

Grounding Anti-Racism in Human Rights: From Reflection to Action in International Cooperation

October 2026

Made possible in part thanks to the generous support of the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada.

Land acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation. We honor and respect the Indigenous peoples who have lived on this land since time immemorial, and we recognize their ongoing contributions to the community.

Equitas recognizes that our offices are located on the unceded Indigenous territories of the
Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk), xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam),
Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səl̓ilwətaʔɬ (Tsleil Waututh) First Nations. We also work on the unceded Indigenous territories of many other First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples.



Welcome



Your facilitators

- **Libertad Benito Torres**
  Senior Human Rights Education Advisor
- **Diane Tzovanis**
  Senior Human Rights Education Advisor

About Equitas

Equitas works for the advancement of equality, social justice, and respect for human dignity through transformative education programs.

Equitas' approach to anti-racism is grounded in human rights principles such as equality, non-discrimination, accountability, justice, and transparency.



Content / trigger warning

- *Before we begin, we want to acknowledge that today's session includes discussions about racism, discrimination, colonialism, and systemic inequities within international cooperation and development work. These topics may impact participants in different ways depending on lived experiences and identities.*

- *We especially recognize that Black, Indigenous, and racialized participants may experience this content more personally or intensely. We encourage everyone to engage with care, reflection, and respect, and to take the space or pauses they may need throughout the session.*

Objectives



- Ground our work in anti-racism and human rights in international cooperation
- Explore how colonization and racism intersect and how this shows up in the sector
- Understand how we can use a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to challenge racism
- Explore concrete ways to apply this in your work

Icebreaker and introductions



Pair up with the person next to you

In 5 minutes, share:

- Your name
- Your organization
- Your role
- One interesting/fun thing about yourself

After both partners have shared, each participant will briefly introduce their partner to the larger group.

Activity: Group norms / Rules for engagement



What do we need from each other - and from the group as a whole - **to feel safe, included, and to be able to participate fully today?**

Creating the conditions for deep work

- Expect and embrace discomfort
- Cultivate trust and self-care

What strategies do you find useful to take care of yourself as you do this work?

How can you support others in the group?



Human rights and international cooperation sector

Human Rights Exploration Activity

PART A - Pair discussion

Instructions

Please read the following statements individually (5 min). Then, discuss the questions below in pairs (10 min).

Guiding questions

- What **changes** when something is framed as a **need versus a right**?

- Why do you think it is **important to talk** about **rights**?



Human Rights - International cooperation

PART B - Plenary debrief

Guiding questions

- What **changes** when something is framed as a **need versus a right**?
- Why do you think it is **important to talk about rights**?



Human Rights - International cooperation

Differences between a need and a right:

- who has responsibility;
- whether something depends on charity or obligation;
- who can claim rights and seek accountability;
- how people are positioned (beneficiaries versus rights-holders).



Human Rights - International cooperation

PART C – Conclusion (plenary)

Based on our discussions, how would we now define human rights?



Human Rights - International cooperation

Key points

- Human rights are **universal** and **inherent** to every person simply **by virtue of being human**, regardless of race, gender, nationality, religion, or any other status.
- Human rights aim to protect **dignity, equality, freedom, participation**, and **safety**.
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) – a foundational reference.

Anti-racism, localization, co-construction & decolonization

Activity - Words on the wall

Instructions

- Take the post-it notes you need and add your **ideas, reflections, or examples** to help build a shared understanding of the different terms identified on the flipcharts.



What do these terms mean to you?

- You have 10 minutes to complete this activity.

BREAK



Anti-racism, localization, co-construction & decolonization

PART B - Collective reading & pattern spotting

Step 1 - Silent reading

Take a few minutes to move around the room and silently read the responses written on the posters.



