the upcoming sections, this document will delve into the crucial aspects such as transparency, joint decision-making, and horizontal accountability.



## Empowerment

Within our partnership framework, empowerment is a cornerstone. It's about recognizing that every stakeholder brings unique value to the table. It involves understanding where support is needed and providing that support unconditionally. When a task is delegated, empowerment means granting ownership, allowing individuals and organizations to be responsible for their expertise. It's a collaborative journey where each stakeholder contributes meaningfully, elevating the partnership's collective strength. Through empowerment, stakeholders aim to nurture a sense of shared ownership and collective accountability, ensuring that everyone's voice is not only heard but respected. It's about harnessing the full potential of our diverse and skilled team to create a positive impact.

To promote empowerment within a partnership and among stakeholders, focus on

- Identifying needs of involved partners (international, in-country, and community based) and develop a collective strategy to empower each other
- Providing access to expertise and experience, and all partners, especially in-country partners to share their expertise;
- Offer training to maximize the contribution of all partners involved;
- All partners should check their assumption of expertise and superiority;

This approach fosters a sense of shared ownership and commitment, leading to more effective, context-specific solutions for communities.

## Transparency

Access to information is directly linked to perceived power imbalance. As the saying goes, *information is power*. Transparency is a core principle that ensures equal access to information for all stakeholders, and they should firmly believe that one stakeholder does not possess more information than the other, as this could lead to imbalances within the partnership. Instead, all parties emphasize that everyone should have equal access to critical details. This applies universally, regardless of whether a stakeholder is a donor, international or in-country partner, or a community organization. The need for transparency becomes more relevant when funds are being discussed and decision are being made.

Ensure that all information is available and accessible to all relevant stakeholders.

- Organize moment of interaction to share information both formal and informal. Within the SRoL Somalia programme, the donor created a monthly and quarterly moment to engage with all partners. This has proven to be very effective and is worthwhile to be replicated
- Be open and transparent when discussions start around available funds. Ensure that all stakeholders involved can bring to the table their contribution and needs based of equity and equality.
- Transparency requires knowing each other's systems, procedures, and methods of operation and creating collective procedures to working together respecting these systems.



## Joint Decision Making

In our collaborative framework, joint decision making is not just encouraged; it's an obligation. Stakeholders must have a voice and actively participate in the decision-making process. This inclusivity is vital for reaching comprehensive and well-considered conclusions. Starting point of joint decision making is identifying and understanding who the relevant actors are that have a stake in the issue at hand. This is the fundamental starting point of equity, the acceptance that other than you might have a bigger say in the issue at hand and therefore need to have a stake in the decision-making process.

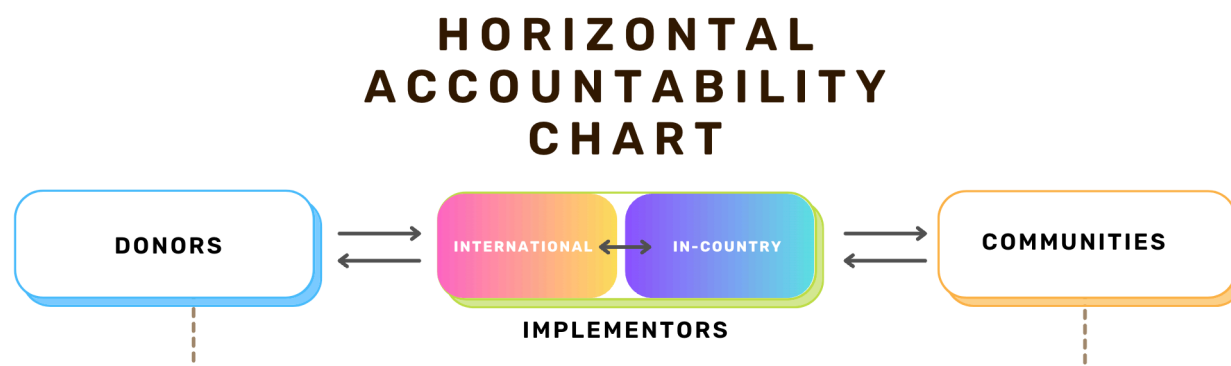
Decision-making approaches should be rooted in consensus-building, where every perspective is taken into account. Stakeholders value the input of each partner and strive to find common ground through dialogue and compromise. This approach ensures that decisions are made collectively, taking into consideration the diverse perspectives and needs of all stakeholders. Striving for absolute consensus is could be difficult, however accepting consensus as a guiding principle and operationalizing in an approach that best work for all involved leads to a more joint decision making.

But our commitment to joint decision making doesn't stop at making choices. The partnership also prioritizes follow-through and action. Once a decision is reached, they ensure that it is implemented effectively and efficiently. This not only demonstrates the dedication to the decisions they make but also helps you to achieve your shared goals and objectives.

