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IPA's Commitments to Increasing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Where Are We and Where Are We Heading?

In 2020, IPA began a process to strengthen diversity and inclusion within our organization and our work. [In a previous post](#), we shared with you our intention to diagnose some of the core issues that IPA could focus on to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in our own operations, as well as our work with partners. We wanted to look at diversity in terms of race, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, among others, but also through representation from the countries where we work. Like many others in the research and international development field, we felt compelled to look closely at our own organization to assess where we might do more.

We spent six months looking at data, discussing with staff globally at all levels of the organization, and debating where we can and should initially focus our efforts. We collected information through an anonymous [all-staff survey](#) (which was completed by over 300 staff and enumerators) and held focus groups in 22 country offices. In addition, we analyzed internal data on demographics, recruitment, retention, pay equity, promotion, benefits, and reviewed our research network and engagement practices. This is what we found:

Where we are doing well

IPA's staff is quite diverse. Ninety percent (812/898) of IPA's staff are located across IPA's 22 country offices and **85 percent of the research staff (research associates, senior research associates, and research managers) are from the countries where the research is taking place.** In addition, 45 percent (9/20) of IPA's country and regional leadership are from the regions where we work. This is a welcomed finding as it suggests that our investments in staff development over the years are paying off.

Fifty-two percent of IPA's staff are female and 43 percent of US-paid staff are black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), or from regions where IPA works.

Aside from gender and racial diversity, we also learned that 56 percent of staff report being primary caregivers and 5 percent of staff report having a disability. Sixty-six percent of staff

identify as being Christian and 17 percent identify as being secular, while a further 10 percent identify as Muslim, Buddhist, or Jain. And, 4 percent of staff reported identifying as LGBTQ-I.¹ This data not only helps paint a picture of who works at IPA, but also the diversity of individual needs and interests that we want to hold at the center of how IPA designs its practices and HR policies going forward.

Through a series of vignettes, we asked staff a range of questions about IPA's culture, management, and recruitment practices. Responses to these vignettes showed that the majority of staff reported feeling confident that their managers would support them in case of any issues related to diversity, equity, or inclusion. **Gender pay equity analysis revealed that men and women are paid equitably.** Data showed that US-paid staff at all levels are within a 4-8 percent salary range across genders.²

Having said that, there are still areas where we can do more.

Where we can do more

Twenty-seven percent of researchers in IPA's network are from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This is better than it was a decade ago, but still not as representative as we would like. Further, for two of our larger competitive research funds, **project teams with an LMIC researcher have only been able to access 15 percent and 17 percent of research funds, respectively.** There are a number of reasons why this percentage is so low, and it is an area that we will continue to prioritize going forward through our researcher diversification strategy. We will share more on our researcher diversification strategy in a forthcoming blog.

Only 7 of 20 regional and country directors are female (35 percent), while 17 of 30 leaders at the global level are female (57 percent). This highlights advancing more targeted approaches for professional growth for IPA's female staff at the country office level. While our country and regional leadership do well in representing the developing and emerging countries where IPA works, **our senior leadership does less well with just 5 of 30 leaders identifying as BIPOC or originating from an LMIC country** where we work. These two aspects of diversity in leadership will be a strong focus for our strategy going forward.

While staff overall reported feeling confident that management would act on their behalf, **this confidence was not as strongly held by staff who self-identified as LGBTQ-I or for country office female staff who belong to ethnic minorities.** This segmented data gave us a view of how differently staff experience inclusivity at IPA and indicated where we need to prioritize advancements. And finally, on the issue of data, conducting this DEI analysis in a data-driven way was particularly difficult given the lack of consistent measures and definitions of diversity metrics. This is an area that we have already started to address through our HR information management system, and we will continue to develop to track researcher diversity.

So where to next?