Anti-racism, localization, co-construction & decolonization

Step 2 — Plenary discussion



Guiding questions:

- Did anything **surprise** you?
- Are some concepts **used more frequently** in your organization or sector? **Why**?
- Which concepts seem **easier** to put into practice? Which seem **more challenging**?
- Where do you notice **tensions between discourse and practice**?

Anti-racism, localization, co-construction & decolonization

Key reflections

- Co-construction without shared power can become consultation.
- Localization without shifts in power and resources can remain symbolic or become the adaptation of Global North models to local contexts.
- Anti-racism without structural and power analysis can become diversity language.
- Decolonization goes beyond inclusion and participation; it challenges dominant systems, knowledge, and power relations.

Anti-racism in the international cooperation sector

Activity - Sector scenarios on anti-racism

Instructions

- Read the scenario individually and reflect on the guiding question (**3 min**).
- Join the plenary to share key reflections and observations (**8 min**).
- Repeat the process with the second scenario.

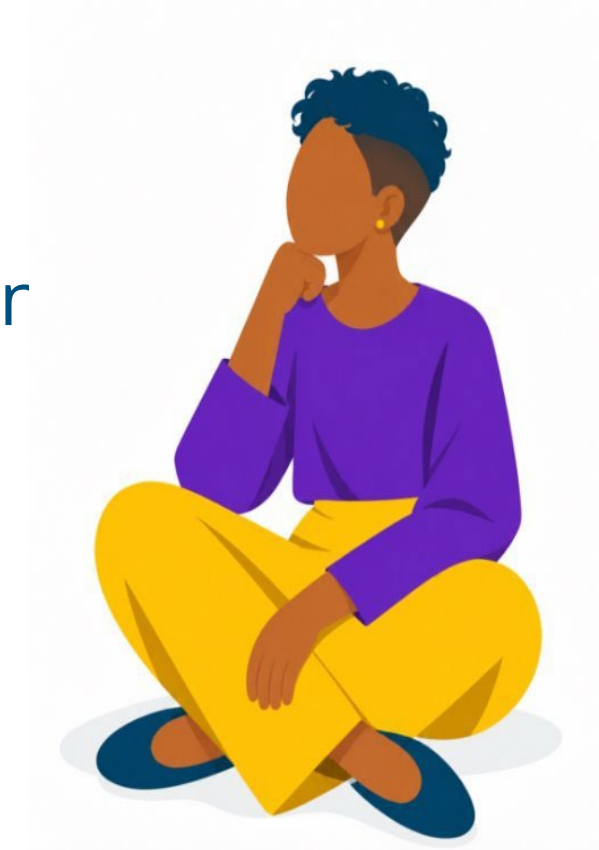
Reminder: The goal is not to find the "right" answer, but to explore how racism, power, privilege, and organizational dynamics can operate in international cooperation and social justice work.

Anti-racism in international cooperation sector

Scenario 1

Guiding question

- What is your assessment of this scer and its associated challenges?



Anti-racism in international cooperation sector

Scenario 1

Guiding questions

- In what ways does **white saviourism manifest** in international cooperation work?
- How may **racism** operate through narratives of **“helping,” “capacity-building,” or “saving”**?
- What would a **more anti-racist and solidarity-based approach** look like?

Anti-racism in international cooperation sector

Scenario 2

Guiding question

- What is your assessment of this scenario and its associated challenges?