- Identify and understanding who the relevant actors are that have a stake.
- Ensure that all decision making is based on the principle of consensus, or an agreed version of consensus, to ensure that no single partner dominates the decision-making process.
- Ensure that individuals working to implement programmes have the mandate to collaboratively determine the way forward.
- Ensure that all stakeholders have a role in the decision making or at minimum that decisions do not negatively impact specific stakeholders.
- Streamline bureaucratic processes wherever feasible to allow for more agile and responsive decisions.
- Provide clarity on roles and responsibilities, promotes well-informed, collective choices.
- Ensure follow-through on decision made resulting in more inclusive and effective decision-making.

## Horizontal Accountability

Accountability is a cornerstone of equitable relationship. Accountability refers to a system of checks and balances that operate within and organisation and among various actors or organizations that work together. Although accountability has different aspects, the one most focused on is the hierarchical or vertical, also known as inward accountability. This type of accountability is derived for financial and fiduciary control system. In creating effective partnerships, various forms of accountability should be given attention. Shifting from vertical to horizontal accountability helps to promote shared power and mutual accountability among these actors.



There are various forms of accountability with various that need to be aligned:

- 1. Donors' Accountability to their Citizens and International/In-Country Organisations:** Donors have a fundamental accountability not only to their citizens but also to the international organisations they partner with and in-country organisations actively involved in the implementation process. This dual accountability ensures that decisions made by donors consider the perspectives and needs of both international/in-country partners and communities. Donors must be responsive to the expectations and values of their own citizens. who should be well informed about international development policies and their approach. When communities understand and support policies based on equity and localisation, the accountability relationship can then extend to define the content of donor policies in collaboration with the development community and partner countries, ensuring a more informed and inclusive decision-making process.
- 2. Sideward/Mutual Accountability:** All parties involved, donors, international and in-country organizations, and the communities they serve to hold each other accountable. This two-way accountability means that everyone has a role in ensuring that actions and decisions align with the agreed-upon goals and values of the project. This requires respecting the various system different partners use while at the same time working together to align these different systems. Sideward accountability requires openness, respect, and trust.

3. **Inward Accountability:** When thinking about accountability, inward accountability is the one often comes to mind. Inward accountability is vertical or hierarchical forms of accountability. It refers to the obligation of individuals or entities within an organization to be answerable to those above or below them in the organizational or partnership structure. The bases for inward accountability are the existence vertical power dynamics. Although inward accountability remains important, it is often prioritizing internal organizational structure above the partnership. When working in partnership, inward accountability should go hand-in-hand with sideward accountability.
4. **Policy Creation with Communities:** Accountability goes further than fiduciary and financial accountability. It touches starts with the question “why are we doing what we are doing?” These questions cannot and should not be answered from a single perspective. In an effective partnership, donors, (implementing partners), governments, and communities together should be involved in answering this question. Communities and governments are not just recipients of policies; they should be actively engaged in their creation. This level of involvement ensures that policies are tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the communities, promoting a more responsive and accountable approach with the donor.

Overall, horizontal accountability fosters a collaborative and inclusive approach to governance and decision-making. It ensures that all stakeholders are accountable to each other and have a voice in the process and helps create a system where checks and balances operate effectively to achieve common objectives while respecting the autonomy and agency of each party involved.

**Note:**

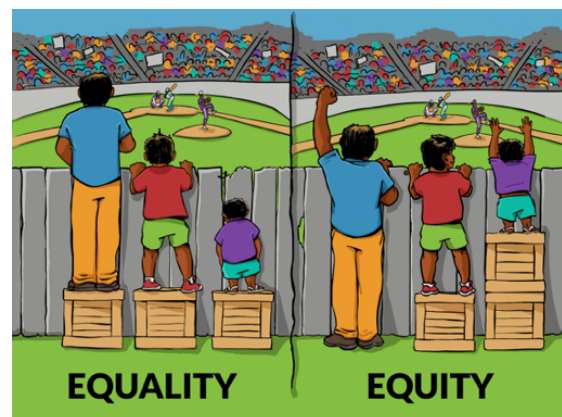
*While "equity" and "equality" are often used interchangeably, they represent different concepts:*

**Equality:** Equality relates to opportunities. Equality is built on the premiss of treating everyone the same, providing the same resources, opportunities, or support to all individuals, regardless of their needs or circumstances. It assumes that everyone starts from the same place and requires identical assistance.

**Equity:** Equity on the other hand relates to outcomes. Equity recognizes that people, communities, and organisations are different, have different needs, starting points and challenges, and different values to the table. It involves distributing resources, opportunities, or support in a way that accounts for these differences, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to succeed.

In essence, equality aims for sameness, while equity strives for fairness by acknowledging and addressing individual or group-specific disparities. Achieving equity may require tailored approaches to accommodate varying needs, ultimately resulting in a more just and inclusive outcome.

