Diversity monitoring in international development organisations

Evidence briefing #1

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Background note

Diversity in Development is a UK charity aiming to promote public education about and access to international development. We believe that it is vital for debates about, and access to, international development to involve society as a whole. Failure to achieve this would be ironic for a sector that aims to promote equity and justice globally. It could also impair its effectiveness and make it vulnerable to a lack of public and donor support.

We aim to monitor equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the sector through new studies and reviews of available evidence. We also produce occasional briefings based on recent studies that we feel make an important contribution to the debate.

The survey

NGOs and charities are a highly visible element of the international development sector, yet there is limited evidence about the diversity of their workforce. In this study, Diversity in Development worked with Bond – the major UK membership organisation for international development organisations – to include several questions on diversity monitoring in their 2022 membership survey. The aims of the questions were to:

- Assess the extent to which international development organisations collect and use diversity data on their staff (including gender, age, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background)

- Stimulate debate on diversity issues within international development organisations and at different levels within those organisations

- Collect data on what international development organisations think can or should be done to improve diversity

The online questionnaire was sent to approximately 450 Bond members and 124 responses were received. Respondents worked in a wide range of organisations: 37% in organisations that had an annual income of less than £2 million (defined as small organisations), 41% between £2 and £20 million (medium organisations), and 22% over £20 million (large organisations). 57% of respondents worked for organisations with fewer than 30 employees.

EDI practices

83% of respondents said that their organisations had an EDI statement in place, and 66% included cultural aspects of the organisation in job advertisements. 60% had removed language that was seen to reinforce stereotypes.

Table 1: EDI practices implemented, by organisational size

	Small >£20m annual income		Medium £2-20m annual income		Large >£20m annual income		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Including **statement of commitment** to equality, diversity and inclusion in your job advertisements	44	80.0	35	87.5	23	82.1	102	82.9
Including **cultural aspects** of your organisation in your **job advertisements** to emphasise work/life balance and encourage wellbeing	34	61.8	31	77.5	16	57.1	81	65.9
Removing **exclusive language** that reinforces stereotypical (e.g. male) attributes	31	56.4	23	57.5	20	71.4	74	60.2
Advertising roles on **specific job boards**, not the usual charity job websites	29	52.7	15	37.5	18	64.3	62	50.4
Something else	18	32.7	18	45.0	9	32.1	45	36.6
None of the above	3	5.5	1	2.5	2	7.1	6	4.9
Total	55	100.00	40	100.00	28	100.00	123	100.00

Collecting diversity data

A narrow majority of respondents (57%, n=70) reported that their organisation collects diversity data on its staff. Just under a quarter of respondents (23%, n=29) said 'No' and 21% (n=25) responded 'Don't know/not sure'. This means that 43% (n=54) of respondents in total either think that their organisation does not collect diversity data or do not know whether it does. 71% of those in large organisations collected diversity information about their employees, compared with 58% of medium and 49% of small organisations.

Chart showing: Yes 57%, No 23%, Don't know/not sure 20%
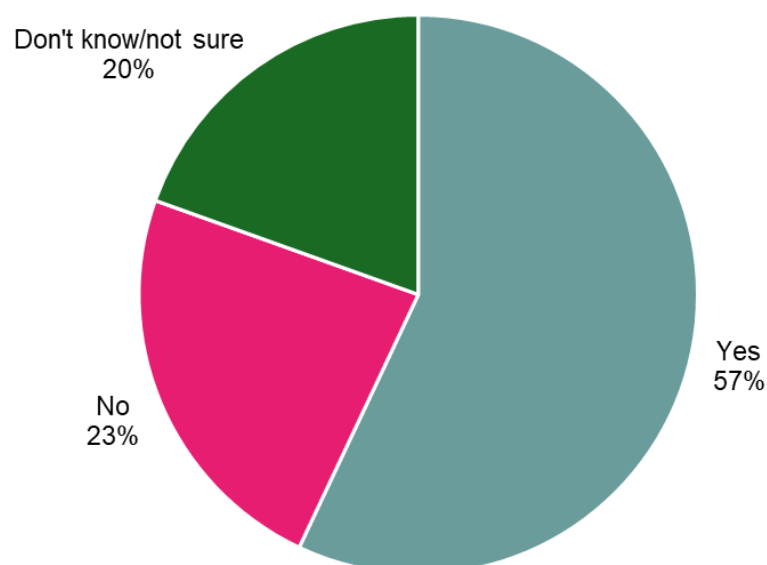
Types of diversity data collected

Of those in organisations that do collect diversity data, 69 broke this down by type. 96% said that they collect data for gender, 85% for ethnicity, 80% for age, and 77% for disability. The proportions collecting data on sexual orientation (61%) and religion (58%) were lower. By far the least common category was socioeconomic background, collected by 26% only. Table 2 shows the different sorts of diversity data collected, both as a percentage of respondents who said their organisations do collect this data and as a percentage of all respondents.