Anti-racism in international cooperation sector

Scenario 2

Guiding questions

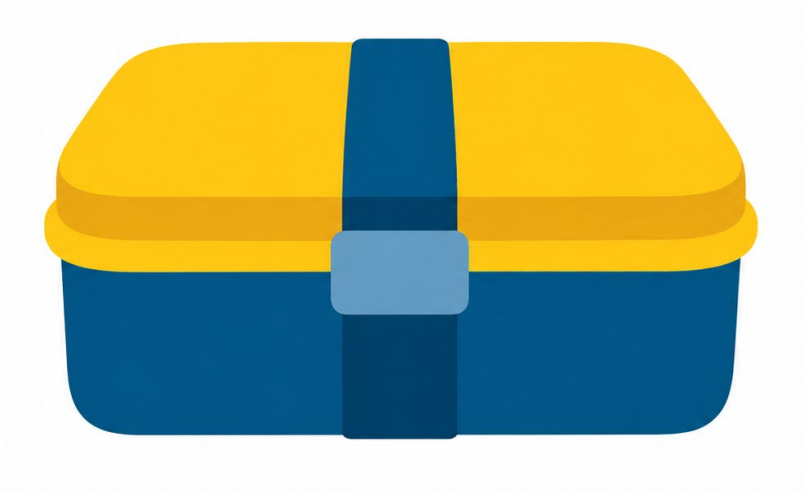
- How can **white fragility or defensiveness** prevent accountability and change?
- How may **racial and gender stereotypes shape perceptions of IBPOC women** in the workplace?
- Who carries the **burden of addressing racism** within the organization?
- What would **meaningful anti-racist organizational transformation require** beyond representation or training?