Based on the findings above, we have developed a multi-year strategy centered around four key objectives and corresponding targets:

1. Deepen a culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion through policies, practices, and behavior.

Our commitment is to cultivate an environment that empowers staff and fosters respect, inclusion, and belonging across the organization. As part of our strategy going forward, we will **review our hiring practices to maximize diverse candidate pools** reflective of the market, and learn about and implement effective approaches to **increase the inclusion of staff who are LGBTQ or ethnic minority women**. Recognizing that there are country-specific differences, we will also develop country-level plans to **further DEI efforts that are more reflective of local norms**. We will also standardize metrics and data collection so that we are able to more regularly and consistently measure progress in hiring, retention, and development of our staff as well as our performance in relation to key partners, including researchers. **We commit to making this data publicly available.**

IPA's partnership with researchers is a core to the strength of the organization. Yet power dynamics between staff and respected external researchers can make it difficult for staff to speak up when they are uncomfortable with expectations or communications from PIs. To address this, **we will increase our focus on expectation setting and monitoring between staff and PIs** through onboarding materials, grant kick-off meetings, and regular partner reviews. We will also create regional mediator positions who will be responsible for providing support and guidance to both staff and PIs on how to manage and navigate relationships that they might find challenging. It will be the role of the mediators to intervene in staff-PI interactions as needed by either party. Importantly, these positions will be outside of both management and business relationships with both parties to ensure neutrality.

2. Increase diversity of global leadership.

By 2025, we aim to have 65 percent of IPA's country leadership from the countries or regions where we work. We also commit to **increasing female country and regional leadership** to at least 50 percent. Likewise, we will **increase the proportion of global leaders hired in LMIC countries where we work**, and **double the proportion of global leadership who are BIPOC and from Africa, Asia, Central or South America, And the Middle East**. We will also increase representation on our board from regions where we work. We recognize it is not enough to hire diversely, we also need to offer support and opportunities for staff retention and career advancement, especially for candidates that are not traditionally represented in leadership positions.

3. Increase the diversity and inclusiveness of our research network.

The third area of focus for improvement is around the diversification of our research network. **By 2025, our goal is for 35 percent of grantee teams for competitive funding to include LMIC researchers, and correspondingly, 35 percent of funds to go to grantee teams with LMIC researchers.** We are committed to ensuring that at least 60 percent of IPA-related projects include LMIC researchers. We also commit to building the pipeline of researchers across our countries of operation, including facilitating professional research pathways for our staff. We will share more on this in an upcoming blog.

4. Increase equity and inclusion in the content of our work.

Over recent years we have increasingly pivoted towards research topics that focus on the intersection of economic, social, and human rights. This has emerged through our work on forced displacement, crime and violence, violence against women and girls, and most recently, our initiative on human trafficking. **We will continue to pursue opportunities where we can support economic and social justice efforts across the globe.**

In-country partnerships are at the core of our work. It extends beyond individual research projects, from M&E to embedded labs and scale-ups, and shaping long-term research agendas that address specific, locally relevant needs. **We will lift up local voices that are at the heart of our work, and ensure they are well-represented when we talk about our work publicly.**

In our communications, we will continue to challenge stereotypical views of poverty and development. For example, we will avoid using imagery that depicts the poor as vulnerable, passive victims and choose images that capture people who are active, engaged, and empowered involved. We will highlight more of the voices, interests, and priorities of our global partners and staff from the countries where we work. In our events, authored publications, and videos, we will aim to feature people who are closest to the problems we are working to fix and uplift underrepresented voices. We will also ensure that the voices of the populations we are reaching are represented in our communications and that the voices of in-country policymakers are heard. **We will track and report on events and authorship with in-country decision-maker representation, female representation, and field staff representation.**

*As we have said before, as we work to fight poverty with evidence, we can and need to do more to fight systematic inequalities through our work and to put a greater focus on advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in our own organization. The commitments that we have outlined here will not reduce all inequalities in research or international development. But they represent opportunities for IPA to **direct our own work toward impact that is equitable, empowering, and driven by people living in the countries where we work.***

1. It is important to note that staff working in countries where homosexuality is criminalized were asked to abstain from disclosing their sexual orientation in order to protect them from potential incrimination.
2. Country-level data is still being analyzed.

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