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SHAPING OUR NEW NORMAL: AN UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITY TO REIMAGINE A MORE INCLUSIVE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKPLACE

FEED THE FUTURE MARKET SYSTEMS AND PARTNERSHIPS ACTIVITY

MAY 2022

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

COVID-19 is jeopardizing the diversity of our future leaders as well as the broader pipeline of talent for international development programs. From the transition to a virtual working environment to the halt in international travel, the pandemic has profoundly altered the international development workplace and exacerbated existing inequalities. As our industry begins to explore what our "new normal" will look like, we have an unprecedented opportunity to lay the foundation for a more empathetic, equitable, and inclusive sector.

In its earlier research, the study team observed that the international development sector was not immune to the uneven effects of the pandemic, and that COVID-19 was disproportionately affecting women market systems development (MSD) professionals who were experiencing higher rates of burnout and lower morale and career ambitions as compared to their men counterparts. The findings suggested that gains in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts – at least gender-wise – were being compromised, posing significant risk of unraveling the diverse talent pipeline for MSD senior leaders.

In this follow-up study, we explored professionals' shifting perspectives on their careers in light of the changes brought on by the pandemic. We also investigated to what extent implementing partners (IPs) are aligning with and responding to these shifts and considered what the implications are for the future diversity of the sector.

We uncovered three major trends in development professionals' outlook regarding their careers.

- *The pandemic inspired professionals to turn away from a work-centric lifestyle,* challenging the overworked culture of the development industry. This new prioritization of work-life balance was consistent after disaggregating by gender, racial or ethnic minority status, presence of dependents, and work location. That said, women and racial or ethnic minorities demonstrated greater change in this psychological shift, signaling the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on these groups. Over the last two years, most IPs' responses have centered on short-term, practical public-health priorities and they have not addressed the root issues of unmanageable workloads and burnout. To foster employee engagement and commitment, IPs must invest in employee well-being writ large with the understanding that segments of their workforce are facing layered challenges. Otherwise, employees will leave, and women and minority professionals will likely comprise a disproportionate number of those leaving.

- *Development professionals are demanding permanent flexible and remote-work arrangements.* Development professionals desire flexible and remote-work arrangements. While most employees prefer a hybrid work arrangement, women and racial or ethnic minorities, and especially minority women, are more likely to want fully offsite arrangements. As IPs plan for their future workplace arrangements, they must consider the DEI implications of their decisions. They may risk losing women and minority employees should they return to a fully onsite model. At the same time, both hybrid and fully offsite settings can inadvertently amplify drivers of exclusion and must be managed with a DEI lens to counter such effects.

- ***The pandemic has created opportunities to advance locally led development.*** The suspension of international travel triggered introspection, particularly from mid-career and senior-career professionals, on how they can reduce carbon footprints, achieve greater work-life balance, and promote locally led development efforts. While the reduced physical presence of international aid professionals did shift responsibilities to local leadership, our study suggests that the adaptations of the last two years may be temporary unless we intentionally build on these experiences, confront our own underlying biases and mental models around leadership competencies, and formally recognize local staff's increased contributions.

Collectively, these three findings demonstrate how the diversity of our future leaders, as well as the broader pipeline of talent for international development programs, is at risk. When exploring preferences for employer attributes, flexible work arrangements, and desire to increase or decrease the size and scope of responsibilities, we consistently found that women and minority professionals are among the groups seeking more work-life balance, more offsite work, and a decrease in the size and scope of their responsibilities.

These findings underscore the real threats to DEI gains in the industry and call for IPs to safeguard, revitalize, and accelerate the diversity of its talent pipeline as they plan for a new normal. Inaction or even half measures by IPs to understand and address the root causes of these issues will likely result in a growing number of employee departures, with women and minority professionals comprising a larger proportion of these exiting professionals.

At the same time, our study also suggests that opportunities for reimagination abound, and that the development industry is experiencing a rare convergence of attention, energy, and resources to propel and institutionalize social values that development professionals find important.

A critical first step is for IPs to recognize, understand, and address the impact of COVID-19 on its workforce. IPs must unpack how the pandemic has exposed the fault lines of inequality across various factors such as gender, ethnicity, and location, within their own organizations and what the potential repercussions are for the well-being, morale, commitment, and diversity of its workforce.

As IPs strategize their future of work, they should hold themselves accountable to foster a healthier and more inclusive workforce. They can formulate their own principles and values, or they can sign onto existing pledges such as the Coalition for Racial and Ethnic Equity in Development's (CREED) Racial and Ethnic Equity pledge, but these principles must be embedded into their organizations.

To promote well-being, for example, they can enact policies and practices to ensure their workers truly feel off the clock. But more importantly, IPs will need to revisit their staffing models to ensure allocated workloads align with standard working hours. In practical terms, this may translate to opportunities to attract and invest in additional and more local staff to distribute the workload. For USAID, it will require rethinking staffing structures within programs and activities and recognizing that lean teams do not necessarily mean better programming.

To advance DEI efforts, IPs need to ensure inclusive recruitment strategies and accountability measures, such as embedding DEI in performance reviews or succession plans. In addition, IPs need to be intentional about integrating DEI into organizational culture. For example, using a simple tactic like "Say My Name" – where all employees must learn to say their colleagues' names without the fear of mispronunciation is a signal of openness, learning, and cohesion.

But most importantly, shaping a better development workforce requires a hard examination of the unconscious biases and mental models that permeate our industry, and how these standards are act through our policies, practices, and interactions to marginalize groups of individuals. We must unpack the deep-rooted dynamics within the development sector and answer uncomfortable questions around the root causes of our challenges.

To that end, IPs cannot and must not go it alone. IPs, donors, and other stakeholders are part of an interwoven tapestry and each has a role to play in challenging and correcting some of the longstanding assumptions and inequities in our industry. Through collective action, the development sector can find a way forward to truly build back better.

INTRODUCTION

By profoundly altering the workplace for international development professionals, the pandemic has highlighted and amplified existing social inequalities around the world, including in dimensions like gender, minority status, wealth, and others – compelling increased attention to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts. Moreover, the globalization of Black Lives Matter anti-racism activism sparked a cultural tipping point, pressing international development actors to explicitly address inequities within their own industry – as evidenced by the call to decolonize aid, the sector-wide Benchmarking Race, Inclusion, and Diversity in Global Engagement (BRIDGE) survey, and the founding of the Coalition for Racial and Ethnic Equity in Development (CREED).

Our earlier research observed that the international development sector was not immune to the uneven effects of the pandemic. The rapid industry study saw that the pandemic was disproportionately affecting women MSD professionals, who were experiencing higher rates of burnout and lower morale and career ambitions compared to their men counterparts. The findings indicated that the hard-won gains in DEI efforts – at least gender-wise – were being compromised in the MSD leadership pipeline. This was particularly concerning given how leadership roles in MSD-based programs significant discretionary power.

This follow-up study moved beyond MSD professionals and focused on international development professionals more broadly. It explored their shifting perspectives on their careers, some seismic and some subtle, that resulted from the pandemic, and it analyzed how these differed based on respondent identities. It also explored to what extent IPs are aligning with and responding to these shifts, and what the DEI implications are for the industry with a particular emphasis on the future diversity of the talent pipeline.

METHODOLOGY & LIMITATIONS

The study relied on multiple forms of data collection, including an online survey that was completed by 944 respondents, as well as in-depth interviews with a total of 31 individuals. The interviews included 19 survey respondents, eight IP senior leaders, and four USAID personnel across a variety of departments.