Anti-racism in international cooperation sector

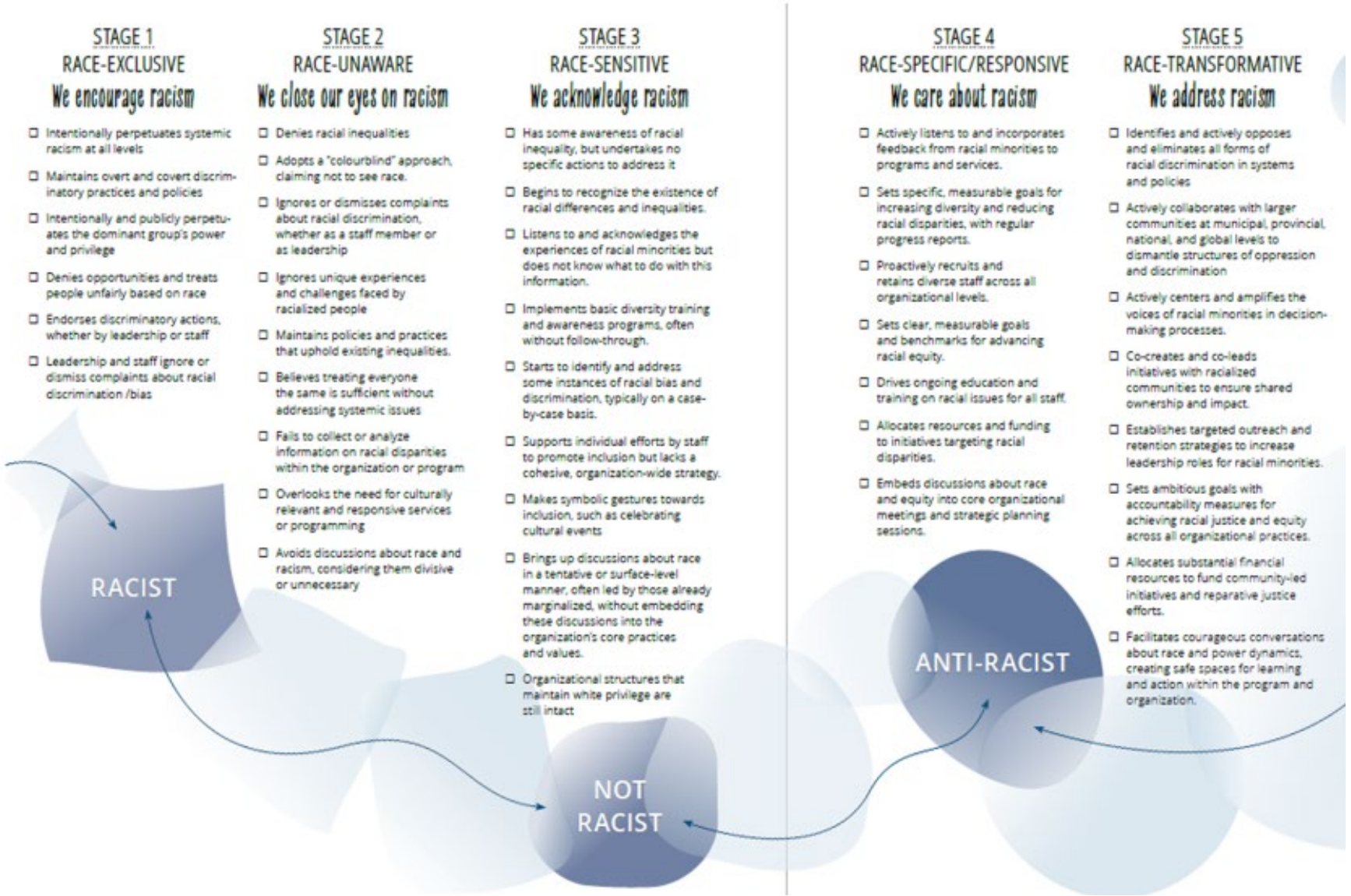
Key takeaways

- Representation alone does not necessarily transform systems.
- Anti-racism requires examining power, structures, and organizational culture.
- Good intentions and “helping” narratives can still reproduce unequal power dynamics.
- Communities affected by injustice are not only participants, but also leaders and experts.
- Organizational change requires moving beyond symbolic commitments toward accountability and structural transformation.

LUNCH BREAK



Racial Transformation Continuum



Being anti-racist requires a proactive attitude, towards racial injustices, while being "not racist" refers to a neutral, passive stance.

Group discussion

Ice breaker

. Where would you **place the international cooperation sector** as a whole on this continuum today, given the setbacks we've seen recently?

