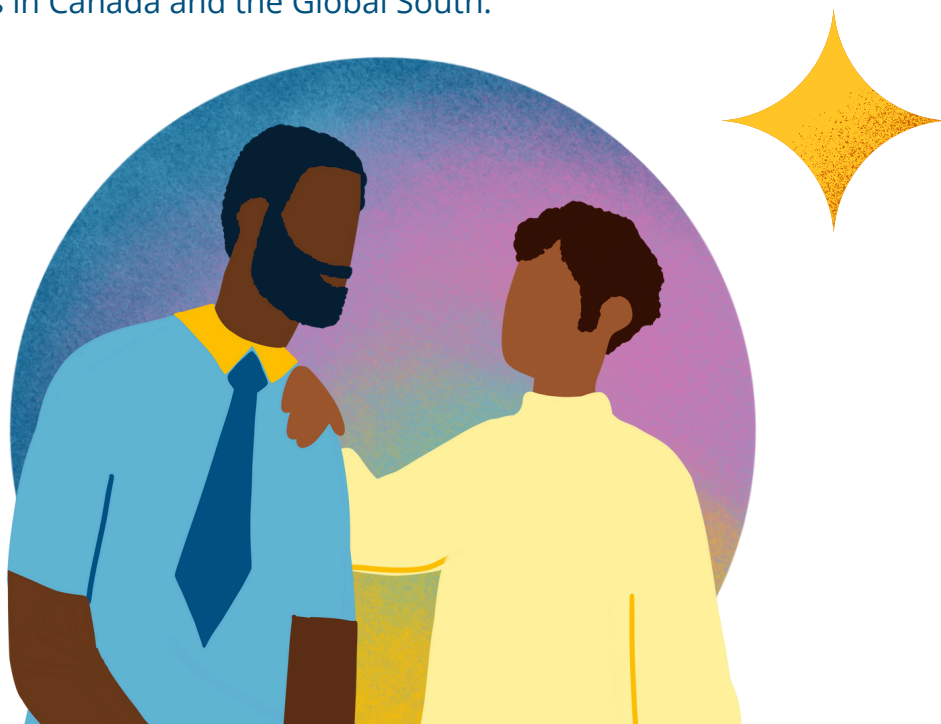


Decolonizing our Partnerships and Practices

The “Decolonizing our Partnerships and Practices” knowledge package was generated from Equitas’ International Learning Event 2024: **“Acknowledging our Past while Embracing our Future,”** which took place from February 12-16, 2024.

Representatives from women’s organizations, human rights groups, leaders tied to Equitas’ community from our Advancing Equality through Human Rights Education (AEHRE) project and other previous and current partners, hailing from fourteen different countries in the world, assembled in Montreal to share good practices and lessons learned relating to advancing gender equality through human rights education. Together, we held in-depth conversations on co-constructing and decolonizing partnerships.

This knowledge package emanates from a synthesis of diverse thoughts and views held by the various individuals and groups present at the event. It incorporates several different recommendations of how we as an international institution of human rights education in the Global North can overcome the challenges of decolonization, which include, but are not limited to, attempting to reclaim what has been lost because of colonization, and undoing the damage done to those brainwashed by colonial teachings. With this knowledge package, we aim to decolonize our learnings as well as create new opportunities to develop knowledge products via co-construction with our partners in Canada and the Global South.



International Learning Event 2024 – Considerations for Equitas programs in 2024-25