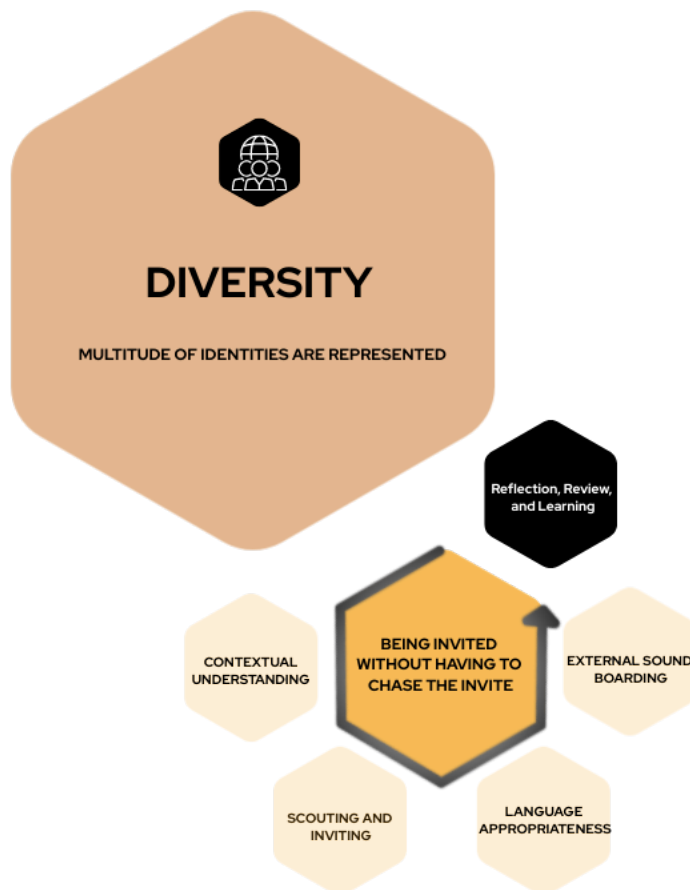
In this framework, the focus is on equity rather than equality.



# Diversity

## *Multitude of identities are represented*

In the pursuit of equity and inclusion within partnerships, we delve into the second major principle: **Diversity**. Embracing diversity isn't merely acknowledging differences; it's about actively seeking and valuing the multitude of identities, voices, and experiences that make up our complex world. To navigate this principle effectively, we'll explore several critical facets, each posing questions that guide our journey:



## **Contextual understanding**

Contextual understanding is the bedrock of effective and impactful initiatives. It means recognizing that no two regions or communities are the same, and each possesses its own set of circumstances, cultures, and dynamics. To truly make a difference, it's crucial to understand and respect these differences.

This principle is about asking the right questions: Where are we working, and what are the unique characteristics of these places? Whose voices are we hearing, and whose are we missing? Are our partners reflective of the diversity of the regions we operate in? Can we approach these contexts without judgment and be open to learning?

Contextual understanding reminds us that every community is a tapestry of identities, and by appreciating this diversity, partners can tailor the programs to be more effective and equitable. It's not just about hearing voices; it's about truly listening and adapting our actions to fit the local context.

Principles of Contextual Understanding involve a multi-faceted approach. They start with conducting comprehensive context analysis, which includes stakeholder mapping to address questions raised earlier in the document. External partners are expected to gain a deep understanding of local customs and norms, ensuring their actions align with the context. Verification mechanisms should be designed to be inclusive, preventing the inadvertent exclusion of any groups or organizations. Collaborating with local knowledge centers, such as universities, is encouraged, with an emphasis on impartiality and fairness. Additionally, continuous reflection and regular updates of the contextual analysis are essential to maintain its relevancy and accuracy as circumstances evolve.

## **Scouting and inviting**

Scouting and inviting is a critical aspect of fostering diversity and inclusion within initiatives. It means actively seeking out voices that may otherwise go unheard. This process goes beyond waiting for volunteers to step forward; instead, one should proactively identify and engage individuals and communities.

The key to successful in scouting and inviting lies in our ability to map communities through in-country partners on the ground. These partners are invaluable in helping to understand the intricate web of relationships, cultures, and perspectives that exist within a region. By working closely with them, you can create a triangulation of information, ensuring the accuracy and relevance of your efforts.

Moreover, scouting and inviting isn't just about finding voices; it's about making individuals aware that their perspectives matter. It's a deliberate effort to reach out to those who may not have traditionally participated in such initiatives. By identifying voices that are not present and inviting them into the conversation, they broaden our understanding, enrich our programs, and uphold the principles of equity and diversity.

- Include mapping of active and dormant organization, and relevant individual in the context analyses;
- Be aware in the internal dynamics amongst stakeholders. Create space for opposing voices and opinions;
- Consider engaging consultants and institution that have a proven track-record and have certain level of independent, such as universities and knowledge centers, to assist in this mapping.
- Ensure that all identified stakeholders are invited to the table. Limit going through intermediaries which may act as gate-keepers

### Language appropriateness

Language has is a powerful tool to communicate and establish relationship. In it is important to be aware that language can have an exclusionary effect as well. Language used by donors and implementing partners often use language that is technical of nature and is derived form their own institutional logic. The is often an assumption that this language is understood by all. To achieve effective partnership, one should be aiming to enhance language appropriateness in these programs, a few key steps can be instrumental:

1. **Community-Centric Language:** Begin by understanding the language spoken and understood by the local community. Ensure that your communication aligns with their linguistic preferences.
2. **Simplification When Necessary:** Don't hesitate to simplify complex language or terminology to make it more accessible. Clarity is essential.
3. **Incorporate Stakeholder Input:** Engage with stakeholders right from the beginning. Their insights into language preferences can shape your communication strategy.
4. **External Expertise:** Seek advice from independent partners or linguistic experts. Their input can provide valuable guidance on language choice and its effectiveness.

