



### **ADD International anti-racism progress**

*Following a series of anti-racism seminars for CEOs hosted by Bond and the subsequent formation of the Bond CEO Anti-Racism Working group, we asked three CEOs to take us through their progress on anti-racism within their organisation.*

*In the final piece in our series, we hear from Mary Ann Clements, Co-Chief Executive Officer of ADD International.*

#### **About you (as this work is personal – about the individual and the organisational)**

##### **1. What made you engage in this work?**

My commitment to the work of rethinking how INGOs operate is something I have had for a long time, so I think engaging with this work made sense to me.

The back story of that stems from how I was brought up, especially by my grandfather and father, to think about race and how racism shows up, and to consciously challenge it. I then studied anthropology, which has its own colonial legacy, of course, but I learnt a lot about critiques of development. Later, I became a leader at an INGO. I always say this happened by accident as I always said that I didn't want to work in the sector.

My presence here in the INGO sector has always been about finding ways to rebalance power and transform 'charity' into 'solidarity'. That has shown up in many different ways in all the roles I have had in my career and it's what matters to me most deeply about the work.

My work on anti-racism, more specifically, grew during the decade when I was a consultant, in particular as part of Healing Solidarity, which I initiated in 2018. We offered spaces for white people working in development to explore how they could develop their anti-racist practice. We had a lot of conversations around the work of anti-racism in the international development sector.

When I first launched the Healing Solidarity conversations in 2018 relatively few people were willing to talk about racism and anti-racism in mainstream international development spaces. People would avoid the topic, but I wanted to make sure it was spoken about because you cannot hope to 'shift power' or 'decolonise' how you work if you don't understand the role of racism in creating the unequal power relations within the development space.

I engaged in the Bond CEO Anti-Racism Working group initially when I was still a consultant. Since then, I've come back into the sector as a Co-CEO myself and am committed to the space because I think it's crucial that we keep having these conversations and push ourselves to reimagine our organisations with all of this in mind.



## **Theme: Anti-racism and organisational governance**

### **2. How is ADD working to shift the power within their governance and leadership, ensuring it has a diverse Board and team representative of the LMICs they work in?**

80% of our Trustees identify as disabled and over half have heritage from the regions where we work, including one of our Co-Chairs. We have intentionally made changes at governance level to make sure that, just as in our grant making, decisions at governance level are informed by lived experience of the issues on which we work.

We inherited a team that had a traditional INGO country office structure and Fred, my Co-Lead, and I have been working to create a more global team, working together in a new way as we become a participatory grant maker for disability justice. This has been a process over time that is ongoing, but for most roles we now hire anywhere we can employ people. Consequently, roles at all levels of the organisation are now located in the regions where we work.

### **3. Why is it important to focus on building anti-racist practices/an anti-racist lens within your organisation?**

Everything we are doing at ADD is about trying to become an organisation that changes the power dynamics that have plagued the so called 'development system'. In our strategy we make a clear apology for how we have been a part of those systemic challenges in the past and commit to doing things differently. So, in a sense, that whole journey is about anti-racism and, of course, because we work on disability justice, anti-ableism is critical for us too and is one of our core values. The intersections are something we think about a lot, too.

For ADD, we focus on both the what and the how. We want what we do to challenge the unfair practices in the development sector, in particular the injustice around funding in the disability and development space, specifically where so little of the resources actually get to organisations of people with disabilities, who best understands their contexts and what needs to be done. Our core intention as an organisation now is to challenge that and to do things differently, which means trusting people who the system has traditionally not trusted, our grantee partners who are activists in Africa and Asia with lived experience of disability who want to make a difference.

## **Reflections on Challenges**

### **4. What are the challenges that come with shifting power and governance in your organisation?**

I think we have been lucky with our governance in that both Fred and I joined the organisation at a time when Trustees could see that change was necessary and were committed to pursuing it. I wish more boards would follow suite, as our sector needs change, and I hear a lot about the obstacles that boards put in the way of leadership.

Because of this, our obstacles have been more about the how and the details of the cultural shifts needed within ADD to make our new and different strategic framework possible. Unpacking a lot of what we do and trying to do it differently has taken time and been imperfect.



One of my biggest lessons is continually letting go of trying to do it perfectly and accepting that we will make mistakes but that we stay committed to our overall change and direction.

**5. Tell us a time when you failed. What made you keep going?**

I wanted to make pay and conditions completely fair and equitable and to put an inclusive culture and wellbeing at the centre of how we work.