Questions to consider when engaging in co-construction with partners		✓
1	<p>How do we envision power dynamics within the partnership?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who holds power and in what areas? • How can we work towards a more equitable power dynamic? • What are we prepared to give up? Where should we allow more space for the partner? • What assumptions are we making about the partner (regarding resources, knowledge, skills and other potential contributions)? • Are we prepared to shift our usual priorities? How so? 	
2	<p>Did we collaboratively create a framework for the start-up phase where Equitas and partner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established shared (HRE) norms/principles/values to underpin the partnership and project? • Recognized each other's perspectives, noting similarities and differences? • Established shared understandings around key approaches/practices and concepts/terminology? • Discussed respective areas of expertise? • Recognized reciprocal learning opportunities? • Identified the common results we want to arrive at; or our common success criteria? • Realistically assessed the time and resources that will be required? 	
3	<p>Did we identify partner needs (and community needs) via a participatory approach?</p>	
4	<p>Did we clearly map out individual and collective roles and responsibilities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did we establish a mechanism for collaboratively reviewing assigned roles & responsibilities? 	
5	<p>Did we establish a process for joint decision-making?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does our decision-making process involve the use of a participatory approach? • How will we ensure that inclusion and respect for diversity are maintained in decision-making spaces? 	
6	<p>Did Equitas and the partner explore opportunities to involve the wider community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were community members given adequate opportunities to shape the project in a way that meets community needs? 	
7	<p>Did Equitas and the partner identify and discuss gaps, potential challenges and risks that may arise throughout the project cycle?</p>	
8	<p>Did we identify potential growth areas for each stakeholder? (e.g. Unlearning opportunities for Equitas; opportunities for the partner to lead in new areas)</p>	
9	<p>Are we fostering adaptability and allowing room for partners to make mistakes? □ Are we sufficiently valuing the process (and not simply the project results)? □ Are we ready to accept that the process may be messy (not linear) and time-consuming?</p>	
10	<p>Do we have a system in place to document the co-construction process, ensuring institutional memory and maximizing learning opportunities?</p>	

Questions to guide community-led monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (CoL MEAL) practices		✓
1	<p>How are we planning to approach monitoring and evaluation during the initial grant-writing phase?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we genuinely respecting the community's interests, or are we mostly focused on securing funding from the donor? • Have we identified potential conflicts of interest that could affect the project's MEAL framework? • How will we avoid engaging in extractive practices? • Are we prepared to work more agilely and within a less rigid framework? Have we reflected on and differentiated between the rigidity we impose on ourselves versus that imposed by the funder? • Are we rethinking traditional approaches to monitoring and evaluation? Are we being creative and innovative by pushing ourselves out of conventional patterns? • How are we planning to foster collaborative ideation to feed into the MEAL process? 	
2	<p>How do we ensure that MEAL efforts align with the needs and rights of the communities involved from the outset?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will we ensure that MEAL aligns with community needs and aspirations? Have we established ethical guidelines for this purpose? • Are we enabling genuine co-construction with our partner and the community, rather than merely adapting MEAL frameworks to fit their needs? • Are we maintaining an open mind rather than adopting a stance as evaluation experts? • How do we plan to share our MEAL roles and responsibilities with both the partner and the community? • Did we consult with the partner on feasible ways to include the community in the MEAL process? • Will the indicators be decided by consensus to ensure that they are not disconnected from reality? Are we certain that indicators are not primarily inspired by our organizational goals? • What steps will we take if our partner and/or community members lack the capacity or readiness for collaboration in MEAL? 	
3	<p>How will we ensure that MEAL efforts are inclusive?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did we integrate a participatory approach throughout MEAL? • Are we using simple language that is accessible to partners and to all community members? • Did we ask ourselves: who should be involved in the discussion? Did we prioritize local expertise and local perspectives? • What methodology did we employ to identify marginalized groups and ensure their inclusion in the MEAL process? • Are MEAL staff involved throughout the project cycle, rather than just as an external party? 	
4	<p>Are MEAL practices transparent and accessible?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did we share the MEAL plan with all stakeholders? • Have we disseminated MEAL activities through a calendar accessible to all stakeholders? • Did we effectively familiarize all stakeholders with the theory of change and logic models using accessible language? • Do we have an open source that allows all stakeholders (including community members) to access the data? • Should we explore alternative methods of engaging and reporting beyond verbal and written communication? • Did we maintain transparency with the partner and with community members throughout the MEAL process? • Will the partner(s) and the community have primary ownership of the results? 	

