#DEIforDEVELOPMENT

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION FOR
THE DEVELOPMENT SECTOR IN INDIA

LEARNINGS FROM THE #DEIFORDEVELOPMENT FORUM HELD ON MARCH 20, 2023

gbl. | Contents

Good Business Lab (GBL) is a non-profit, labor research and innovation lab. We lead businesses to improve the lives of all workers. We use rigorous research to establish common ground between worker wellbeing and business interests in low-income settings.

#DEIforDevelopment is an initiative by GBL to host a multistakeholder discussion to stimulate dialogue, create awareness, amass ideas, share best practices, and build collective capacity that advances diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in India's development sector.

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The idea behind the initiative is rooted in an awareness of the underrepresentation of marginalized and underprivileged communities among professionals in India's development sector [1]. The question remains -

DO WE HAVE ENOUGH VOICES FROM THE POPULATIONS WE SEEK TO ASSIST OR SERVE? [2]

In examining this, the first edition of the #DEIforDevelopment Forum was held on 20th March 2023. It saw the participation of over 15 prominent development organizations including J-PAL South Asia, Centre for Responsible Business (CRB), Indian School Of Development Management, Arthan, Dasra, CivicDataLab, Action For Autism, Noora Health, ETI Services, Includovate, Bahujan Economists, and others. It was received with immense positive feedback and rich learnings arising from the open discussions.

Chatham House rules were followed in the session, and the format included an ice-breaker activity on the way we perceive the world around us and break-out room discussions on varied topics in relation to DEI, including building intentionality into our hiring processes, the role of senior management, creating fair career growth opportunities, and using technology to create a more inclusive and accessible workplace.

[1] The development sector in India refers to domestic and international organizations/initiatives with a social focus in India. These include non-governmental organizations' activities, corporate social responsibility (CSR), social consulting, social research, etc.
[2] Participating organizations that are named have given consent to be included in this write-up.

In the ice-breaker activity, participants were asked to draw pictures of a sunset. Interestingly, participants across the board shared familiar images of a sunset on a horizon, in between mountains with birds flying overhead. This reinforces a simple question -
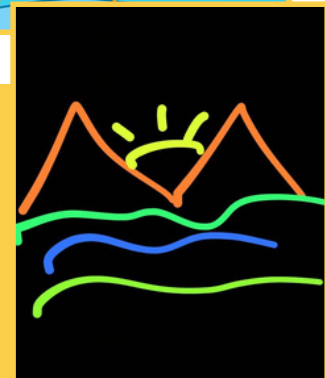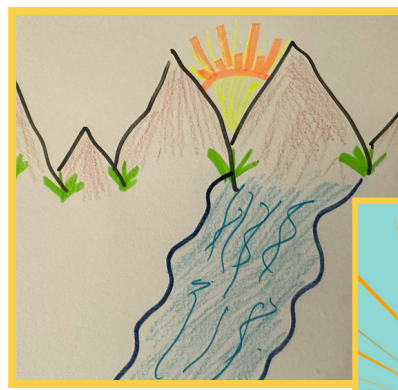
WHY WOULD ALL SUNSETS LOOK THE SAME TO EVERYONE?
## HOW DIFFERENT IS THE SUNSET IN YOUR DRAWING VERSUS THE ONE OUTSIDE YOUR WINDOW?

There isn't a simple answer to this but an observation that people are attuned and conditioned to see things a certain way because of what our experiences and society have taught us. Kindergarten children are typically taught to draw sunsets in the same way, so it isn't surprising that the adult participants in the #DEIforDevelopment forum also ended up drawing those familiar sunsets. The reality is that often we are also socially conditioned to see people and the world around us through a homogenous lens or certain preconceived notions.

The activity gave a tiny glimpse into how unconscious bias may crop up and the need for DEI to be an intentional and consistent effort for all of us.

