

The Future of Inclusion:

From Strategy to Organisational Practice

This resource was based on a presentation by Ama Afrifa-Tchie, the founder of The Inclusion Agilist (a culture and inclusion consultancy) and the Global Lead for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) at Norwegian Refugee Council, alongside peer exchange among practitioners working across international civil society.



How can organisations develop resilient and future-proof DEI approaches?

What causes DEI fatigue, and how can we combat it?



Ama Afrifa-Tchie

This resource brings together insights from the Shared Ground Collective's Q1 2026 Strategic Session, combining expert input with practitioner reflections and lived experiences shared across organisations, which explored how organisations can move beyond initiative-driven diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts toward structurally embedded inclusive practice. The session and this resource was based on a presentation by Ama Afrifa-Tchie, the founder of The Inclusion Agilist (a culture and inclusion consultancy) and the Global Lead for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) at Norwegian Refugee Council, alongside peer exchange among practitioners working across international civil society.

The Shifting DEI Landscape

Inclusion work is facing significant headwinds, with political and economic pressure leading many organisations to scale down DEI programmes — in parallel with active attacks on the rights of racialised and migrant communities, women, gender-diverse and LGBTQ+ people.

Historically, DEI work in organisations has centred on awareness and training, target-setting, and employee resource groups (ERGs). While these have played an important role, these approaches often fall short when they are not accompanied by structural change and shifts in organisational power and decision-making.

According to Afrifa-Tchie, the key transitions underway include:

From **representation** to genuine **influence**

From **performative** commitments to **structural** change

From **siloed initiatives** to **integration into core operations**

DEI fatigue — widely reported across sectors — is not a sign that inclusion doesn't matter. Rather, it stems from the inherent challenges of meaningfully integrating DEI when it's seen as an add-on instead of included in design from the beginning. When DEI sits apart from organisational strategy, it's easy to deprioritise.

Participants further noted that this fatigue is often experienced most strongly by racialised and gender-marginalised practitioners, particularly when responsibility for inclusion is informally carried by individuals or small teams without corresponding authority, resources or structural support.

***“True inclusion focuses
on participation and power,
not only presence.”***

Organisational Design as the Site of Inclusion

Here are six organisational areas that benefit from an embedded DEI approach:

1. Strategy development
2. Budgeting processes
3. Performance management
4. Innovation processes
5. Leadership development
6. Organisational change initiatives

**Inclusion must be understood as a governance
and design issue — not solely an HR function.**

“Inclusion needs to become a property of the organisation itself, rather than the responsibility of a single department.”

From theory to practice

The recommended approach is to **flip the conversation**: instead of leading with an inclusion agenda, start by asking departments what their priorities are for the year, then explore how inclusion can be embedded within those priorities.

This strategy positions DE&I as supporting existing organisational goals, rather than competing with them — which can be especially effective in contexts where DEI work is being deprioritised.

Tactically, practitioners should:

Choose 1–2 priorities to focus on rather than overwhelming teams with a full list

Build allyship across different organisational levels

Identify informal power holders, not just those in the formal hierarchy

Connect departments to share best practices and break silos

Work with three types of people: champions (already committed), willing learners (open but uninformed), and those who want to help but need guidance

Try a stakeholder mapping exercise to identify decision-makers and influence pathways. Start small, build relationships through genuine curiosity about others' work, and scale from there.

What this looks like in practice: insights from the Collective

Across small group discussions, practitioners shared how inclusion efforts play out in practice within their organisations. These examples highlight both possibilities and structural limitations.

In one organisation, interns collectively organised to advocate for changes to internship conditions, which ultimately led to the development of a stronger internal policy. While effective, this process relied heavily on the labour of those most affected.

→ **Good practice:** Creating formal, accessible feedback and accountability mechanisms can reduce reliance on informal organising and ensure that concerns are addressed without placing the burden on those most impacted.

In municipal consultation processes, separate preparatory spaces were created for community members and institutional actors to build shared understanding before engaging in joint decision-making, helping to address power and knowledge asymmetries.

→ **Good practice:** Investing in pre-engagement and capacity-building can create more equitable conditions for participation and enable more meaningful shared decision-making.

A recurring theme throughout the session was the gap between representation and influence — with diverse staff present in organisations but excluded from decision-making spaces.

→ **Good practice:** Mapping decision-making processes and ensuring diverse participation in key forums can help shift from representation towards meaningful influence.

Conclusion

Rather than treating DEI as a standalone programme, inclusion must become **a structural property of the organisation** — embedded in strategy, budgeting, performance management, leadership development, and change processes.

In a political climate where inclusion is under attack, the most resilient approach is one that makes inclusion inseparable from how the organisation operates — not an initiative that can be easily dismantled.

Prompts for reflection & internal discussion

1. Why does inclusion often remain theoretical?
 2. What prevents inclusion from becoming embedded practice?
 3. Where do inclusion efforts succeed or fail?
 4. Where do you see tensions appearing in your organisation? e.g. leadership conversations, employee perceptions, organisational priorities
 5. Which systems most strongly shape inclusion in your organisation?
 6. Which systems need redesign in your organisation?
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***“An organisation is only
as strong as its most
vulnerable staff members.”***

About the Shared Ground Collective

The Shared Ground Collective, an initiative by FAIR SHARE of Women Leaders, is a protected and cross-organisational space for racialised, gender-marginalised practitioners in the international civil society sector. It comprises monthly Sharing Spaces for reflection, collective processing and somatic practices as well as quarterly Strategic Sessions with input from guest speakers and peer exchange of best practices. Each Strategic Session will be accompanied by a public resource. To learn more or sign up for the Collective, visit our [website](#).

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