Figure 1: Study timeline

944
online
surveys

31
individual
interviews

October - December 2021 *January - March 2022*
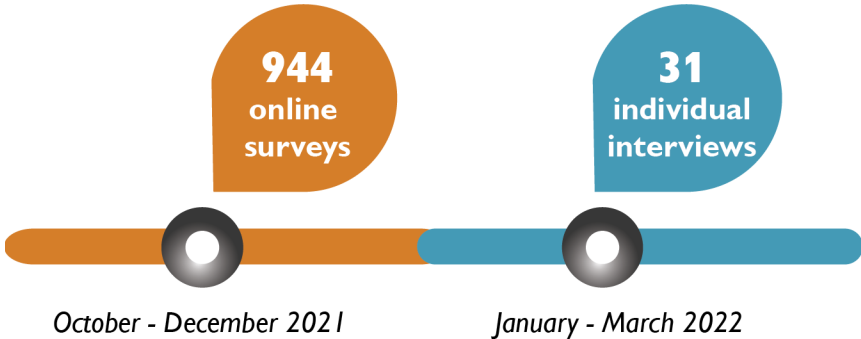
This study had its share of limitations. First, the study team acknowledges that the findings do not capture the full diversity of experiences within the international development community. The team undertook a substantial outreach effort, including French and Spanish versions of the survey, and were able to obtain completed responses from 93 nationalities, with an almost even distribution between those based in a headquarters office and those based in a country office. Despite close to 950 professionals lending their voices, 39 percent of respondents identified as US citizens or permanent residents. To strike a more even balance of non-US voices, the team ensured that the qualitative interviews captured a wider diversity of perspectives. The team also acknowledges that the research is skewed toward those employees occupying desk-based roles, for example technical advisory, project management, or business development capacities, and do not fully capture experiences of frontline workers.

Moreover, the study was limited to international development professionals who were working in full-time positions with IPs. It does not capture the perspectives of freelancers, part-time staff, or those who lost or left their jobs (or the field) altogether. In addition, while this study was able to incorporate gendered[1] and ethnic or racial minority-disaggregated analysis, there were insufficient responses to allow for other inclusion aspects, including LGBTQIA+ and disability.

Finally, the team acknowledges that DEI is complex, multidimensional, and context-specific and that exploring this issue from a global perspective is an inherently challenging exercise. To ensure a fair and balanced study, the team relied on a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that included DEI experts who advised the study team on how to best integrate pandemic-related findings with the latest discourse and efforts on DEI.

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[1] *The gender analysis was limited to cisgender men and women given the limited responses on other identities.*

WHAT TRENDS HAVE WE OBSERVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT WORKPLACE?

FINDING 1: DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CAREERS ARE CHANGING

The pandemic inspired professionals to turn away from a work-centric lifestyle, challenging the overworked culture of the development industry. This new prioritization of work-life balance was consistent after disaggregating by gender, racial or ethnic minority status, presence of dependents, and work location. That said, women and racial or ethnic minorities demonstrated greater change in this psychological shift, signaling the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on these groups. Over the last two years, most IPs' responses have centered on short-term, practical public-health priorities and they have not addressed the root issues of unmanageable workloads and burnout. To foster employee engagement and commitment, IPs must invest in employee well-being with the understanding that segments of their workforce are facing disproportionate challenges. Otherwise, employees will leave, with women and minority professionals likely comprising a disproportionate number of those stepping out of the industry.

Figure 2: Top attributes in an employer, pre-pandemic versus now
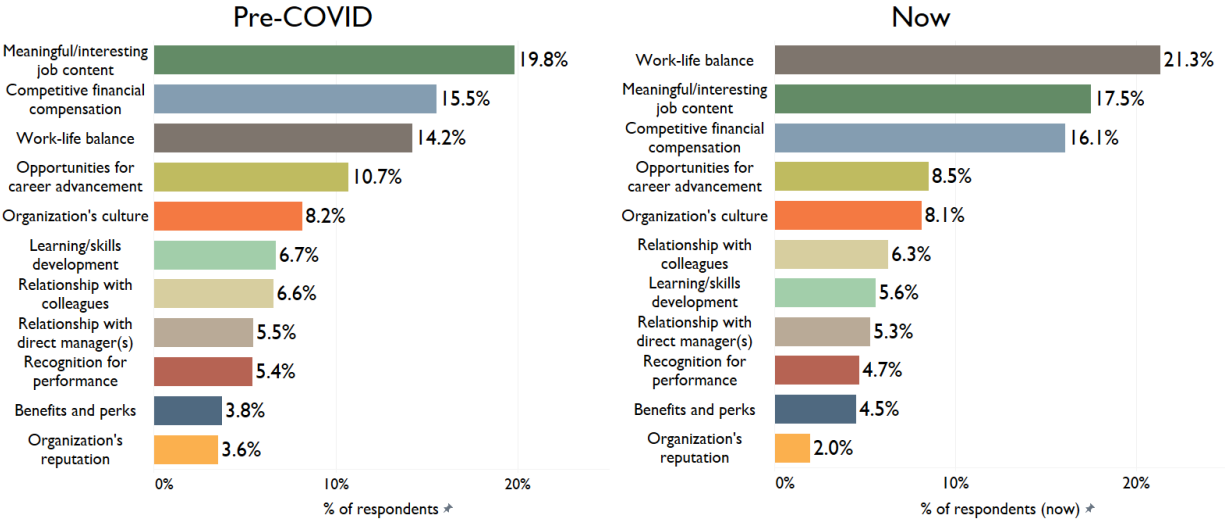
The survey asked respondents to select what they believed to be the top three attributes in an employer prior to the pandemic and currently (Figure 2). The results signaled a major change, with development professionals now valuing work-life balance as their number one attribute, replacing meaningful job content and financial compensation. Employees remarked that the pandemic forced them to recalibrate their priorities.[2]

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[2] *This finding validates our earlier research on MSD professionals and extends the results to the industry overall.*

"The pandemic changed so much of the perception about time management. I am thinking that we need to manage our personal tasks, as well as professional, because we cannot postpone one or another." – Early-career professional, based in country office[3]

"Work is taking a backseat. People are saying, I'm going to protect and prioritize my…family, kids, partners, life, the environment. So much has happened in the world within the last two years. These big tectonic shifts, both domestically in the United States and globally, have impacted people and their well-being, their mental health as well as their physical health." – Senior IP leader, based in headquarters

Figure 3: Increase in prioritization of work-life balance from pre-COVID times

Figures indicate percentage points
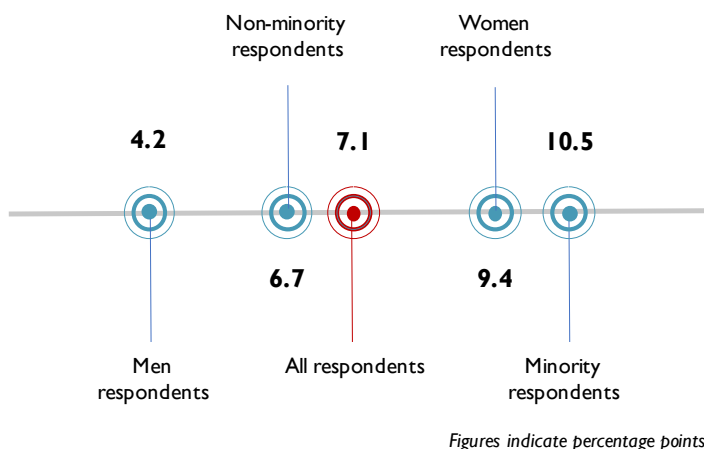
When observing the extent of this shift, there were some differences between groups. Women and those who identified as a racial or ethnic minority were more likely to demonstrate a greater change from pre-COVID times (Figure 3). This is in line with the global data that shows that women and other traditionally disadvantaged groups have borne the brunt of the pandemic, and it is not surprising that they are asking for a career that allows them to navigate often competing or diverse challenges and responsibilities.