By following these steps, stakeholders can foster better communication, understanding, and inclusivity within their programs, ultimately strengthening their impact on the communities they serve.

**Diverse Collaboration:** Bring together poets, writers, academia, and others to contextualize Transitional Justice-related terminology in the local language and social norms.

**Local Terminology Development:** Create local terminology in the current language that accurately reflects the context.

**Testing and Adaptation:** Test the language with different communities to ensure its relevance and resonance.

**Avoid Echo Chambers:** Avoid preconceived notions and echo chambers that may not consider the local context.

**Expert Input:** Engage local language experts to facilitate effective translation between languages.

**Contextual Consistency:** Ensure language appropriateness is integrated into both partnership and thematic language, aligning with local contexts.

**Shared Language:** Foster a shared language within the partnership, including implementing partners and donors, to enhance understanding and collaboration.

**NB:** In this document we have chosen to use terminology that we consider to be aligned with the message we want to convey:

**Locally-driven** instead of Localization

**In-country partners** instead of Local partners

**Shared ownership** instead of Local Ownership

**Collective Accountability** – instead of accountability

### **External sound boarding**

Incorporating external sound boarding into your program is a strategic approach aimed at enhancing diversity, inclusivity, and correctness in your actions. This practice involves actively seeking input and feedback from external sources, including community members, partners, and marginalized groups. By doing so, you ensure that your program not only represents a wide spectrum of voices but also benefits from a diverse range of perspectives.

The process of external sound boarding serves as a vital mechanism to verify whether you might be unintentionally missing certain communities or groups from your initiatives. It helps validate your understanding of the local context, ensuring that your program aligns with the actual needs and expectations of your stakeholders.

Regularly engaging in dialogue with these external voices fosters a deeper sense of trust, inclusivity, and accountability within your program. It provides a comprehensive and well-rounded perspective that contributes to more informed decision-making. This collaborative approach enhances the diversity of perspectives involved, ultimately leading to more effective, culturally sensitive, and sustainable programs.

# Inclusion

*Variety of ideas and perspectives are respected*

**Inclusion** marks the final piece of the proposed three-part framework. Inclusion encapsulates the idea that a multitude of ideas and perspectives are respected and valued within our collaborative efforts. It serves as the final step in the proposed framework, where equity and diversity come together to drive shared ownership, effective collaboration, and collective accountability. In the sections to follow, we'll delve deeper into the significance of inclusion, exploring how it shapes our actions and outcomes, and why it is fundamental to our shared vision of effective, equitable, and impactful partnership.





## Respect and empathy

Respect and empathy are foundational principles in fostering meaningful collaboration and dialogue among diverse stakeholders. At the core of this principle lies the fundamental idea of treating others as you would like to be treated yourself. It involves recognizing and challenging our own assumptions and biases, creating a shared space where open and honest dialogue can flourish. In this shared space, all participants are granted an equal voice, and ground rules are codified to ensure that interactions are respectful and considerate.

- Treat people the way you want to be treated.
- Check your own assumptions.
- There should be shared space for dialogue.
- The space for dialogue is shared by everyone.
- Codify ground rules.
- Unspoken rules should be known.

- Be aware of own norms and expectation. Reflect on how these might differ from the partners/
- Clarify expectations and verify their validity by putting them on the agenda.
- Embrace flexible timelines, steering clear of tight, unrealistic schedules. This grant partners the space they need to excel.
- Invest time in understanding the unique situations partners and stakeholder face, empathizing with their challenges.
- Transparent communication operations, ensuring clarity and trust. Timely responses are encouraged, ensuring that every partner can communicate effectively.
- Thinking of diverse cultures and their specific need. In the face of conflict or misunderstanding, actively seek resolution through means such as social meetups, open dialogues to address these issues.
- Furthermore, fostering a culture of knowledge sharing, encouraging partners to freely exchange learnings and insights, cultivating mutual respect and empathy in a collaborative environment.

## Safe space

Creating a safe space is pivotal to enhancing inclusion, respect, and empathy among diverse stakeholders. It's about cultivating an environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing their ideas and perspectives without fear of judgment or bias. Creating safe space should be considered in both inward and sideward processes. Inward in terms of the process and procedures that safeguard individuals in an organisation and sideward in terms of partnership between organisations. Both the inward and sideward processes require commitment from the various levels in the organisation and need to be codified and facilitated. This codification acts as a shared foundation, setting clear expectations for behaviour and interaction.