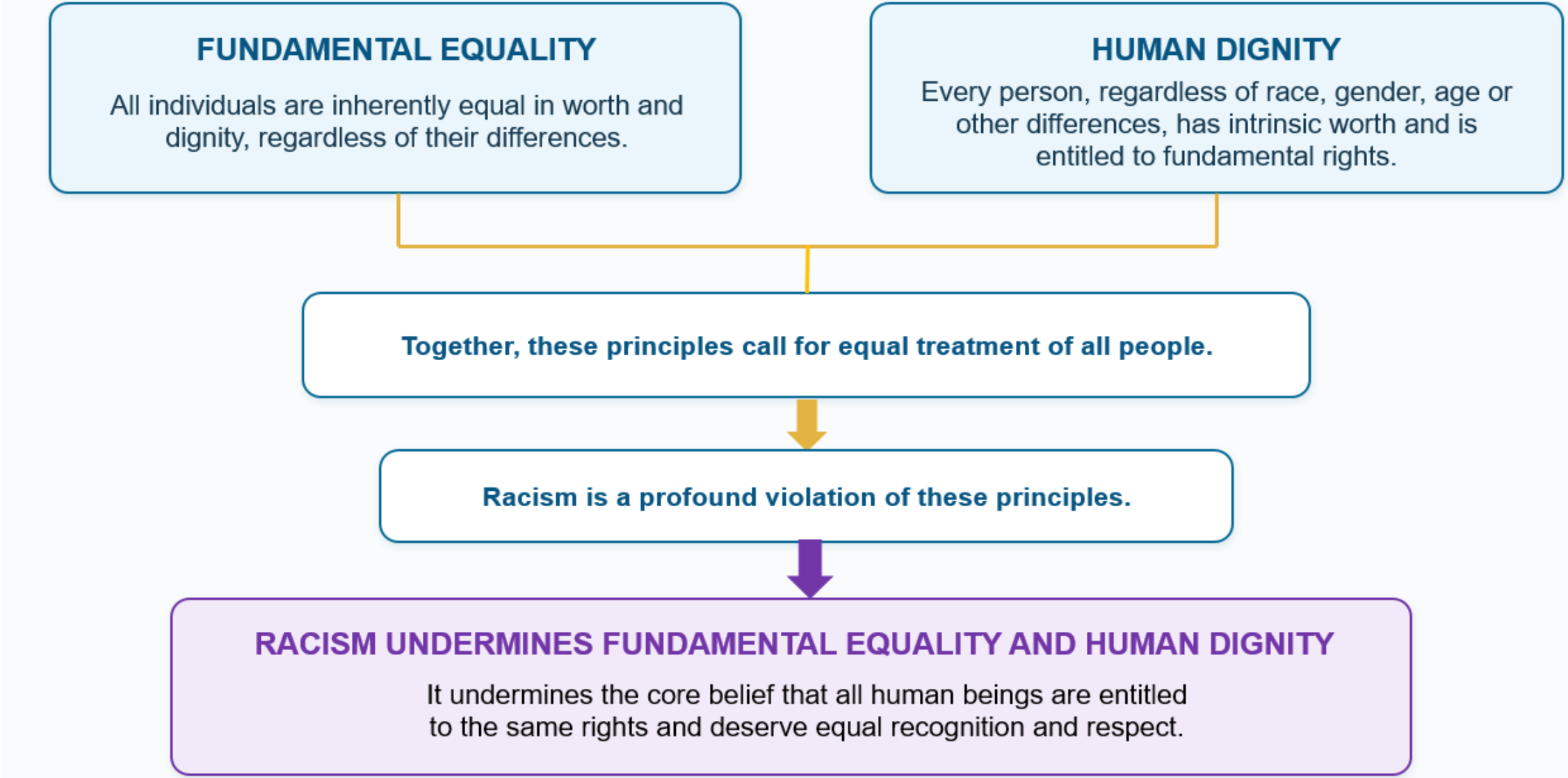


1. Where would you **place your organization** on the continuum right now? What specific action, policy, or everyday practice influenced your response?

2. Looking across the continuum, **are there areas where your organization might be at different stages** at the same time? What explains those differences?

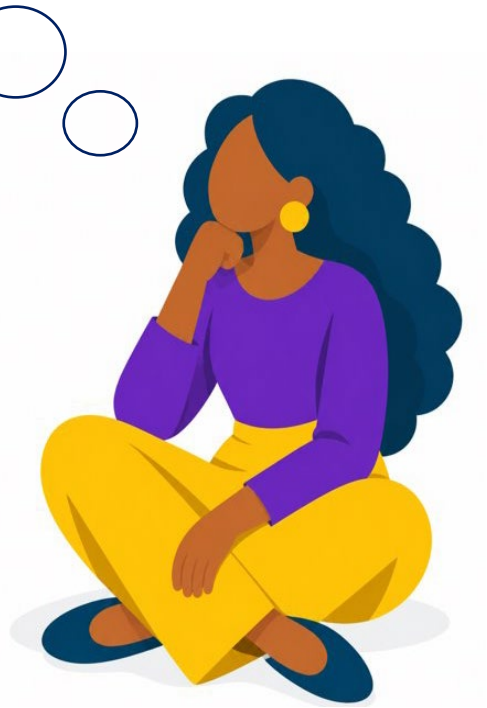
3. If your organization wanted to move further toward anti-racism along the continuum, **what would need to be challenged, changed or relinquished?**

Human rights and anti racism: Where paths cross



Human rights and anti racism: Where paths cross

What does it mean in practice to ensure that **equality** and **dignity** guide our everyday actions and decisions?



What is HRBA?

