

## Diversity and Inclusion Session at International Civil Society Week 2019

### Key Points and Reflections

July 2019



Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) played a large role in conceptualizing International Civil Society Week (ICSW) 2019. In practical terms, this means that ICSW has a strong commitment toward ensuring that people affected by civil society's work have a seat at the table and can fully participate; and that diverse stakeholders are brought together to discuss complex problems. The D&I World Café Discussions that took place during ICSW 2019 in Serbia are evidence of such commitment. In this space, individuals from distinct backgrounds and walks of life came together to share valuable insights about D&I and civil society in relation to four relevant areas: the justice system, intergenerational collaboration and equality, educational institutions, and D&I in the workplace. Following a dynamic and action-oriented approach, participants identified challenges and barriers, and provided solutions or best practices to address exclusionary practices and power imbalances in these four areas.

The ideas and thoughts that emerged in the World Café Discussions were the result of a collective reflection based on empathy, respect and awareness. They shed light on practical ways about how civil society can be meaningfully diverse and inclusive, such as promoting an organizational culture that is intersectional and prioritizes a holistic understanding of D&I. At the level of its impact, civil society must keep challenging the conventional ways of engaging with communities to ensure that interventions and programs are inclusive, and that they respect and cherish the diversity, struggles and victories of the communities it works with. In short, civil society must remain relentlessly committed to leaving no one behind and to making sure that another world is possible. Below you can find a summary of the key points and main reflections of the World Café Discussions:

#### **D&I in the justice system**

Justice systems do not always act in the best interest of vulnerable and marginalized people. Discrimination on the basis of multiple identity signifiers and social locations, such gender, race, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, nationality, class, religion or migratory status, as well as racism and sexism are structures of oppression that exist within justice systems. This underlines the need of providing holistic trainings to individuals working in areas related to the justice systems, such as the police, lawyers and judges to eliminate implicit, racial, and gender bias.

#### **D&I and intergenerational collaboration and equality**

While recognizing the wide diversity of intersecting identities *within* generations, this discussion focused on the consequences of collaborations *between* generations. Some of the challenges

in this area refer to generations failing to understand Millennials and Gen Z, and vice versa; the power imbalance between generations; the lack of trust in youth leadership, and their exclusion from spaces of influence. Opportunities to challenge these differences take place when various generations find a middle ground and facilitate dialogue among each other and when young people receive mentorship and resources to be better to enter and claim spaces of influence and to say, *“we don’t want to be silent no more!”*.

### **D&I in educational institutions:**

Educational institutions often lack the infrastructure required to meet the needs of students with different identities and/or disabilities. Behavioral and other related concerns, such as the lack of educators’ sensitivity, biased or incomplete curricula, simplistic (rather than progressive) education policies, and bullying and discrimination are challenges to ensuring D&I in educational settings. This group noted that some of the best practices to tackle these challenges include setting universal diversity and inclusion standards for educational institutions; sensitizing educators and staff; eliminating segregation; promoting student representation and student activism; and modifying curricula to represent the diversity of histories, cultures and identities of multiple groups.

### **D&I in the workplace**

Among the main challenges in addressing D&I in the workplace is the lack of a strong commitment to fully implement D&I policies within organizations, even when these policies exist on paper. The absence of awareness, sensitization and training about diverse aspects of D&I another barrier which prevents a full understanding of these power imbalances and intersections. In trying to provide solutions to these issues, this group suggested that organizations’ top leadership must embrace and promote D&I, as this would trickle down the interest of D&I issues to other members. Another element is the need to carry out trainings, awareness or sensitization programs to discuss and address issues related to D&I. Furthermore, this group agreed that it is not enough to have D&I policies in place but that these policies must be *comprehensive* and must acknowledge how gender and disability operate at the workplace, *so that no one is left behind, and no one feels excluded*.

*Would you like learn more about diversity and inclusion and civil society? Would you like to keep the conversation going? Please join CIVICUS’ new platform, DIGNA: Diversity Group for Networking and Action on Facebook or email [digna@civicus.org](mailto:digna@civicus.org) for more information!*