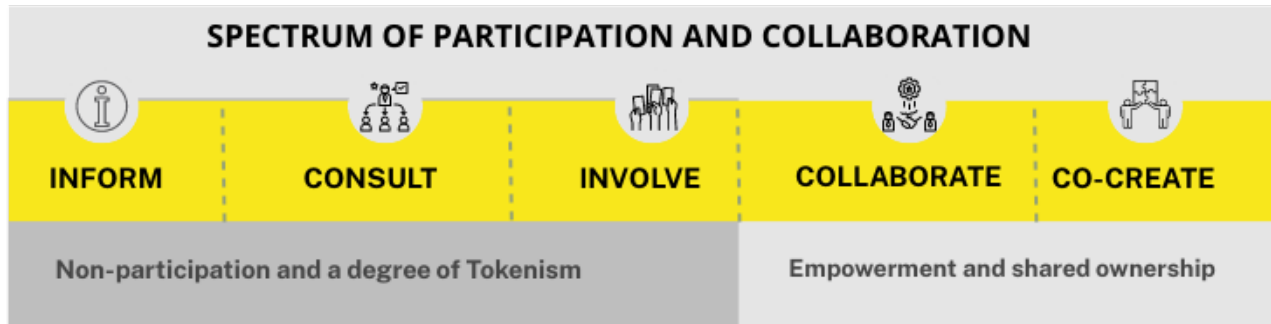
Furthermore, building a collaborative space requires the deliberate inclusion of mechanisms to manage disagreements constructively. These mechanisms can range from structured conflict resolution procedures to designated platforms for open dialogue. By having these systems in place, stakeholders ensure that disagreements are addressed with respect and empathy, fostering an environment where diverse voices are valued and heard. The table below gives a breakdown of the different steps that can be undertaken to create and maintain a safe space (both inward and sideward)

In essence, a safe space goes beyond physical boundaries; it's a psychological and emotional construct that promotes an inclusive and respectful atmosphere. When properly nurtured, it encourages stakeholders to collaborate authentically, bridging differences and working together towards common goals.

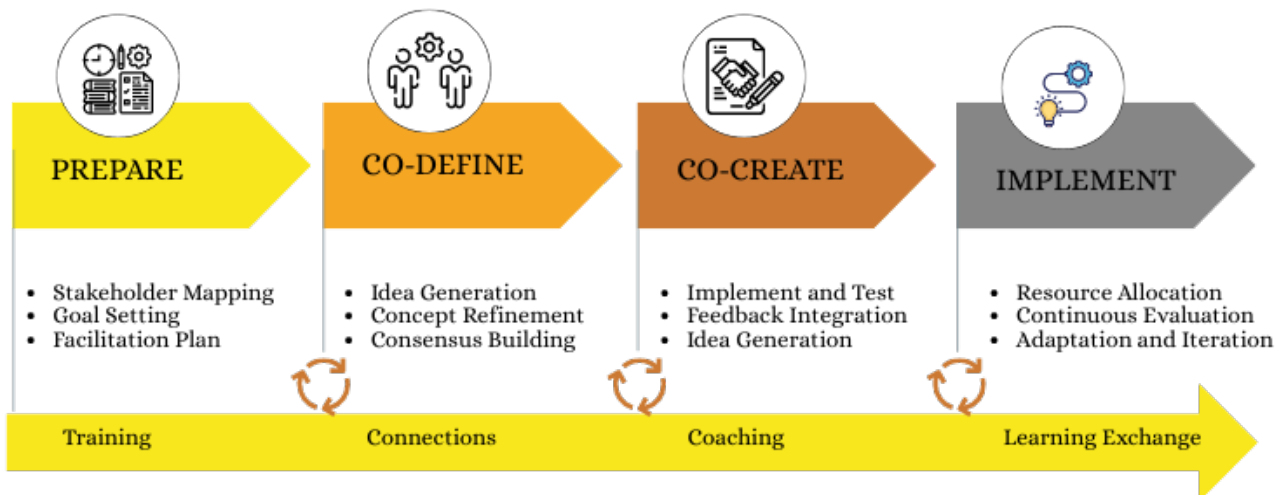
- 1. Collectively Establish Clear Guidelines and Codes of Conduct:**
  - Develop and communicate a set of guidelines and codes of conduct that outline expectations for respectful and inclusive behavior.
  - Ensure all participants understand the consequences of violating these guidelines and emphasize the importance of adherence.
- 2. Facilitate Open and Respectful Communication:**
  - Encourage open and transparent communication among organizations by promoting active listening and constructive dialogue.
  - Create opportunities for participants to express their ideas, concerns, and feedback without fear of retribution.
- 3. Build Trust and Rapport:**
  - Organize team-building activities and icebreakers to help participants get to know each other on a personal level.
  - Foster a culture of trust by emphasizing the importance of confidentiality and the responsible handling of sensitive information.
- 4. Address Conflicts Constructively:**
  - Develop a conflict resolution process that allows organizations to address disagreements and disputes in a fair and respectful manner.
  - Encourage mediation or third-party involvement when necessary to find mutually beneficial solutions.

