

NO 12

July 2024

# Comparing oranges and oranges: working towards diverse, equitable and inclusive knowledge creation in an international Global South organization

THOUGHT  
PIECE

**Key words:**

Diversity

Equity

Inclusive

Human Resource

workplace policy

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**Conflicts of interest:**

There are no conflicts of interest to declare for this study.

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**Comparing oranges and oranges:** working towards diverse, equitable and inclusive knowledge creation in an international Global South organization

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## **Acknowledgement**

Special thanks go to Deqa Aden for developing the GSGS/GSGN/NGN framing;<sup>1</sup> to Adonia Bekele for asking the—seemingly simple, yet profound—question of what constitutes a peer in knowledge creation;<sup>2</sup> and to Michael Onsando for sharing his poem with us and everyone else reading.

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1 See more here (Aden, Ngugi, and Schomerus 2023 ; Aden 2023).

2 See more about that in Box 14: Peer review.



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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

<b>BIPOC</b>	black, indigenous, people of color (used mainly in North America)
<b>D</b>	diversity
<b>E</b>	equity
<b>GN</b>	Global North
<b>GNGN</b>	someone who was brought up and educated in the Global North
<b>GS</b>	Global South
<b>GSGN</b>	someone who was brought up in the Global South, but educated in the Global North
<b>GSGS</b>	someone who was brought up and educated in the Global South
<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>I</b>	inclusion
<b>INGO</b>	international non-governmental organization
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

# Make peace with the paradox

Make peace with the paradox.

Eventually you'll need to slow down to speed up,  
become softer to get harder,  
feel more to think better,  
get stronger to be more kind.

The things you want to move towards  
often involve moving in unexpected directions.  
Stay nimble, stay agile, stay curious  
– become.

*Michael Onsando*



# Introduction: comparing oranges with oranges

In Kenya's shops, cafés, and market stalls, vendors are always busy squeezing fruit to make delicious juice concoctions. When reaching for the fruit to chuck into the juicer, they sometimes grab an orange from the left, sometimes one from the right. It seems to make no difference. And yet, two different bottles are sold: one is labelled 'local orange juice', the other is 'international orange juice'. There is a price difference: international costs more. International also has higher environmental cost, considering the oranges need to make it all the way to Kenya.

The juices tend to taste the same, so it is difficult to know what exactly makes the international oranges better for producing orange juice that is drunk in Kenya.

Putting our heads together to share Busara's thinking about diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), we laughed about the different oranges. The explicit labelling, the difference in price and status—it was such a fitting image to what we were trying to unpack. The international orange as an ingredient for the juice was so valorized. The local orange, creating the same product—orange juice—was less expensive and needed to be distinguished from the international one.



Now, we are trying to mix the oranges, so to say, to create a way of thinking about what it means to be an organization that produces knowledge in the context where it is applied, does so with international and diverse staff, and aims to honor profoundly different perspectives. We are doing all of this amid tremendous and long-overdue changes in how development is talked about: the need to decolonise ideas, research methods, and knowledge hierarchies has moved firmly into the centre of the debate.

Busara—an international research organization headquartered in the Global South—is, or aims to be, an organization that tackles these ambitions and challenges head-on. In doing this work, we also need to find a sustainable, creative, and nourishing way to support diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our organisation beyond having people of sufficiently different categories on the payroll. To figure out how to best do this, we must clarify our beliefs and put them into practice—and also deal with the emotional labor involved in doing both.

A few years ago, the Black Lives Matter movement stretched its influence from the US into our offices in Kenya. As an international organization with headquarters in East Africa, and with staff from all over the world committed to addressing inequalities and inequities, Busara somehow felt connected, but also removed. Beyond expressing generalized support, the organization was unable to spell out how exactly it needed to bring into the open the different types of inequity within our organization. We took social movements from elsewhere to renew our responsibility to clarify how we might intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate inequities, exclusion, and stereotyping.



## Our positionalities

This Groundwork offers a framework to think about these issues, as well as some practical steps. It was written by two people holding senior leadership positions in the organization who also represent two staff archetypes working in applied research in global development: one of us grew up and was educated in the Global South, and the other in the Global North. We tackled this task jointly in the spirit of honesty, creativity and coalition building—since Sengeh reminds us that

*you cannot change systems that are rooted in history and culture by yourself. For radical shifts to occur, you need to identify and mobilize a critical mass of allies. You need as many people and institutions to work and fight beside you as you can find.*<sup>3</sup>

In our long-term conversations that created the framework for our thinking, neither of the two authors glossed over the reality of difficult encounters—it can be culturally really tough to talk to each other, as we highlight in our first box on DEI in practice on this page—while embracing our shared challenge.