Questions to guide community-led monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (CoL MEAL) practices		✓
5	<p>How were evaluation tools created?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did we collaborate with local stakeholders to develop and co-construct the evaluation tools? • Do the evaluation tools encourage stakeholder participation? • Have we conducted preliminary testing of the evaluation tools to ensure their appropriateness? 	
6	<p>Did we engage in collaborative data analysis?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What measures are in place to uphold impartiality during data analysis? How did we ensure we avoided making assumptions about outcomes? • Were stakeholders involved in the data analysis process? Did we analyze the data collaboratively? • Did we directly engage with target groups to gather feedback around the outcomes? Were the findings validated by the appropriate stakeholders? 	
7	<p>How were the findings reported?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were negative or undesired outcomes considered? Was further analysis conducted around these? • Are we ready to accept negative/undesired outcomes, to delve deeper into their causes, and to explore them for potential insights or unforeseen opportunities? • Were the findings validated prior to being published or shared with donors? • Were the findings presented in a culturally sensitive and audience-diverse manner? • Were the findings reported in the local language to enable the community to take ownership of the knowledge and insights? • Did evaluations respect the sensitivity of private information by maintaining confidentiality during data gathering and sharing? • At this stage, did we remain genuinely committed to prioritizing the community's interests, or did our efforts shift primarily towards meeting the donor's expectations? 	
8	<p>What impact did the overall MEAL process have on the community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the overall process contribute to fostering agency among partners and community members? • Did a collaborative MEAL process contribute to building solidarity around an issue? • Did the MEAL process extend beyond itself to lay the groundwork for ongoing dialogue and collaboration among participants and organizations? 	

International Learning Event 2024 – Considerations for Equitas programs in 2024-25

Questions to consider as we work towards decolonizing our partnerships		✓
1	<p>Are we imposing our own decolonization agenda on our partner?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we allowing our partner to define decolonization and decolonizing practices, rather than doing this exercise on our own? • Are we imposing decolonization and our understanding of it on our partner? • Does our partner prefer using a term other than decolonization? • Is the partner willing/ready to have this conversation around decolonization? 	
2	<p>Did we take the time to recognize our positionality?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we recognized our privileges? • Are we mindful of historical harm that may be pertinent for us to consider? • Are we falsely assuming that we have ‘a value to add’ to the project/partnership? 	
3	<p>Have we engaged in honest conversation with the partner to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the power dynamics that exist within the partnership? • Ensure they that they feel safe enough to speak up, to voice their fears as well as their needs? • Build a culture of feedback? Do partners feel at ease to voice their dissatisfaction or disagreement? Do they feel comfortable questioning our practices or suggesting other ways of working? • Ensure that they are content with their contributions? Are we engaging in these conversations from the get-go (at the very start of the project/partnership)? 	
4	<p>Are we devoting sufficient time to relationship building?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we committing to reciprocal/equitable dialogue? Are we listening to our partner? • Are we allocating sufficient time to get to know and understand our partner? • Are we approaching the partnership with the utmost humility? 	
5	<p>Have we critically assessed our perception of our partner?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have we examined our biases? Have we assessed whether we harbor prejudices or assumptions vis-à-vis our partner? • Did we ask ourselves: ‘Who is the expert?’ Are we presenting ourselves as the experts or as a conduit for our partner? • Are we adopting an abundance-mindset vis-à-vis our partner, rather than a deficiency approach? Do we perceive the partner solely as a beneficiary, relegating them to a passive role (to whom we may assign tasks); or as deserving of meaningful involvement? • Are we willing to learn from our partner? Can we identify those learning areas? • If appropriate, are we encouraging our partner to be more courageous, to take more space, more leadership? 	