## Co-creation of tools and mechanisms

Co-creation is commonly accepted as the main way of ensuring inclusion. However, the operationalization of co-creation stays limited to informing, consulting, and involving stakeholders. As the overview below shows, these steps do not automatically lead to co-creation. At worst these steps might be considered as degrees of tokenism as they do not fundamentally create inclusion or shared ownership.



The true essence of co-creation of tools and mechanisms lies in ensuring that all stakeholders have an equal say in selecting and determining the right tools and methods for their collaborative efforts from the start. It's about shared decision-making from the outset, as well as through all the different stages shown in the overview below, where partners collectively evaluate and choose the most appropriate tools, rather than one partner dictating the choices. This collaborative approach at the beginning of the consortium fosters inclusivity, respects the diversity of perspectives, and leads to more effective and equitable working arrangements. It also helps establish clear expectations within that space and promotes ongoing reflections on the appropriateness of selected tools and mechanisms. Moreover, it ensures that these mechanisms respect the differences in organizational structures and cultures among partners, allowing for a harmonious and productive collaboration.



The table below provides concrete tips and ways to ensure genuine co-creation.

**1. Identify and Engage Key Stakeholders:**

- Identify all relevant stakeholders, including beneficiaries, community members, experts, partners, and funders.
- Develop a comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategy to involve them in the co-creation process.

**2. Create a Collaborative Environment:**

- Establish physical and virtual spaces for stakeholders to interact and collaborate.
- Use technology and communication tools to facilitate remote participation and contributions.

**3. Feedback Mechanisms:**

- Develop mechanisms for stakeholders to provide feedback on program design, progress, and challenges.
- Regularly solicit input through surveys, focus groups, and feedback forms.

**4. Training and Capacity Building:**

- Offer training and capacity-building opportunities to stakeholders, particularly if they lack the necessary skills and knowledge to actively engage in the co-creation process.

**5. Collaborative Workshops and Meetings:**

- Organize regular workshops, meetings, and brainstorming sessions where stakeholders can share ideas, discuss challenges, and co-create solutions.
- Ensure these meetings are inclusive and encourage participation from all stakeholders.

**6. Co-Design and Co-Planning:**

- Collaboratively design and plan the program with input from all relevant stakeholders.
- Involve stakeholders in decision-making processes and the development of program strategies.

**7. Regular Updates and Progress Reports:**

- Provide stakeholders with regular updates on program progress, accomplishments, and challenges.
- Share performance data and insights to maintain transparency.

**8. Feedback Integration:**

- Act on the feedback received from stakeholders and show that their contributions have influenced program decisions.
- Make visible changes and improvements based on stakeholder input.

**9. Continuous Evaluation and Learning:**

- Continuously evaluate the co-creation process and the program's impact.
- Use lessons learned to adapt and improve the co-creation strategy over time.

**10. Recognize and Acknowledge Contributions:**

- Recognize and acknowledge the contributions of stakeholders through (public) acknowledgments.
- Celebrate the successes and milestones achieved through co-creation efforts.

## Creation of shared culture

Building a shared culture within our collaboration is essential for stakeholders. This culture is cultivated through practical actions rather than mere words. Regular reporting, both quarterly and yearly, forms the foundation of transparent communication. These reports serve as tools for sharing progress and identifying areas for growth. Moreover, this commitment to a shared culture is evident in the structural aspects of our partnership. Partners should prioritize constant interaction and maintain open lines of communication. Monthly and quarterly meetings are opportunities for discussion, allowing everyone's ideas and feedback to flow freely. This open dialogue is the essence of our collaboration, ensuring that every stakeholder's voice is valued and heard.

Shared culture extends beyond professional interactions; it's about getting to know one another and creating a sense of unity. Come together for joint social activities and gatherings, fostering a genuine sense of community among all participants. These interactions build trust, strengthen relationships, and underscore our dedication to the principles of inclusion and equity.

- Prioritizing unanimous agreement on processes and procedures that all stakeholders support, understand, and internalize is essential, fostering a common foundation;
- Consistency and planned communications, both formal and informal, are paramount in ensuring a strong, shared culture;
- Shared templates and tools that are co-designed to create spaces that accommodate diverse identities and perspectives, contributing to a collective identity;
- Collective branding and symbols enhance shared culture;
- Open and continuous communication underpins the shared culture, enabling transparent exchanges;
- Unnecessary hierarchy is limited, nurturing an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration;
- Consciously shaping the culture includes actively helping one another, reinforcing shared values;
- Cultural principles are codified, embedded within systems and practices;
- Awareness of the softer elements of culture, such as emotions and behaviors, is maintained, with space for addressing these elements as a vital component of the shared culture;

## Connecting the Framework

The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) framework is a dynamic foundation that weaves together the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, fostering a connectedness that is beneficial in today's collaborative landscape. In this framework, equity ensures fairness, acknowledging that each stakeholder possesses unique needs and challenges. It compels partners to allocate resources and opportunities in a manner that rectifies imbalances and cultivates a level playing field.