"As a person of color, my employer does not consider the impact of racial dynamics playing out in [my] country in the midst of a pandemic and political upheaval. There is a lot of harm being done to Black and Brown employees as a result. This adds to the impact of the pandemic." – Senior-level professional, based in headquarters, woman, identifies as a racial or ethnic minority

"I am glad there was some response [from my employer regarding COVID-19] … not to be ungrateful but frankly it was too little too late, and there just wasn't enough attention paid to the enormous burden that women were bearing for all the extra work and responsibilities that came with the pandemic." – Senior-level professional, based in headquarters, woman

"It is unquestionably true from the data from all different directions - the most vulnerable and under-resourced have a tendency to absorb the most shock. Childcare and caring for the elderly and the sick, for the most part in the countries where we work, these fall on women. These take them out of the workforce, out of the economic opportunities. Even for our headquarters

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[3] *Note we attributed all quotations to the experience level and location of each development professional. We have included other demographic information, including gender and ethnic or minority status, in specific sections where we felt such information was pertinent to analysis. Quotations from IP senior leaders all include the size of their organization.*

population, it's obviously the women who have to bear the brunt of dealing with school closures and taking care of people who are ill with COVID. The disproportionate requests for more time off or assistance, or just expressing their frustration with the situation have mostly come from those [women]." – IP senior leader, large organization

In seeking more balance, professionals recognized that they were contradicting the paradigm of the ideal development worker who dedicates all their time and energy to their career – particularly for women and minority groups. Moreover, respondents stated that COVID-19 instilled a sense of panic in the industry, especially following a steady decrease in donor funding and more competition for resources, which exacerbated this paradigm. The transition to remote, technology-based work amplified the "always on" dynamic, rendering work inescapable.

"The pandemic has had indirect consequences on the company, with a lot of activities getting delayed, several people leaving the company, and a vanishing pipeline of new projects that discouraged my employer to hire replacements for the staff that moved on. This has resulted in an increased and hardly manageable workload, and little opportunities for personal development." – Entry-level professional, based in headquarters

"Just constantly being expected to respond or be available is very exhausting. I think it ends up being quite an impediment to having a work-life balance. The pandemic has somewhat exacerbated this since we are always working from home now. There is an expectation of, 'Oh, you have your laptop with you, so you can add to your workload, you can wake up at four o'clock in the morning or five o'clock in the morning to take this call because you have your laptop with you.'" – Entry-level professional, based in headquarters

Despite professionals' concerns about workload and burnout, it was initially surprising to observe that most respondents stated that their employers respected their work-life boundaries (74%) and that they stated they were comfortable (68%) asking their employers for changes regarding their working models (Figure 4). In contextualizing these results, respondents spoke with a sense of resignation regarding the industry's overworked culture, particularly given that they were grateful to be employed during difficult economic times in roles that they ultimately found interesting and meaningful.

"It's very difficult to define or to quantify levels of satisfaction or comfort [about an employer]. Obviously, if you're completely miserable, you would leave or look for another job, but many people don't. The majority don't. Of course, there are people who would like to leave, but they can't find something better or equivalent. So they have to keep doing this work […] there are aspects where I think [my company] is doing great. It's very easy to criticize or to be unhappy because nothing is perfect. They are not underpaying me. They have treated me fairly with the benefits. No one has been disrespectful. I'm doing an interesting job and I get good opportunities. The problem is with the very heavy workloads and very long hours and back-to-back assignments with no break." – Senior-level professional, based in headquarters

"In this industry, your reward for good work is more work. Is it that organizations pile all the responsibilities on the people that they trust to put the best effort forward? Is it not managing those who aren't doing well or are struggling? I don't know. But to me, it's always a race. It's a marathon that is being treated like a sprint. The pandemic was the straw that broke the [camel's] back… [but] I like my work." – Senior-level professional, based in headquarters

Figure 4: Comfort level in asking employer for changes to current working model

Overall, how comfortable would you be in asking your employer for any additional changes to your current working model?

Very uncomfortable/uncomfortable	Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	Comfortable/very comfortable
14%	18%	68%

0%   50%   100%

... disaggregated by racial or ethnic minority status

	Very uncomfortable/uncomfortable	Neither	Comfortable/very comfortable
Non-minority	12%	18%	70%
Minority	23%	16%	62%

0%   50%   100%

... disaggregated by gender identity

	Very uncomfortable/uncomfortable	Neither	Comfortable/very comfortable
Men	11%	17%	72%
Women	15%	19%	66%

0%   50%   100%

... disaggregated by racial or ethnic minority status and gender identity

		Very uncomfortable/uncomfortable	Neither	Comfortable/very comfortable
Non-minority	Men	9%	18%	73%
	Women	14%	18%	67%
Minority	Men	23%	11%	67%
	Women	22%	19%	58%

0%   50%   100%

■ Very uncomfortable/uncomfortable   ■ Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable   ■ Comfortable/very comfortable

In further disaggregating the findings, there were noticeable differences regarding comfort levels based on gender and racial or ethnic minority status – with minority women being least likely to feel comfortable asking for changes compared to their counterparts. In reflecting on the context of the United States, one IP senior leader stated that under-represented groups likely do not have the psychological safety at the workplace to speak up without fearing penalization.

> *"In the United States, we know the understory of black communities, and there's a heavier burden that they're facing [in terms of public health] as well as in terms of family…there's always a crisis, not just the kids, but within the family network… Right now, they're less likely to speak up. They don't have the ability to say I want to work remotely because I need this as part of work-life balance and family balance. If an individual person spoke up, that person would be concerned about retaliation, either by the supervisor or others that say they need to fill out 50 forms and justify why they want that." – Senior IP leader, large organization*

Interviews with IP leaders revealed that while they had personally observed shifts in employees' mentalities during COVID-19, their institutional responses have largely been driven solely by public health concerns. More than three-quarters of survey respondents (76%) stated that they were satisfied with their respective organizations' actions, and cited examples about receiving frequent communication about transmission rates, private transportation, internet subsidies, personal protective equipment, and access to vaccines to alleviate the effects of the pandemic. That said, employees stated that these benefits, while appreciated, did not address the root tension between job demands and the desire for work-life balance.

"The lack of concern for the mental health impacts of the pandemic has been stark and disappointing. In addition, working from home has translated into endless back-to-back meetings with no consideration that this means we are often glued to our computers for 4 or 5 hours without a single break. There are no quiet hours or attempts to limit meetings. In the 14 months I have been with my employer, there has not been a single mention of taking care of ourselves during unprecedented times." – Mid-career professional, based in headquarters

"While my employer has acknowledged that challenges exist, nothing has been done to address the issues that have been raised. The workload and demands are high (likely higher than normal), but we are not provided any support and burnout is a very real threat." – Mid-career professional, based in country office

Professionals alluded to desiring a workplace that places empathy at the core of its business model, which is in line with the growing understanding that managing burnout is not the responsibility of an individual employee, but the organization and its leadership.