In the next sections, key takeaways from each breakout room are consolidated with the aim to share knowledge and encourage larger networks to be considerate of DEI for the development sector. Additional resources are shared at the bottom of each summary to help readers who may wish to learn more.

gbl. | Executive Summary
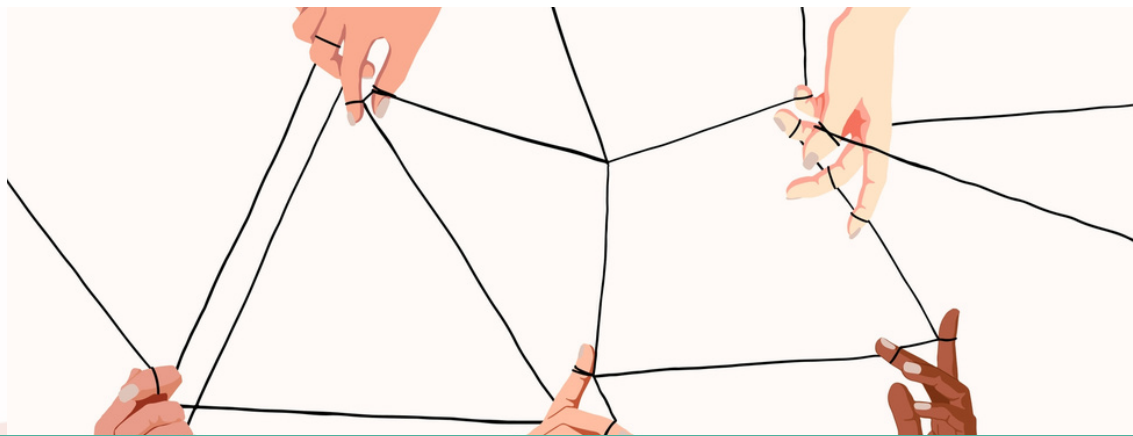
The event and the overall discussion remained true to our motivations towards creating the #DEIforDevelopment forum; it was a place where we could all be vulnerable about our shortcomings, learn from each other's work and lived experiences, and enthusiastically collaborate to help make the development space more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

There were multiple reflections that we gained from the discussion:

- Some aspects of our discussion covered issues that ought to be easily and expediently addressed such as **using inclusive language and educating our coworkers on topics such as caste, gender and disabilities.**
- Others are more at the organizational level, such as **implementing affirmative action hiring policies** and creating more equitable career growth policies.
- Lastly, we also discussed **systemic changes** that are required in the Indian developmental sector as a whole - initiatives such as democratizing funding, ensuring fair and transparent pay scales, and listening to, building for, and ensuring representation of the populations that we work with.

HOW TO BE MORE INTENTIONAL IN OUR HIRING PROCESS

Hiring for exceptional talent is always one of the most important jobs for People Ops and DEI leaders. Hiring mistakes are costly, so it's important to set up the hiring process for success and be intentional about it from start to finish.

DETERMINE YOUR JOB CRITERIA AND UPDATE JOB DESCRIPTIONS TO REDUCE BIAS AND INVITE DIVERSITY.

This can be done in 4 simple steps:

- **Decide on outcomes**: Define what a successful employee in this role would be doing 3-12 months after they start.
- **Identify skills and knowledge**: Based on the dream achievements, work backwards to figure out what skills and knowledge are needed. Pro tip: Test your criteria to reduce bias and invite diversity. Ask: are these criteria truly needed to succeed in the role (example: minimum experience required, education level, personality traits?)
- If you're not sure which skills are needed? Interview people at your organization and externally who excel in a similar role. Ask: what skills and knowledge are critical to your success? **Interview people with diverse backgrounds and styles to identify criteria that are actually needed for the role.**
- Pay close attention to how you define qualifications and competencies and the use of tests and other evaluations for hiring. **Is the language inclusive and designed to attract a diverse candidate pool?**

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT OUTREACH AND RECRUITING STRATEGY.

It is important to apply a DEI lens to every step in the hiring process. Identify organizational needs - such as languages, relationships to different stakeholders and communities you aspire to serve. Then build your hiring process designed to fill those needs. Recruit explicitly to reach diverse audiences. Go beyond personal contact, word of mouth, and usual posting avenues. Have a more diverse database of universities and colleges you reach out to. Develop sustained relationships with diverse communities, associations and affinity-based networks to seek out talent from underrepresented groups.