A conceptual framework that:

- is founded on the conviction that every human being, by virtue of being human, is a **holder of rights**
- equates development to **realization of all human rights for all**
- is based on **international human rights standards** and aims to promote and protect human rights
- emphasizes a more **holistic, participatory** and **accountable process** - not only results
- identifies not only rights holders, but also **duty bearers and responsibility holders** and their capacities
- reinforces progress towards **gender equality**



HRBA to development cooperation: A shift in perspective

FROM …	TO …
Using international assistance as a tool to **meet NEEDS**	Using it as a tool to **advance human rights**
Focusing on the poorest, the underserved as **beneficiaries**	Supporting their empowerment as **rights holders** and **agents of change**
Focusing narrowly on achieving development **results**	Recognizing the importance of results as well as the **process** for achieving them
Ranking **needs** in **hierarchical order**	Recognizing that **human rights** are **non-hierarchical, inalienable, indivisible** and **interdependent**

Source: Feminist Approach Guidance Note

A human rights-based approach to anti racism

- HRBA uses **human rights standards** to guide action
- **Holds organizations accountable** for equity and fairness
- Centers **voices of those most impacted** in decisions
- Addresses **systemic** and **intersecting inequalities** (not just individual cases)
- Uses **laws, data**, and **evidence** to drive change
- **Builds capacity** to sustain racial justice efforts



A human rights-based approach to anti racism

Which aspect of HRBA particularly resonates with you?

What does this approach invite us to affirm, question, or change in how we address racism?



PANEL: the 5 pillars of HRBA

Participation and inclusion

Accountability and transparency

Non-discrimination and equality

Empowerment

Links to human rights



Activity - PANEL

Instructions

- In groups, discuss the two questions related to the pillar assigned to you.
- Prepare a brief summary to present in plenary (2 minutes per group).



1. What does this pillar look like?

(In your programs/projects, in your work with the communities you engage with, or in decision-making.)

2. What are some barriers that make it difficult to advance this pillar?

(For example: systems or structures, organizational culture, power dynamics, limited resources, or time constraints.)

BREAK



Activity – Integrate PANEL in your organization

Instructions

- Work individually or with colleagues from the same organization (20 minutes).
- **Reflect on the five pillars** by answering the **questions provided in the worksheet** (answer the questions you feel are most relevant).
- **Plenary:** Be prepared to share a few reflections that are meaningful for your organization.



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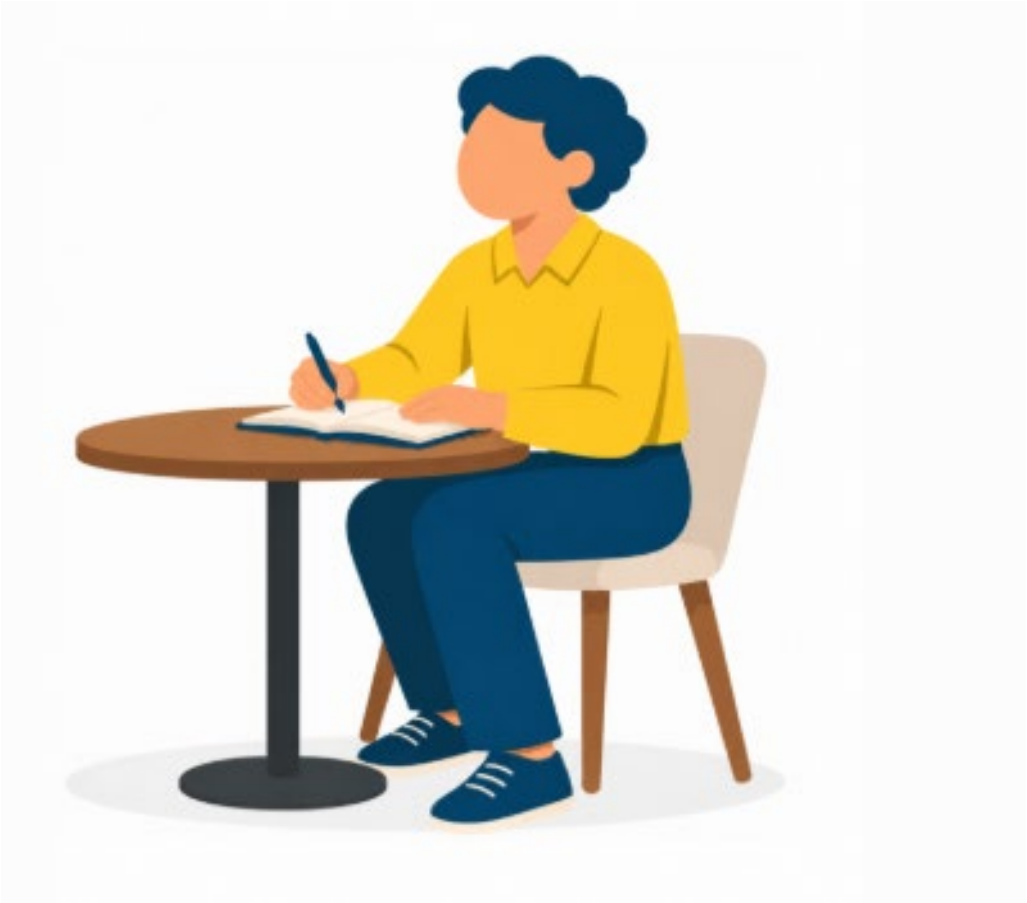
Day 2