"There's no malicious intent [...] As an example of how empathetic [my employer is], I let them know that my grandmother was dying and asked to go back [home] for a week for a visit. And they have a policy for grievance leave, but that's after somebody dies, not when somebody is in the hospital and may or may not be dying. They said, 'OK, you can go as long as it doesn't affect your ability to get all your work done.' So I got to go, but I still had to get everything done. And as long as I could handle all of [my work responsibilities], then it was fine. I could envision a more supportive environment, perhaps is the way to put it." – Mid-career professional, based in headquarters

"[What] my employer did that won them so much goodwill and respect, is they just gave us days off... It was either a Thursday or Friday, depending on where you were [globally]. And they just said, the entire organization is shutting down that day. And they did it three times for us the first year of the pandemic. And I have to say, knowing that no one else was working was such a relief." – Senior-level professional, based in headquarters

One IP senior leader noted that their organization's primary focus on their staff's well-being paid off in terms of good morale, greater productivity, high retention, and the feedback that the employer "takes care of their people."

"Pretty much everything we've done over the course of COVID has been in response to [staff] having more family time and more flexibility generally [...] Work-life balance was something that we stumbled into over the course of the last two years, and have made adjustments to accommodate that, just making sure that everybody knew that we supported them and their families, and that our priority was the care and support of them as human beings, like helping them with childcare and figuring out solutions so that they could have a balanced life. And that has been something that has been a priority for us over the last two years." – IP senior leader, small organization

Overall, development professionals' greater emphasis on the importance of work-life balance is in line with trends we are seeing in other industries. In particular, the increased rate of change in this mentality by women and racial or ethnic minority professionals, points to how the pandemic has disproportionately affected them. Unless IPs invest in their staff's well-being and remain mindful of how the overworked culture is affecting different segments of their workforce, they will face a growing number of employee departures. Concerningly, given the survey results above, these departures may comprise a higher number of women and minority professionals, unraveling many of the DEI gains made in the industry.

Employees with no dependents expressed an acute pressure to maintain a work-centric lifestyle, in part because they felt that they had less of an excuse to advocate for boundaries and in part because they sensed a positive bias in their working environment toward those with dependents, particularly employees with children.

> *"It would be nice to feel like there is the flexibility to take care of personal needs/responsibilities that may require them being done during the day without feeling like I have to justify and jump through hoops - particularly since I don't have children - but as a single person I am solely responsible for taking care of my home duties."* – Mid-career professional, based in headquarters, no dependents
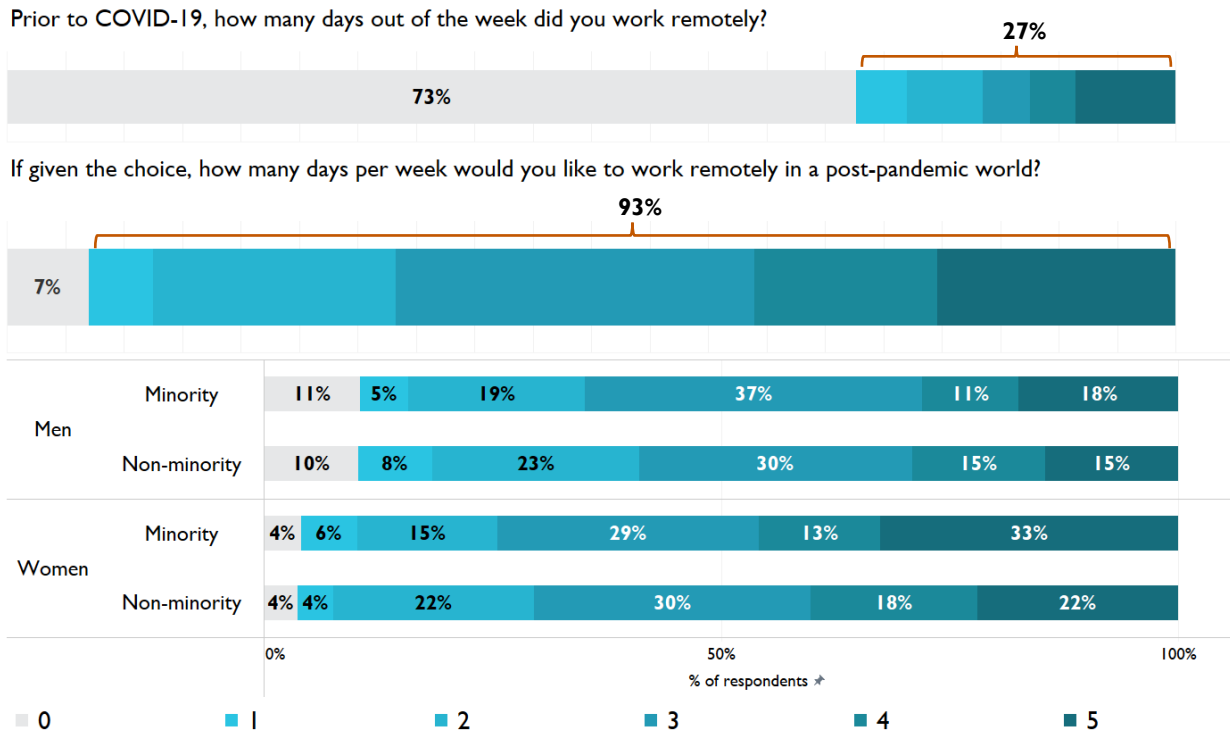
> *"In a couple of cases, people mentioned that they felt being single put them at a disadvantage because the first to be repatriated, the first to go on holiday, the first to be able to work remotely – are those employees with families. [But] I have a family, I have a mother and a father, and I'm the kid. I know a couple of organizations where [having family/dependents] was the selection criteria to keep people in-country or send them home. For some people, it was like 'I was penalized because I am single.'"* – Mid-career professional, based in country office, no dependents

FINDING 2: PROFESSIONALS ARE SEEKING PERMANENT FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Development professionals are demanding permanent flexible and remote-work arrangements. While most employees prefer a hybrid work arrangement, women and racial or ethnic minorities, and especially minority women, are more likely to desire fully offsite arrangements. As IPs plan for their future workplace arrangements, if they do not consider the DEI implications of these decisions in designing and implementing strategies to mitigate the risk, they could lose women and minority employees. At the same time, while women and minority employees have a stronger preference for remote work, both hybrid and fully offsite settings can inadvertently amplify drivers of exclusion and must be managed with a DEI lens to counter such effects.

The survey responses revealed that COVID-19 precipitated a favorable shift in development professionals' attitudes toward flexible work arrangements, be it work location or working hours (Figure 5). Prior to the pandemic, 27% of survey respondents had some type of a flexible work location arrangement. In a post-pandemic world, 93% stated they did not want to work fully onsite, with 73% desiring a hybrid model, and 20% desiring a fully offsite arrangement.

Figure 5: Remote work preferences

Prior to COVID-19, how many days out of the week did you work remotely?

| 73% | 27% |

If given the choice, how many days per week would you like to work remotely in a post-pandemic world?

| 7% | 93% |

Men	Minority	11%	5%	19%	37%	11%	18%	
	Non-minority	10%	8%	23%	30%	15%	15%	
Women	Minority	4%	6%	15%	29%	13%	33%	
	Non-minority	4%	4%	22%	30%	18%	22%	

0%   50%   100%

% of respondents

■ 0   ■ 1   ■ 2   ■ 3   ■ 4   ■ 5

Similarly, although less drastic in contrast, 56% of respondents stated they had some form of flexible working hours prior to the pandemic. In a post-pandemic world, 94% of respondents stated that they would like an official policy allowing for flexible working hours.

Professionals remarked that an offsite model would allow for greater work-life balance and noted that technological advancements allowed them to get on with their day-to-day responsibilities without having to be onsite. Others remarked that they had greater access to conferences, workshops, and trainings because of programs going virtual. For many professionals based in country offices, from Uganda to Senegal to Nicaragua to Cambodia, flexible work location also translated to reduction in commute times and the ability to avoid heavy traffic.