Questions to consider as we work towards decolonizing our partnerships		✓
6	<p>Are we making room for perspectives other than our own (western-centric) perspectives?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we allowing partners to express their interpretation of issues that affect them? • Are indigenous/traditional knowledge and practices being considered/respected? • Are we including perspectives beyond those traditionally represented by white males or beyond those who historically dominated the narrative? • Are we including perspectives, knowledge and practices of traditionally marginalized groups (IBPOC and other ethnic minorities, 2SLGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, newcomers, children and youth, women, the elderly, etc.)? • Are we using a participatory approach throughout the project cycle? • Are we considering values other than our own? • Are we committed to unlearning? What strategies will we employ to accomplish this? 	
7	<p>Are we ensuring that the following criteria do not exclusively dictate whom we partner with?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common language • Familiar ways of working • Issues we are already interested in or have previously engaged with • People and communities we traditionally work with 	
8	<p>Are we mindful of avoiding the perpetuation of other/new forms of colonization?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What mechanisms do we have in place to ensure that - even as an organization that engages in HRE - we are NOT perpetuating unconscious biases, racism, discrimination, inequality? 	
9	<p>Are we using our position of privilege to disrupt colonial legacies and to help create systemic change:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By influencing, challenging, educating donors? • By ensuring that funds are managed in a way that empowers partners; and that supports more equitable partnerships? • By seeking untied and more flexible funding that facilitates deviation from established colonial structures? • By helping partners (who request this type of support) to better navigate colonial structures? • By building a movement focused on decolonization, aiming to dismantle barriers through solidarity? 	
10	<p>Are we effectively serving as allies to support our partner?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we refraining from imposing our expectations on our partner, allowing them the freedom to be themselves? • Are we allowing our partner to make mistakes (the way we're allowed to commit errors ourselves) without penalizing them for this? • Are we actively promoting our partner's agency? Are we aiding in amplifying their voice? • Are we looking to share power? How and why? Are we seeking to transfer certain powers? Which powers and how? • Are we aligning our goals with the partner's context and needs rather than solely focusing on our own requirements? • Who benefits most from the project/partnership? Are we seeking a middle ground that accommodates the context and mitigates the risk of exacerbating imbalances and inequalities? 	

Recommendations for Equitas to Decolonize Practices in HRE

Based on the reflections gathered from the discussion groups on decolonization during Equitas' International Learning Event in February 2024, here are some recommendations for Equitas to decolonize its practices and processes in human rights education:

1 Strengthen Power Sharing in Program Development

Implement a more comprehensive co-construction approach, involving partners from the Global South in the early stages of program development. This approach should extend beyond tools and activities to encompass the entire program design process. This means, among other things, offering the partner from the Global South the opportunity to take the lead when developing some materials. Equitas should ensure that partners from the Global South are included in program development discussions from the concept note stage onwards. This will facilitate co-construction of programs and align them more closely with local needs and contexts.

2 Address Power Imbalances in Funding and Decision-Making

Ensure that management fees and operational costs are discussed transparently and fairly from the outset of partnerships. Create a safe space for partners to express their needs and concerns without fear of repercussions or loss of partnership. Equitas should re-evaluate its approach to calculating management fees for partners, especially when considering instances where partners express difficulty in raising this issue due to power imbalances. Instead of calculating fees as a percentage of total costs, Equitas could explore a more equitable per-item basis calculation, as suggested by partners.

3 Promote Flexibility and Adaptability

Recognize and respect the diverse contexts and needs of partners, particularly those in the Global South. Be open to revising procedures and requirements to better align with local realities and practices. Be in a position to learn about how things are done in their contexts.

4 Facilitate Equitable Partnerships

Foster-trusting relationships with funders to advocate for more flexible and united funding approaches. Challenge the existing system by advocating for decolonized practices and creating a movement around this concept.



Encourage leaders from the Global South to take up more space and responsibility within partnerships. Support capacity-building initiatives to reinforce self-confidence and empower partners to assert their needs and perspectives. Equitas should actively support leadership development initiatives for partners from the Global South. This could include providing training and resources to empower partners to assert their needs and perspectives within partnerships, which will in turn promote more equitable decision-making processes.

6 Embrace Reciprocal Exchanges

Promote reciprocal volunteer programs where individuals from both the Global North and South have opportunities to exchange knowledge and experiences. Prioritizing equitable participation is one way to avoid perpetuating colonial practices.

7 Learn from Global South Pedagogies

Acknowledge and incorporate pedagogical approaches from the Global South into human rights education practices. Foster collaboration between educators from different regions to co-construct inclusive and culturally relevant teaching methodologies.

By implementing these recommendations, Equitas can work towards fostering equitable partnerships, challenge power imbalances and promote decolonizing practices in human rights education. This holistic approach will contribute to creating a more inclusive and effective framework for advancing human rights globally.