Table 2: Types of diversity data collected

Type of diversity data	N	Respondents whose organisations collect diversity data (%, n=69)	All respondents (%, n=124)
Gender	66	95.7	53.2
Ethnicity	58	84.1	46.8
Age	55	79.7	44.4
Disability	53	76.8	42.7
Sexual orientation	42	60.9	33.9
Religion	40	58.0	32.3
Socioeconomic background (staff in all countries, not just the UK)	18	26.1	14.5
None of the above	1	1.4	0.8

There were marked differences between small and large organisations in the types of diversity data collected. Small organisations were markedly less likely to collect data on

ethnicity (65%, compared with 95% for large organisations), age (62%, compared with 95%), sexual orientation (31%, compared with 75%), religion (27%, compared with 65%), and disability (54%, compared with 90%). Differences were less marked for gender (89%, compared with 100%) and socioeconomic background (23%, compared with 30%).

Table 3: Types of diversity data collected by responding organisations collecting any such data, by organisational size (n=69)

	Small >£20m annual income		Medium £2-20m annual income		Large >£20m annual income		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	23	88.5	23	100.0	20	100.0	66	95.7
Ethnicity	17	65.4	22	95.7	19	95.0	58	84.1
Age	16	61.5	20	87.0	19	95.0	55	79.7
Sexual orientation	8	30.8	19	82.6	15	75.0	42	60.9
Religion	7	26.9	20	87.0	13	65.0	40	58.0
Disability	14	53.8	21	91.3	18	90.0	53	76.8
Socioeconomic background	6	23.1	6	26.1	6	30.0	18	26.1
None of the above	1	3.8	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.4
Total	26	100.0	23	100.0	20	100.0	69	100.0

Using diversity data

Among those whose organisations do collect diversity data, 63% said that this was used to report back to the board, 60% to feed into organisational strategy, and 55% to inform recruitment. 49% benchmarked their organisations against others. While 61% reported to their boards on gender and 56% on ethnicity, only 12% did so on socioeconomic background. 49% collected diversity data at least once per year, with most of the remainder doing so at the time of appointment only.

Barriers to improving diversity

87% of respondents said that their organisation was seeking to 'improve representation', but only 29% had any specific targets in relation to this. When asked to identify approaches to improving diversity, 57% mentioned meetings to better understand the issues, 47% peer-to-peer support, and 42% guides with information on the issues.

When asked in an open-ended question to identify the main barriers to improving diversity in their own organisation, the main themes were:

- Low turnover of staff in small organisations

- Self-similar recruiting

- Wider image of the charity sector as white/middle class

- Difficulty in identifying candidates from underrepresented groups

- Lack of time, resources, and expertise to drive an EDI agenda/practice

Additional barriers were identified regarding collecting data on socioeconomic background. Unlike other categories, socioeconomic background is not a protected characteristic in UK legislation and, given limited resources, some saw a need to focus on areas that are protected. Some were unsure how to measure socioeconomic background, and others said that their small organisational size would mean that such data was not meaningful. A smaller number said that collecting data on socioeconomic background might be intrusive.

Conclusion

Many international development organisations are collecting and using diversity data. However, just under half of respondents reported that either their organisation does not collect any data or they do not know if it does so. There are particular challenges for smaller organisations in collecting diversity data.

The lack of data and policy on collecting socioeconomic data is particularly striking and concerning, in view of evidence of the underrepresentation of lower socioeconomic groups in the sector, and a relative lack of support for government funding of international development generally among people from working-class backgrounds.[1]

As a sector fundamentally connected to equity and inclusion globally, EDI should be part of the culture of international development organisations at every level. Understanding the composition of the existing workforce, through the collection of diversity data, is inherent to this. We commend those who have made progress on this journey, while encouraging those who are not collecting or using such data to reflect on the implications of this and what more can be done.

Recommendations

While recognising that the scale and nature of response will vary according to size and complexity, we recommend that all organisations in the international development sector should consider the following:

1. Review the extent to which diversity data is collected and adopt formal policies in this area.

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[1] A profession for the privileged? Towards a more inclusive international development sector, Diversity in Development (2025)

2. Ensure that diversity data is collected and updated at regular intervals, rather than only when individuals join the organisation. This would give employees the option of updating their records, and for new categories to be adopted.

3. Ensure that diversity data is regularly reported at board or trustee level, where it can form part of wider strategic decision-making.

4. Develop and implement appropriate action plans, based on the data, that address any underrepresentation and disparities, with measurable goals and regular progress reviews.

5. Make a clear statement recognising the need for socioeconomic background to be included in diversity data and EDI policies, alongside multiple, overlapping identities such as gender and ethnicity, to identify the experiences of those facing compounded disadvantages.

6. Take part in sector-wide initiatives to promote socioeconomic inclusion, including, for example, agreement on common definitions of socioeconomic background and the establishment of a network of EDI practitioners.

7. Review recruitment requirements to ensure that skill requirements are not unduly restrictive – for example, that non-graduates are not excluded unnecessarily.

We also recommend that the government should make socioeconomic background a protected characteristic. This would incentivise the collection, monitoring, and use of such data. However, we do not believe that the sector should wait for such action before implementing its own policies in this area.

Diversity in Development