We have done a lot – committing to sharing transparent salaries, explaining how they are calculated, giving lower paid staff rises first, becoming more transparent about other benefits, trialling the 4-day week for all teams everyone and so on.

But I have learnt that it's very difficult in the current systems that we all currently operate in to make things completely fair. Working across multiple geographies, there are just too many variables and differing bits of legislation, sometimes I have felt I have failed to do what I set out to do because complete equity is probably not possible within a conventional salary system even though that is what I had wanted to achieve. I have had to accept that we can only control so much of the apparatus that we operate within and that it is still worth trying to improve equity even if a perfect solution remains elusive.

**Reflections on Change**

**6. What examples of change have ADD been able to implement in your organisation regarding its leadership and distributing its resources?**

We are transforming from a traditional business model kind of INGO to a participatory grant-maker for disability justice. It's a significant shift. Decisions about how resources are allocated are now being made by groups of disabled people, in other words, by those we exist to support. Our whole role has changed.

We have tried to reflect this in how we lead and run the organisation as well. ADD had a lapsed commitment made many years ago to ensure that 50% of the staff had lived experience of disability, but when we joined that commitment had lapsed. We have put in place initiatives to work back towards that, as well.

**7. Can you share with us a time you have felt that you've managed to progress work on anti-racism?**

I suppose for me it's not about a single time, but a whole way of approaching my work. The changes we have made at ADD over the four years since I joined are all about questioning whose voice and power counts and about ensuring that Black and brown disabled people in the countries where we work in Africa and Asia can both access resources and make decisions. We are doing that by creating and testing a range of participatory grant making structures and advocating for fairer funding in a variety of different ways. But we are also doing it by rethinking lots of what we do internally. This sort of change takes time, but I do feel that we have made progress.



I am also in co- leadership, as a white woman working from London, with Fred who is a Black disabled man working in Kenya. I name this not because that in itself makes us anti-racist because it's not just the what but the how. We've talked about this publicly before but sometimes people make comments either to us or about us that assume that somehow because I am in London or because I am white that somehow Fred is my deputy. Actually, our how is that we make all the key decisions together.

That for me is what co leadership is. We have split different aspects of ADDs work between us but we steer the ship together. And whilst that doesn't always function perfectly I do hope that in doing that we demonstrate a different kind of solidarity being possible on some level where we are working together towards shared goals, sharing power, and challenging in some small way the racism inherent in the assumptions others make about us.

#### **8. Why have you found this method of engaging with anti-racism worthwhile and useful for the past 18 months?**

I find the CEO space useful as it is a place to hear what others are doing, share ideas and be inspired. It's often also a reminder of things we have not yet got to or not thought enough about. For me it's also a place to create space to not know the answers and to ask different questions. One thing I have learnt in raising the conversation about anti-racism in development spaces over the years is that when people do listen there is then often a tendency to want simple solutions. I call them 'checkbox' solutions.

These often in our sector also then lead to the idea of buying in some expertise that will 'fix things' but no consultant or training initiative will make this sector anti-racist alone. Those are often valuable tools but the real work is to walk a path of change with humility, reflecting on our day to day practice, committing to doing things differently and when it doesn't quite work trying again because that's how cultural and systemic change happens. And yet because there is so much harm that has been done and unfairness that has been perpetuated it can seem like we must fix it all now. And this contradiction can feel deeply uncomfortable I think but it's the water we have to swim in.

Whilst there are what feels like watershed moments like, for example Black Lives Matter, or the Aid cuts that are happening now that might bring change more into the spotlight, it's our day to day behaviours and practices that change the experience of staff and partners who experience racism in our work. And I think the CEO space is a valuable way to keep that front of mind and keep challenging ourselves as people who hold power in the sector to keep taking action.

#### **9. Reflections on the whole process**

For me, the work of anti-racism is not something that is nice to have or something to think about when we have time, but something we have to stay committed to consistently. At the same time, the problem is structural and systemic in the sector as much as it is in the wider world. We cannot change everything overnight.



I'm a believer in the action and reflection cycle I teach as an action learning facilitator, which basically says that we need to keep taking action to change things, but we should not forget to reflect on that action and adapt it so that we can keep making progress. Anti-racism work is like this. We need to act and then reflect and work out how to keep at it and do better, and the CEO space provides one space for that reflection.