> *"What attracts me to the hybrid model is the ability to have a face-to-face interaction, if needed, but at the same time, the flexibility to work from your own environment, from your own space and also to be able to travel or to respond to emergencies, if needed… [It allows you to] still go about other obligations in life outside of work while also being able to maintain your work [obligations]." – Entry-level professional, based in headquarters*

> *"Remote work gives more chance to have quality in my life. I can eat healthy at home; I can do some exercise… I don't have to pass a lot of time in car traffic. I use that time for my own activities and that gives me quality of life. I can share activities like eating with my family every day. Prior to COVID, I ate with my family on weekends. I can be more concentrated at home. In the office, it is noisy with people talking. I do my job better at home." – Entry-level professional, based in country office*

"In a month, I could attend about seven webinars, because it's easy for people to organize webinars now compared to the physical conference. You don't get to network physically, but you can still have a good conversation with people in the chat box. Introduce yourself, people will tell you what they do, and you can interact after the webinar. Personally, I connect with them on LinkedIn." – Early-career professional, woman, based in country office

When disaggregating by respondent characteristics, there were noticeable disparities in preferences. Women professionals were more likely to desire a fully offsite model as compared to men (Figure 5) and stated that such an arrangement would allow them to better meet their domestic obligations, including caring for their spouses, elderly family members, and/or their children. This is not surprising, given that domestic responsibilities fall disproportionately on women around the world.

"It has been very difficult to manage unexpected childcare for young children - schools/preschools shut down unexpectedly, but deliverables and proposals still have deadlines, so we work at night or very early in the morning to make up the time; working remotely does help this a bit."- Senior-level professional, based in headquarters, woman with dependents

"Remote working helps me save a lot from my salary. Also, it gives me the chance to look after my house and my husband." – Entry-level professional, based in country office, woman with no dependents

"Remote work allows me the opportunity to take care of domestic chores in a way that full-time work would not. Childcare near work and home is not accessible or affordable, which means adding at least an hour to my commute to pick up my child." – Mid-career professional, based in headquarters

In addition, racial or ethnic minorities were more likely to desire working remotely full-time.[4] Several respondents indicated that remote work was about more than preferred flexibility. It was a way to ease the pain points around their work experience and career progression opportunities. Remote work allowed these professionals to avoid racism, microaggressions, witnessing systemic discrimination, and the psychological fatigue of being the non-dominant voice in the workplace.

"Remote work alleviates some of the stress associated with non-inclusive work environment." – Senior-level professional, based in headquarters, woman, identifies as a racial or ethnic minority

"When you start seeing diversity dwindle at Senior Manager, Senior Director, C-suite, Chief of Party [levels]…you say, "Why do I need to go into the office if what I can do can be done remotely? Also, I'm not making that much because of where I fall in the organization, and so I might not be able to afford childcare..." there are a lot of layers where socio-economically you may not stack up with your colleagues." – Senior-level professional, woman, identifies as a racial/ethnic minority

"In this industry [in the US], there has been a dominance of upper-middle income, primarily white, coastal [people]. And I will say that going into [Washington] DC and being part of some conversations, I sit there with a heavy level of eye rolling of like, 'Oh, this is such a narrow view of the world.' The question is, is this non-dominant person not just present, but is their perspective being heard and even appreciated, or factored in, and more objectively reviewed? If you are different from the norm, the dominant voice, you're not just uncomfortable, you're fatigued. You're just tired of sitting there going, 'I'm not heard, they're not getting it. They're not getting

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[4] *It is important to note that those who stated desiring to work remotely full-time still understood the importance of in-person strategic meetings to cultivate relationships and manage stakeholders on as-needed basis.*

me.' And you just kind of say, 'Screw this.'" - Senior-level professional, based in headquarters, woman, prefers not to disclose minority status

IP leaders validated much of the enthusiasm around technology and communicated many of its benefits. Some noted that the time and cost savings from a lack of a commute was a major benefit to all employees. Others saw remote work as a chance to even the playing field for under-represented groups. One IP noted that a virtual working environment allowed them to seek more diverse candidates, especially since candidates' geographical location or willingness to relocate was no longer a criterion for the opportunity. Another IP noted that remote work allowed an employee with special needs children to be more integrated into the organization.

> *"The virtual reality has given us more opportunities for inclusion. One of my team members has always been partially remote. I always felt bad for her because she struggled to be fully integrated with the rest of the team. When she was calling into the meetings while everyone was in-person, it immediately put her at a disadvantage because she was not there to read the room. [Working remotely] the past two years, she's on par with everyone else because we're all in the same position. I'm not negating the impact of losing in-person presence, and the mentorship and the networking opportunities it offers. But I think if we learn how to work in new ways effectively, we can compensate to a great extent. –* IP senior leader, large organization

Our interviews revealed that IPs are gravitating away from a fully onsite working model. Many were considering a hybrid arrangement, so as to meet employee preferences while also promoting cross-pollination, team building, and networking that they believed is best be done in-person.

> *"Our stance has been that our team has been very productive off site. Everybody's working hard, but there is a loss of collaboration and cross-unit awareness. What I think might be missing is also not [necessarily only] the work, it might be the relationships and the celebrations… and just having good personal relationships and connections." –* IP senior leader, small organization

> *"I feel like we're not as productive [with fully remote work], I can see that we're missing building up [early career] staff. I do think that [early career] people do not fully appreciate what is the missed opportunity in terms of their own learning and capacity building. I think that maybe they overfocus on the freedom aspect." –* IP senior leader, small organization

Given what we know about women and minorities' preferences, a mandatory onsite or even a hybrid model may trigger departures from these professionals. That said, even with optional hybrid arrangements, women and minorities may opt out of in-person engagements – risking social isolation and long-lasting career damage in comparison with those who choose to be more visible in a physical office setting.
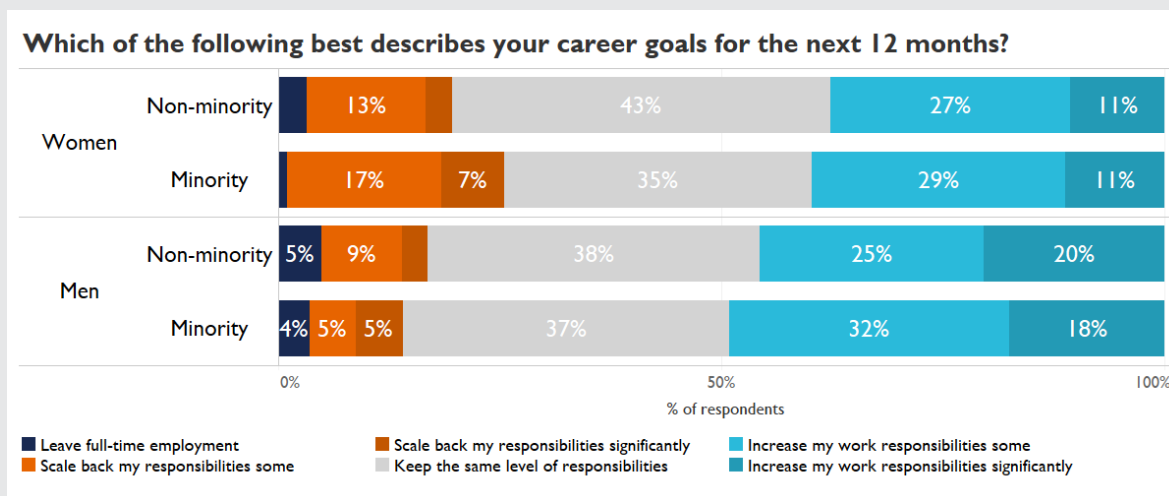
> *"I could see [what would happen] if you were too flexible in allowing some people to work from home: once we start going back to the office, or whoever chooses to go back… is the stereotypical young or middle-aged white man because they like it, and how is that going to change the conversations? [When I am remote,] I'm 10 steps behind an in-person conversation. So if you're building a culture where so much work is getting done through fast interactions, and one group is self-selecting and being allowed to stay outside, what is that going to do? I could see where it would have important implications on perpetuating a lot of problems in this industry where a specific race or gender group is dominant." –* Senior-level professional, based in headquarters, woman, does not wish to disclose racial or ethnic minority status

Moreover, emerging evidence shows that a fully offsite work environment does not seem to be the great equalizer as one would hope, despite the benefits it offers women and minorities. For example, experiences of women and men during telework are different, demonstrating the persistence of biases and discrimination even within a virtual setting. Given the likelihood that fully remote or hybrid work becomes the default setting for the international development workplace, it is even more important that DEI be at the forefront of IPs' modus operandi to ensure drivers of exclusion are not – even inadvertently – amplified.