ESTABLISH A DIVERSE HIRING COMMITTEE AND PROVIDE NECESSARY TRAINING.

Establish a hiring committee (to counter individual biases) that is involved in handling all steps of the hiring process - including outreach, interviews and selection. Ensure that the committee's membership is diverse, for example - by gender, caste (if you have that information available), function and level. The committee should follow a consistent process.

HIRING COMMITTEES SHOULD USE OBJECTIVE EVALUATION CRITERIA.

Consider ways to remove identifiable information from applications and resumes before the committee reviews them. Pro tip: all individuals involved in interviews should use standardized, behaviorally-anchored questions that relate to the job. They should also evaluate candidates independently using objective criteria before conferring. Ensure that screening, evaluation, and interview practices are equitable and inclusive and provide fair opportunities to all qualified applicants.

Lastly, hold your hiring managers accountable for building the best teams – and not just the best candidates.

ROLE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT IN ENSURING DEI

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE MANAGER ROLE THAT MAKES IT SO WELL POISED FOR IMPACT?

Only managers are able to address the unique needs of individual employees. While training all employees is a great place to start, role modeling and culture setting start from the top. Managers are hotspots for creating inclusive cultures. When they are involved in the essential DEI conversations, you can quickly see change sweep across an organization.

- **Go on listening tours**: Connect with people across different levels and teams at your organization to understand their current experience. Show you care while also collecting "team pulse" data.
- **Use heart and head statements**: Want your message as a leader to be more influential? Speak to the heart ("imagine if", metaphors, stories, specific people) and the head (facts and research). For example: "Imagine if every employee felt like they could bring their most authentic selves to work, and we could increase the retention by 43%".
- **It is the intent that matters**, even though outcomes may not always be perfect. What truly matters is creating a space as a leader that allows for compassionate and critical dialogues to take place.
- **Set the tone**: Lead by example and walk the talk; such as no work on the weekends or beyond 6 pm (as it can also be disadvantageous to people who have caregiving and household responsibilities).

- **Open the circle**: Ensure conscious representation of LGBTQ+, sex work survivors and other marginalized groups.
- **Track impact and report results**: Progress in DEI will bring positive impact and necessary transformation to your organization, but constant advocacy will be vital to the initiatives making momentum.
- **Bring caste into the DEI conversation**: Be aware of what caste is and how it operates among people - and how caste privilege advantages some and disadvantages others.
- It is important as leaders to **approach this work with an eagerness to learn,** move quickly to address immediate needs, encourage radical candor for where you can improve, and iterate (and iterate again) until the solutions create meaningful, scalable, and positive impact.
- **Hold yourselves, as leaders, accountable** for rewarding inclusive behavior and providing your teams with the empathy, support, and accountability they need to be their most inclusive selves.
- **Work to create an environment where everyone has the opportunity to grow** and thrive, regardless of their starting point - and aim for an infrastructure that's truly inclusive, and meets the needs of those underrepresented.

Questions for Reflection:

- In what ways are you already an inclusive leader? In what ways can you become a more inclusive leader?
- Think about the identities of team members you trust, go to for feedback, and share most openly with. What identities do you share in common? What identities are missing from that group of trust team members? What might be the impact?
- What is your commitment or action item going forward?

HOW TO ENSURE FAIR CAREER GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERYONE IN THE WORKPLACE

- Establish written **performance expectations** at the outset.
- Provide reasonable accommodation wherever possible. This could be something as simple as "job restructuring" which may involve reallocating or marginal functions of a job. Consider modifying work schedules and flexible leave policies as it increases flexibility.
- **Bias prompts**: Including written prompts designed to disrupt bias and improve objectivity during performance reviews and appraisal forms can prompt managers to reflect on how bias might be influencing decisions.
- **Offer support and assistance** to enable employees to meet performance standards. Example: employee to employee learning program. (Resource)
- This also means ensuring that marginalized individuals receive access to sponsors, mentors etc, and allocate resources for these beforehand.
- Encourage people in positions of power to be vocal about, and visibly take advantage of employee wellbeing policies that exist while also actively encouraging their team members to do the same.
- It is important to stay focussed on policies right from intent up until execution.
- For those starting out their careers - it is important to have access to **paid internships** that include support and training opportunities.