October 2026

Write an anonymous message of hope to a colleague in the group, without addressing it to anyone in particular.



Welcome



Today's goal is to:

- Explore concrete ways to apply learnings in your work
- Identify concrete strategies and critical pathways to impact


Recap

HRBA for anti-racism, in practice

Taking Action: Instructions

- We will work through the **six sections together**, one section at a time.
- For each section, you will have approximately **7 minutes** to reflect and respond individually, then discuss your answers with a partner.

The final 10 minutes will be devoted to synthesizing your ideas:

- Area for action and why
- Potential barriers
- Steps to take
- Allies or strategic stakeholders to engage
- First step



HRBA for anti-racism, in practice

1. Identify a focus area

Think of ONE area of your work or organization where you see an opportunity for change
(e.g.: a program or project, a policy or practice, a decision-making process, a partnership or funding approach, a internal team culture or operations)

Then, with your partner, take turns answering the following:

- What is not working or could be more equitable?
- Where there is some opportunity to advance antiracism?



HRBA for anti-racism in practice

2.Define the desired change

- **Take a moment to think individually about the desired shift.**
  In your worksheet, describe the desired change.

- **Then, take a moment with your partner to discuss:**
  - What would improve if anti-racism + HRBA principles were meaningfully applied here?
  - What would change for racialized communities and staff regarding their participation and leadership in decision-making?



HRBA for anti-racism in practice

3.Critical path mapping

Individually, think about the following questions, and **map out the steps that would need to happen to achieve the desired change.**

Draw a simple flowchart:

- What needs to happen first?
- What approvals, conversations, or processes are required?
- What barriers might show up?

Share with your partner.



HRBA for anti racism in practice

4. Stakeholder and buy-in map

Think about the **people within your organizatio**n that you would need to engage in **enacting the desired change.**

- Who has influence (formal or informal)?
- Who could slow this down?
- Who could champion (ally)?
- Who is often left out but should be included?

Then share with your partner.



HRBA for anti-racism in practice

5. Strategy for buy-in

Individually, select 2–3 key stakeholders from your map:

- What matters to each of them?
- What language or framing will resonate?
- Where are the points of alignment?

Share with your partner.



HRBA for anti-racism in practice

6. Prioritization and first step

Reflect individually and identify **ONE realistic next step you could take over the next 2 to 4 weeks.**

- What is within your influence (not perfection, just movement)?

Share with your partner and ask for recommendations.



BREAK



HRBA for anti racism, in practice

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Closing activity

As we close, take a moment to think about what you are carrying forward from this space.

- What **challenged** you?
- What **stayed** with you?
- What **gives you hope** in your work or context right now?



Thank you



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