Diversity within the EDI framework recognizes the rich tapestry of perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences within our global community. It encourages the active participation of individuals from all walks of life, thereby enriching the collective wisdom and enabling multifaceted problem-solving. Inclusion, wants an environment where every voice is heard, valued, and respected. It embraces a culture where diversity is not only recognized but celebrated.

The EDI framework is about the interconnectedness of these principles, promoting an inclusive ecosystem where equity guides our actions, diversity fuels our creativity, and inclusion ensures that every voice contributes to our shared success. When one of the three fundamental principles, Inclusion, Diversity, or Equity is missing from a partnership, it can lead to significant imbalances and potential risks:

1. **If Equity is Missing: Risk of Disengagement**
  - Without equity, there's a risk that some stakeholders may feel marginalized or unfairly treated. This can lead to disengagement, as those who perceive inequity may become less motivated to actively participate or contribute. Inequities in resource allocation, decision-making, or recognition can erode trust and commitment within the partnership.
2. **If Diversity is Missing: Risk of Homogeneity**
  - In the absence of diversity, the partnership may suffer from homogeneity. When perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences are too similar, it can result in groupthink and a limited range of ideas. This lack of diversity hinders innovation and can lead to solutions that are less robust or adaptable to different contexts.
3. **If Inclusion is Missing: Risk of Dominant Identity Rule**
  - Excluding certain voices or identities can lead to a dominant identity or group setting the agenda and making decisions unilaterally. This not only perpetuates power imbalances but can also result in solutions that favour the dominant identity's interests, neglecting the needs and perspectives of others.

Incorporating all three principles—Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity—is vital to maintain a balanced and effective partnership. These principles serve as cornerstones for building collaborative, resilient, and innovative partnerships that truly represent the interests and perspectives of all stakeholders.

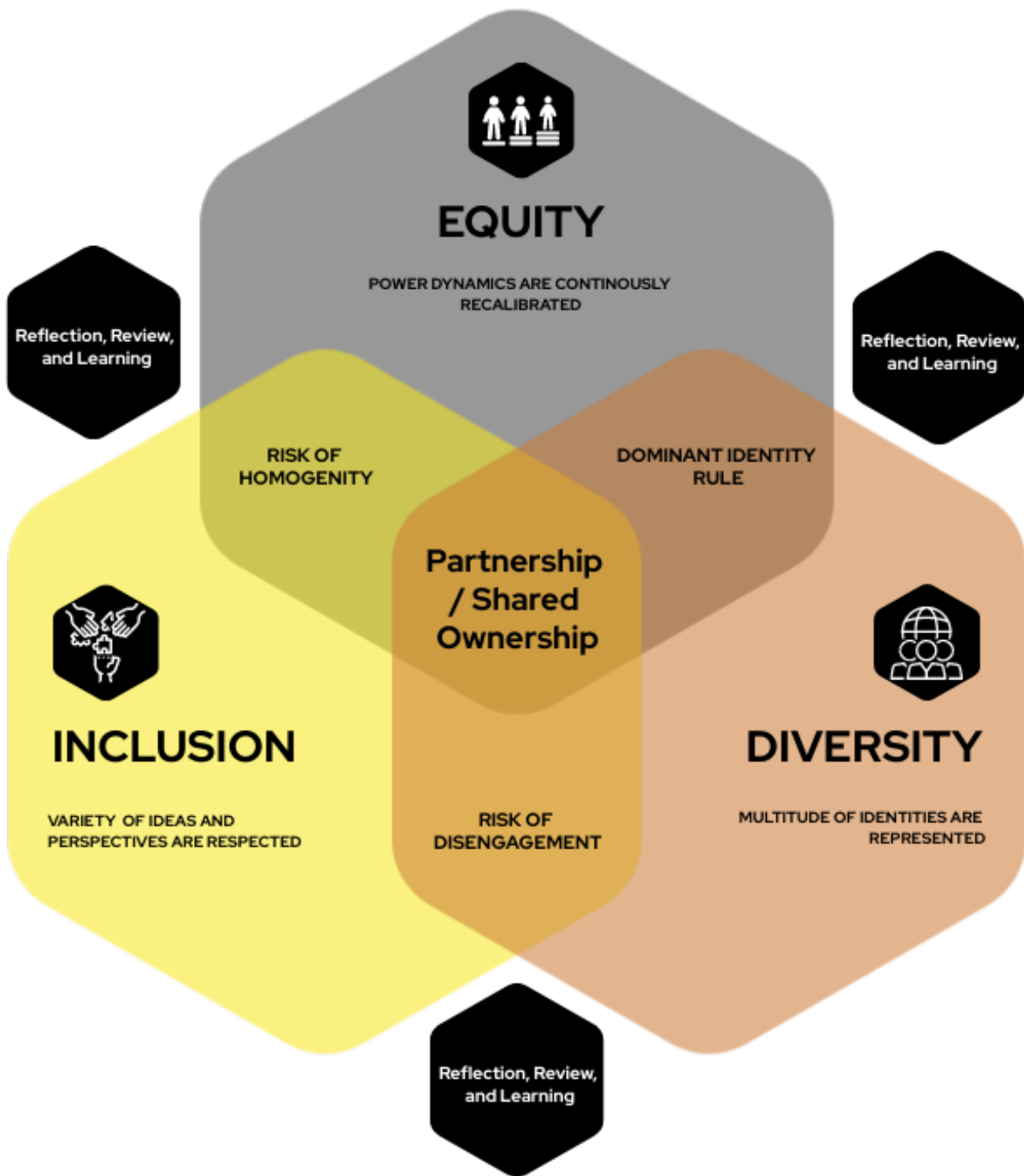


Figure 1. The infographic visually represents the key principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and their interconnectedness within the framework.