GBL RECOMMENDS

A quick check you can run to increase fairness and reduce bias in your performance reviews and in turn, the growth opportunities:

To run a **FAIR** check on your performance reviews, ask:

- **FORTHRIGHT**: Are we making processes and success criteria explicit and clear to all? Have we been transparent about why we do reviews and how we'll use the data?

- **ACCESSIBLE**: Are we setting up each person for success and checking for unintended consequences on all groups? Are the timing of reviews and the tools we require appropriate for all people?

- **INVOLVED**: Did we get input from all the people who were impacted before making decisions and to continue iterating? Are we giving everyone an opportunity to assess whoever they work closely with, across levels ?

- **RIGOROUS**: Have we put consistent measures in place to mitigate bias (e.g., providing training, holding all employees to the same standards)?

HOW TECHNOLOGY CAN BE LEVERAGED TO CREATE A MORE INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE WORKPLACE

New technologies are proving to be a powerful tool in the workplace, helping create an inclusive and accessible workplace.

- **AI powers inclusivity**: Advances in AI include areas such as speech-to-text transcription, flash cards, predictive text, as well as visual and voice recognition, all of which can assist employees with disabilities.
- **Assistive and adaptive** technologies like screen reading software and magnification devices are all helping to promote participation and independence.
- Tech for **inclusive research**: The improving accuracy of tools like Google translate and specialized survey instruments allows us to translate and contextualize research better.
- **Digital inclusion**: It is important to be aware that technological penetration creates a belief that digitization makes it easier to include marginalized communities but the lack of access due to reasons such as financial or gender norms in the home can actually isolate. We need to be mindful of these contexts when introducing technologies as solutions.
- **Supplement tech with Human contact**: Technology can make work a lot more efficient at the back end, but human intervention tends to leave more room for accessibility and accommodations.
- **Intent** matters: Before bringing in a new technology, it is necessary to reflect on why the technology is being introduced, and whether technology is integral to the solution. It is the intention behind using the tech that is significant, rather than the act of using technology itself.
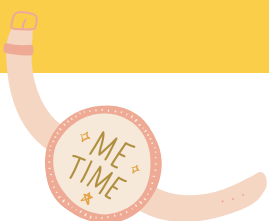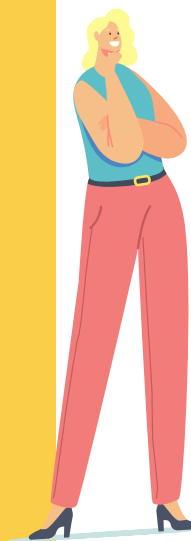
gbl. | Care for yourself

Whether you're a member of the DEI team, the sole DEI professional at your organization, or a People Ops person tasked with DEI work, this work can feel challenging and confusing. To show up best for others, don't forget to show up for yourself. Here's some tips for staying motivated, engaged, and healthy.

- **Keep a win journal**: Progress can be slow, making it hard to remember that you're doing great things. Every day, write down one small win you've had to bring attention to even the tiniest successes.
- **Ask for feedback**: If you have a hard time noticing your wins, ask others to share positive feedback with you! Anytime you launch a new piece of work, share a new resource, or optimize an existing process, ask employees to share one thing they appreciate, ensuring you're not only getting the critiques.
- **Remember your "why"**: When DEI work feels hard (and it will), think back to why you're motivated to create a workplace that is more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. Remember what motivates you and focus on making tiny progress toward your vision.
- **Find your community**: Find your network of trusted colleagues within or outside your organization and keep this discussion ongoing!

ME TIME