Intersectionality in the workplace: racial/ethnic minority women

Gender, ethnic, and racial identities converge to affect employees' experiences at work, and ethnic or racial minority women in particular are likely to face an even wider range of constraints and discriminatory behavior. Our study validates this dynamic, showing that compared to their counterparts, minority women have faced a disproportionately greater burden of the pandemic, and are demonstrating a greater demand for work-life balance. As Figure 6 shows, while minority women are likely to be marginally more ambitious than their non-minority women counterparts, they are also far more likely to desire scaling back responsibilities.

Figure 6: Career goals by gender and ethnicity

Which of the following best describes your career goals for the next 12 months?

Women — Non-minority: 13% | 43% | 27% | 11%
Women — Minority: 17% | 7% | 35% | 29% | 11%
Men — Non-minority: 5% | 9% | 38% | 25% | 20%
Men — Minority: 4% | 5% | 5% | 37% | 32% | 18%

% of respondents

Legend:
- Leave full-time employment
- Scale back my responsibilities some
- Scale back my responsibilities significantly
- Keep the same level of responsibilities
- Increase my work responsibilities some
- Increase my work responsibilities significantly

While our study was not able to explore intersectionality in full depth, our findings reveal that by focusing only on gender or on minority group, the unique and often compounded experiences of minority women may be overlooked.

Overall, development professionals' tremendous desire for flexible work arrangements, both in terms of location and hours, has important implications. For those IPs unwilling to offer such flexibility, their workers can and will most likely go elsewhere. In particular, they will lose out on attracting and retaining employees most impacted by COVID-19, including women and minority professionals. At the same time,

even IPs that offer flexible work arrangements will need to learn more about and mitigate how DEI issues will manifest in both hybrid and remote working environments. Much of the pre-existing office dynamics can be transferred and perhaps even exacerbated in a virtual setting, and thus deliberate thought must go into ensuring persistent drivers of exclusion do not go unnoticed.

FINDING 3: THE PANDEMIC HAS CREATED AN OPPORTUNITY TO ADVANCE LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

The suspension of international travel and resulting adaptation strategies triggered introspection, particularly from mid-career and senior-career professionals in headquarters, on how they can reduce carbon footprints, achieve greater work-life balance, and promote locally led development efforts. While the reduced physical presence of international aid professionals did shift responsibilities to local leadership, our study suggests that the adaptations of the last two years may be temporary unless IPs intentionally build on these experiences, confront our own underlying biases and mental models around leadership competencies, and formally recognize increased contributions of local staff

Our survey findings showed differences between early-career and mid- and senior-level professionals' desired amount of future work travel as compared to pre-pandemic times (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Average change in desired travel levels from pre-COVID levels
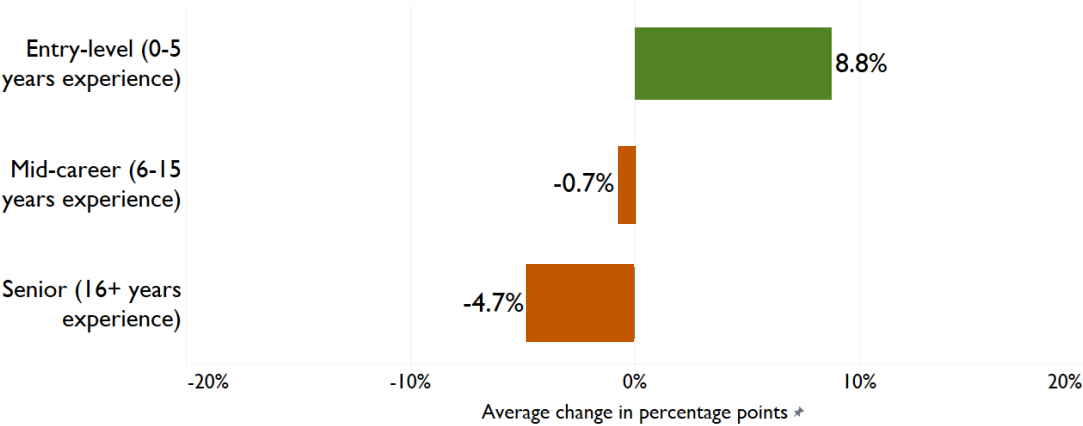
Figures represent average percentage point difference between future desired levels of work travel and actual pre-COVID levels, which were calculated as a percentage of one's overall job.

Early-career professionals would like to increase the amount they travel, whereas mid- and senior-level stated they wanted to travel less compared to their pre-COVID levels. This latter sentiment was particularly acute among headquarters-based professionals who stated that the pandemic had upended assumptions about what can be done virtually after witnessing how programs have been able to continue regardless of international professionals' presence in the operating countries. Other motivating factors included increased awareness around the effects of climate change, a desire for greater work-life balance, and renewed energy around the topic of locally led development.

"COVID has taught us that the insane amounts of travel weren't necessary and undermined our purpose. We now work with and through local actors and advisors to support their legitimate roles - and trust them to get on with it. This is the single most important thing to have arisen from the pandemic." – Senior-level professional, based in headquarters

"Work travel allows us to meet with colleagues based in other locations and can be a key part of this work. I do think organizations have to start thinking about how much can be implemented locally and reduce the need for travel or ensure travel goes both ways (from 'global north' to 'global south' but also vice versa). Some work travel is helpful, too much can be stressful and an unnecessary toll on the environment." – Mid-career professional, based in headquarters

When disaggregating the results by location, we also saw that while mid- and senior-level country-based staff wanted to reduce their overall travel amount in the future, it was comparatively less as compared to headquarters staff. This difference was attributed to the fact that country-based staff needed to travel to perform their professional duties and maintain a sense of job security, especially in the case of front-line workers whose roles require interfacing with stakeholders.

"When you're not going to the field, the burn rates are very low. What does low expenditure mean? It means low performance. When you're holding onto a donor award, you really want to make sure you fulfill the requirements of that award. So when you're not able to travel to the project sites, there's a lot of stress on the project team when they are not able to do their work, which is work they can only do when they visit the communities. So yeah, people get excited about travel restrictions being lifted and they're able to get off their phones to implement activities." – Senior-level professional, based in country office

"If you're implementing projects, you need those people that go to the field to meet with a particular firm, the beneficiaries – and to engage with them. Now, because of COVID, we don't really need [these field officers] because we can easily pick up the phone and talk [to our beneficiaries or stakeholders] over the phone…so that has sort of reduced the job opportunity that comes from most projects." – Early-career professional, based in country office

Some IP leaders reflected on how the pandemic led to increased delegation of responsibilities to country-office staff, by virtue of international staff not being able to travel. This phenomenon was a "happy accident" that may have resulted in some knowledge transfer and the establishment of new operational processes. While the pandemic forced some elements of locally led development to unfold naturally, interviews with local staff suggested that these shifts are likely to be temporary unless there is an explicit intention to sustain them. Local professionals stated that while they have gained additional responsibilities during the pandemic, they did not perceive them as opportunities for career advancement, especially when they were not tied to any promotions, credit, or formal decision-making authority.