## Reflection, review, and learning

Sustaining equitable partnerships necessitates a cycle of reflection, review, and learning. In the context of equity among stakeholders, here's how to ensure fairness:

1. **Assess Relationship Health:** Regularly gauge the partnership's health. Is every stakeholder actively contributing, or is there an undue dominance by a single entity? Ensuring that the power dynamic remains equitable is essential.
2. **Evaluate Contributions:** Scrutinize whether all partners are meaningfully engaged and offering their unique expertise. No stakeholder should be relegated to the sidelines; every voice should count.
3. **Commitment to Follow Through:** Equity isn't only about initial commitments but also about consistent action. Are the promises and responsibilities of each partner being upheld over time?
4. **Constant Evaluations:** Schedule yearly or “every 6 months” assessments of the partnership's health. These evaluations should involve all stakeholders and provide an opportunity for frank discussions on achievements, challenges, and areas needing improvement.
5. **Testing for Equity:** Periodically examine the partnership for signs of equity. Are there tensions or conflicts arising due to imbalances or unfair practices? Address such issues proactively.
6. **Representation:** Ensure that all stakeholders, including those traditionally marginalized, are adequately represented in decision-making processes. Inequitable representation can undermine the partnership's equity.
7. **Alignment with Strategy:** Continuously align partnership activities with shared vision and objectives. Ensure that all partners are working collaboratively toward common goals and adhering to an equitable distribution of responsibilities.

By incorporating the above, you can nurture and sustain equitable partnerships that thrive over time.



## Recommendations:

**Policy development:** Policy is often the starting point of any donor engagement. Policy outcomes and priorities linked to the political ambitions and are designed in the capitals on western nations. In the translation of these ambitions, consider EDI as the starting point of any strategy and policy development. Donor institutions should consider EDI as a practical pillar for effective strategy and policy implementation. Additionally, implementing partners play an important role in connecting these policy directions and community needs. Therefore, effective integration of EDI is as relevant for implementing partners as it is for donors. The following considerations could be of use when considering integration of EDI.

- Codify the institutional direction when it comes to EDI.
- In order to be reflective expanding the diversity of partners and processes.
- Ensure internal processes and prioritizations are aligned with EDI principles.
- Ensure that sufficient resources (e.g. time, training, and network) is allocated to support staff in their integration of EDI in their work
- Create checks and balances to reflect on the question: Reflect on the question who was consulted in the formation of the strategy? Who was not consulted?

**Funding Mechanisms:** funding forms the final step of translating strategy and policy into action from the perspective. With funding donors, engage implementing partners to translate the strategies and policies into activities and approaches. With this engagement, the role of the donor does not stop, in fact it becomes more important to ensure alignment with the core EDI principles. As donors and implementers (regardless of whether they are international or in-country) become partners, donors have the obligation to support and guide implementing partners. Donor should consider the following in when it comes to the funding mechanisms, regardless of the modality:

- Consider developing standards for equity, diversity, and inclusion as part of the funding process.
- Request all potential partners (regardless of whether they are international or in-country) to demonstrate how their consider EDI in their work.
- Request all potential partners (regardless of whether they are international or in-country) to demonstrate how their internal systems (financial, HR, and relationship management) supports the inclusion of EDI in their work.
- Ensure that accountability mechanisms on EDI are included in any funding agreement.
- Ensure that sufficient funds are available to support EDI integration.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the adoption of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) framework demands a profound examination of an institution's core values and its commitment to empowering employees to enact meaningful change.

The essential components for a successful implementation of EDI include organizational commitment, the translation of these principles into concrete policies and procedures, and active involvement of donors in incorporating these principles into their funding mechanisms. It's important to emphasize that effective EDI implementation requires a long-term vision, recognizing that its effects are sustained over time. In this journey, the maxim of "Gentle Pressure Relentlessly Applied" captures the essence, highlighting the importance of consistent and unwavering efforts to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of organizational life.

Based on our observations, it is evident that these principles hold significant relevance for donors, and implementing partners (both international as well as in-country). They should carefully consider how these principles can be integrated into their specific work, reflecting upon how each principle aligns with and can enhance their own contributions and practices. By doing so, the EDI document becomes a universal source of knowledge and insights for all partners, allowing them to adapt and apply these principles according to their individual circumstances and requirements.