"The opportunities for nationals did not really change that much, as much as filling in for someone because it was remote work. When I look at our project, I find many people spent a year doing work remotely, whether international or local, so that means that we're still the same as before. Because employers were allowing remote work, so I don't think it really increases their [national employees'] chances." – Entry-level professional, based in country office

"You're putting more responsibility on [local] people without promotions, without authority, without giving them money, benefits, and moving them up the ladder. So that's not a really motivating approach. So that is a huge concern…if you're giving people more responsibility and ownership, they must be in a lead position, you have to change their whole profile, right? It [should not be] more work, then we come back and take it away from you… it's sort of the same as if you

have a person in the US taking on responsibility for one of their colleagues, if they're out or taking on more work, without any compensation, it's ridiculous." – IP senior leader, small organization

Our study suggests there is renewed momentum among development professionals and IPs in promoting locally led development, and they embrace the localization initiatives announced by USAID. What is then preventing IPs from pursuing localization more deliberately? One reason is that USAID's regulatory mechanisms and decision-making protocols dampen IPs' risk appetite for pursuing partnerships with local organizations or putting forth local personnel. Some IP leaders and survey respondents reflected on how pursuing locally led structures did not necessarily work in their favor and, at times, they were even advised not to pursue them.

"We applied for a number of bids where we had local organizations as primes. And we weren't successful. So that made us rethink our business strategy a little bit. Maybe [the donors] don't [really] want [to work with] local organizations." – IP senior leader, small organization

"Having a more inclusive program design and engaging different perspectives is really hard in our current construct. Oftentimes, you have six weeks to design a massive, complex program, and that doesn't serve our inclusion goals, that doesn't serve our localization goals. What helps [to win programs] is to promote these kinds of white supremacy-based cultural norms of urgency, perfectionism, worship with the written word, etc. I'm not suggesting it's all on donors because we're part of the system too […]"– IP senior leader, large organization

"We've had some overseas bids where the key personnel requirements did not indicate the preference for international or local candidates, but we heard verbally, 'Hey, these two should be international.'" – IP senior leader, small organization

Moreover, IP leaders reflected on how USAID's contracting mechanisms were obstacles to pursuing localization efforts due to the donor's concerns around trade-offs, including administrative challenges in managing contracts with lesser known or unknown local organizations who were not necessarily well-versed in USAID contracting and reporting regulations; and reducing output and outcome targets to align with local organizations' often limited capacities to implement at scale.

"We started with five partners [and USAID said] to go ahead with transitioning responsibilities to them. When that time came, USAID said, 'You know, there would be so many of these local partners and we can't manage it.' … You can't tell us for four years, 'Please, please go ahead, make them local, make them local.' And then when we're actually there, [tell us] 'It's not that important.' That is a very mixed message. These kinds of situations are hard because we're trying to build that capacity up." – Senior-level professional, based in country office

"USAID wants to go toward more local. But then the new [in-country] leadership says, 'Well, we only have so many staff [to manage the portfolio.]' It's true - those local contracts are way smaller in value than ones with an international, well-established organization. So instead of one big contract, they would have to work with 10 small ones and who's going to manage that?" – Senior-level professional, based in country office

"We have a project where our approach is to build local capacity to do the work. It's not clear that USAID is appreciating that part of what we're trying to do. They're really pushing on the numbers. We have two tracks going at the same time –we're trying to educate USAID the benefit of the latter while delivering against our targets, which is a day-to-day challenge." – IP senior leader, small organization

Where do USAID staff stand on locally led development?

USAID personnel see locally led development as a priority topic and welcome the Administrator's ambitious agenda. They shared IPs' reflections on how locally led development necessitates nuanced and careful conversation, coupled with fundamental changes to USAID's funding structure, including restrictive personnel criteria that can inhibit local candidates from being seen as competitive. At the same time, the Agency is constrained by insufficient staffing, which has stalled their efforts in translating their localization principles to practical changes and mechanisms.

"I think there are probably a lot of contracting officers within USAID who feel more comfortable with the quantitative list of requirements because that's easy to tally, it's easy to then say an IP did not propose a Chief of Party with 20 years of experience, therefore it justifies excluding them. And so it makes the actual decision of the award less controversial, less likely to be protested." – USAID staff, based in headquarters

"What's our fundamental approach to design? How are we going to be inclusive of local voices across our program and procurement cycles? Because you can do 'localization' by working with local elites and just check the box, but are you really? How are we navigating the more nuanced conversation?" – USAID staff, based in headquarters

"I think we're still trying to figure out what localization actually means within the Agency. I sit in meetings every week and do partner engagements, and I think we're all still struggling to figure out what it is and what counts." – USAID staff, based in headquarters

In reflecting on this topic, IP leaders also cautioned that blanket localization comes with risks that may be antithetical to the founding principles of DEI, including the over-focus on going local at the expense of all other considerations. One IP leader remarked that localization needs to be managed carefully to not perpetuate unequal power dynamics within local contexts. Another noted that simply placing local professionals in traditionally international positions could risk setting them up to fail if they cannot meet Western cultural expectations.

"The development industry has created beltway bandits in every country. And they're the ones who are going to be winning those initial projects that go to local entities. We have to be very careful. We're actually exporting this model that we have in Washington to that country. And [for] that small, local NGO out in the field that is actually doing good work – if they sub to the usual suspects in the capital city, is their situation going to be actually improved?" – IP senior leader, small organization

"We need to shed light on the perceived competencies of leadership positions traditionally held by international roles – white supremacy-based cultural norms of urgency, perfectionism, worship of the written word. If we don't pay attention to that, and if we had more non-Western team members occupying those traditionally held leadership roles, we're actually doing them a disservice, because we still have our biases and are still looking for those competencies." – IP senior leader, large organization

As travel restrictions ease, IPs will need to navigate their employees' swell of support for localization and consider how this affects their business models, including how they select their partnerships; how they recruit, advance, and retain their local staff; and how this may signal changing roles for their other staff. USAID will also need to recognize that IPs can only realize locally led efforts if there are supporting structures and resources, and both actors must commit to a long-term vision and sincere effort to dismantle the sticky norms that perpetuate the uneven power dynamics within the sector.

> *"I think the common stereotype is older white male Chiefs of Party. We were doing a training, and I had a [white] guy who was younger than me who was our business director. And I pointed out this one woman who was African and I said that she is potential Chief of Party material. He did not see it at all. She went on to be Chief of Party with somebody else. So somebody else saw it. But I think it was a scenario where she just didn't look like what we're used to. And so the white male business director couldn't see it, and I think that's part of what we're suffering from. The 'it's always been like this' mentality.'"* – IP senior leader, small organization

The pandemic has challenged assumptions around the need for international travel and created opportunities to realize many of the localization initiatives of the last several decades. There is a groundswell of renewed support for IPs to foster opportunities for local staff, partners, and stakeholders to lead development efforts, resulting in increasingly powerful and diverse voices. The pandemic seems to have propelled some advancement in this area, but due to a combination of structural and normative barriers, locally led development remains largely unrealized. Without a requisite enabling environment, the risk appetite of donors and IPs will remain low, and there is a danger that the industry will return to status quo from the slight gains it has made during the pandemic – this will be a wasted opportunity for developing, promoting, and recognizing local talent.

What will be the future role of the headquarters international development professional?

Less travel from headquarters and discussions around locally led development are inevitably raising questions around the role of professionals who are not classified as local. One IP leader spoke about reimagining the HQ-based international development professionals as mentors and coaches who can strengthen the pipeline of local staff through support and capacity building.

> *"One of the things that we're looking at is thinking of ourselves more as coaches rather than doers. We're not actually doing the work in the countries, but we're working with our counterparts to help them learn the skill sets they need to work with donors. We've completed our annual review process recently, and we have several staff who are now identifying completely as coaches. A big part of their job description is mentoring and coaching their colleagues globally. And that has been very exciting for folks. It's changing how we think of ourselves. We always thought of ourselves as technical people that go out and show technical skill sets, but now we're moving into a mentoring and coaching phase, where we're building capacity [differently]."* – IP senior leader, small organization

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The diversity of our future leaders as well as the broader pipeline of talent for international development programs is at risk. When exploring preferences for employer attributes, flexible work arrangements, and desire to increase or decrease the size and scope of responsibilities, we consistently found that women and minority professionals are among the groups seeking more work-life balance, more offsite work, and a decrease in their job responsibilities.

These study findings underscore the real threats to DEI gains in the industry and calls for IPs to safeguard, revitalize, and accelerate the diversity of its talent pipeline as they plan for a new normal. Inaction or even half measures by IPs to understand and address the root causes of these issues will likely result in a growing number of employee departures, with women and minority professionals comprising a larger proportion of exiting professionals.

"The burnout, the work life balance - we need more people. There's the tension of solvency from a private sector perspective of running a company. How do you keep a company running? You can't have too many staff. For us [as a donor], we want to have the most amount of money going to our programs and activities, sometimes to the detriment of the number of people that we actually have doing the work there. It's like if a partner hires more people, it may be a couple hundred thousand dollars less or a million dollars less that actually goes to a specific program or activity."
- USAID staff based in headquarters

In addition to the salient DEI findings, this study revealed broader industry trends such as employees' new relationship with their work, near universal desire for flexible work arrangements, and desired reduction in international travel by headquarters-based staff. These trends also offer opportunities to reimagine the future of the international development workplace into an environment that is more empathetic, equitable, and inclusive.

HOW CAN WE SEIZE OUR MOMENT?

Get Started: Commitment

A critical first step is for IPs to make a commitment to recognize, understand, and address the impact of COVID-19 on its workforce. IPs must unpack how the pandemic has exposed the fault lines of inequality across various factors, including gender, ethnicity, and location, within its own organization and what the potential repercussions are for the well-being, morale, commitment, and diversity of its workforce. Some questions IPs should consider include:

- How is COVID impacting staff composition and the empowerment of different employees?
- If people are leaving their jobs or struggling, why? Are certain groups of employees more likely to leave or struggle or be overlooked?
- Are certain groups more likely to advance or advance more quickly within the organization? Who is being left behind and why?
- Do different employees demonstrate preferences for different working models? Why?

- How do hybrid/remote work arrangements empower or disempower staff of different demographics and characteristics?
- Has the organization created psychological safety for employees to voice their opinions and concerns honestly?
- What is enabling or preventing the organization from progressing in its DEI efforts?
- What is enabling or preventing the organization from progressing in its localization efforts?

Organizations can contextualize their findings against existing studies – e.g. the BRIDGE report or the Canopy Lab's Inclusive Leadership Series – to take a temperature of where they are within the industry. They can also participate in the wider community of practice with other IPs who are navigating the same complex challenges unearthed or highlighted by COVID-19.

> *"As leadership, you have to sit down and just shut up and let people speak [about DEI issues]. And it's hard because people are going to feel fear for their jobs. But you have to create this environment where you want to figure out what's going on. And leaders will need to talk to people from a perspective of commitment – that's key. Otherwise, you're going to harm people by making them dredge up all kinds of things, and then do nothing, which happens all the time. I think listening tours are really positive, as are employee poll surveys and satisfaction surveys."*
> *– Senior-level professional, woman, identifies as a racial or ethnic minority*

Go Further: Accountability

As IPs strategize their post-pandemic future of work models, they can hold themselves accountable to their commitments toward a healthier and more inclusive workforce. They can formulate their own principles and values, or they can sign onto existing pledges (e.g. CREED's Racial and Ethnic Equity pledge or InterAction's DEI Compact).

> *"I benefited, where some of the senior executive colleagues were on a board of a company, and they gave it up, and then tapped me for that board seat. I've lived it when the person said, 'I really want to live my values, I really want to live my change. And here's a person who's qualified and just wasn't aware of all the things that were going on.' So they gave up that power and that privilege. For me, that's been a tremendous way to give back to others, and I'm going to do the same."*
> *– IP senior leader, large organization*

Moreover, IPs' principles must be embedded into the organization at all levels. To promote well-being, for example, employers need to enact policies and practices to ensure their workers truly feel off the clock. But more importantly, employers will need to dig deeper and revisit their staffing models to ensure allocated workloads align with standard working hours. IPs will need to reevaluate how many employees are necessary to deliver high-quality work while simultaneously nurturing healthier relationships to their jobs. In practical terms, this may translate to opportunities to attract and invest in additional and/or more local staff to distribute the workload. For USAID, it will require a rethinking of staffing structures within programs and activities and recognizing that lean teams do not necessarily mean better programming.

IPs need to ensure DEI efforts are mainstreamed into organizations starting with inclusive recruitment strategies and including accountability measures such as embedding DEI in performance reviews or succession plans. In addition, IPs need to be intentional about integrating DEI into the organizational culture.

Dig Deeper: Systemic Change

The last two years instigated a sense of urgency for IPs to address and make inroads regarding their employee well-being and DEI efforts. While their reflections, commitments, and actions are laudable, unless IPs take the time to understand *why* such issues are important, well-intentioned strategies can easily miss the mark. For DEI initiatives in particular, IPs run the risk of employing "check box" tactics that can lead to unintended harmful practices like performative allyship and tokenism of underrepresented groups.

Shaping a better development workforce requires a hard examination of the unconscious biases and mental models that permeate our industry, and how these standards are reinforced in our policies, practices, and interactions to marginalize. To this end, we must unpack the deep-rooted dynamics within the development sector and answer uncomfortable questions, such as:

> *"If we don't really understand why we're doing DEI and what it helps us achieve, it's going to be very hard for people who are already stretched, and systems and organizational processes that are stretched, to create that thoughtful space we need to evolve […] We know from our work that change takes decades, and it takes a systems approach. So we owe it to ourselves to apply those very same lenses [from our programming] to this piece of the equation too."*
> *— IP senior leader, large organization*

- What does our overworked culture say about the attributes we prize in our industry? To what extent are those attributes universal?
- Why should we prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion?
- What does a diverse, equitable, and inclusive development workforce look like? Should there be objectives and benchmarks, and can they be standardized?
- What are the underlying power dynamics and cultural norms in our industry that DEI is looking to dismantle?

Answers to these questions will help identify and address the root causes of existing challenges and create the space for addressing them in a holistic and sustained manner. To that end, IPs cannot and must not go it alone. IPs, donors, and other stakeholders are part of an interwoven tapestry and each have roles to play in challenging and correcting some of the long-standing assumptions and inequities in our industry. In particular, donors' (like USAID's) continued awareness, commitment, and expectations around DEI (as evidenced by the appointment of USAID's Chief Diversity Officer and Equity Action Plan) are more important than ever. Through collective action, the international development sector can find a way forward to truly build back better.

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