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3 (Sengeh 2023, loc192)

### **Box 1: The emotional labour of talking to each other**

The two authors of this Groundwork think of their collaboration as that of a good team: we debate, share, laugh, despair, come up with—and dismiss—ideas. We like talking to and engaging with each other. The team spirit grew even stronger when one of us admitted to the other that—despite the good vibes and professional reward of the interactions—the emotional labour of engaging and debating weighed hard on them. The challenging of ideas (and sometimes the authority that those ideas represent) constitutes mental and emotional labour in a tough, historically-laden and usually unfair area of engagement. Acknowledging that even the most good-willed debate can create mental exhaustion helped both of us understand yet another angle of what it means to come from different cultures and histories.

## Purpose of this Groundwork

This Groundwork seeks to offer reflections to help each person working for Busara understand how the organization thinks about DEI in theory and practice; it also offers insights on how each of us can work towards a more diverse, more equitable, and more inclusive organization. This process requires applying to ourselves the honesty that we champion, but often also struggle



to maintain when we look at ourselves. It means to admit challenges freely, address them without judgement, check whether our beliefs are unclear, acknowledge emotions—and then start again. DEI is circular, non-ending work without clear key performance indicators, but with an emphasis on a process that can expand our beliefs and practice while cushioning or maturing our emotions.

We hope others find this a useful way to think about DEI in knowledge production and global development. This is not the final word on DEI for Busara. It is simply a step to reflect that we—just like many others—recognize that DEI is not an indicator or a finish line: it is a constantly evolving process of refining beliefs, sharpening practice, acknowledging emotion, and continuing to ask questions. Ahmed is right when she says that ‘if diversity is to remain a question, it cannot be solved.’<sup>4</sup> This is because, as Sengeh argues, ‘we must always be working toward a more just society by identifying new areas of exclusion.’<sup>5</sup> There is no finite answer.

Discussions about knowledge creation and diverse perspectives can come across as if comparing apples and oranges: they are often about establishing that one type of knowledge is different from another. Our philosophy starts from the belief that highlighting difference first makes the conversation less open. If we take it as a given that the difference between the oranges is a

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4 (Ahmed 2012, 387)

5 (Sengeh 2023, loc192)

marketing tool to elevate the international juice above the local (creating a sense of difference that maintains a hierarchy), what, then, would that mean for how we think about knowledge creation in applied research in global development?

## Structure

In this Groundwork, we outline our approach and offer insight—in the spirit of transparency and coalition-building—into the challenges we face at Busara and how we have tackled some. We embed the thinking we present here into the history of knowledge creation for global purposes; identify the three pillars we use to guide our analytical and practical processes; and along the way share some snippets on everyday practices and learning.



# What is Busara’s philosophy of DEI for a knowledge-creating organization?

A sign in the Harvard Museum of Natural History, quoting biologist Edward O. Wilson, provides a beautiful explanation of why diversity is needed for the earth’s organisms. Wilson describes biodiversity as ‘a shield protecting each of the species that together compose it, ourselves included.’ Only such mutual protection (of ourselves, of us protecting others) allows our existence to be resilient. Only recognizing the communal need for difference allows us to be the diverse individuals we all are. This is not a fluffy declaration of team building. It is a professional commitment.

Busara as a research and advisory organization based and working in the Global South aims to produce context-relevant knowledge that allows for improved operational decisions of those implementing programmes and policies, and to make a—however small—contribution towards a world that is more equitable for the people in it. This also means that we aim to contribute to a future in which global human development activities

- respond to people’s lived experience;
- value knowledge generated in the context in which it is applied;
- promote culturally-appropriate and inclusive practices.

None of these aims are possible without acknowledging that to understand many versions of lived experience, diverse types of knowledge and supporting inclusive practices are necessary. This is true for Busara organisationally, as much as it is for those delivering behavioral approaches to global human development who need knowledge created in the context in which it is applied. To accomplish this, we practice and promote behavioral science that centers and values the perspectives of respondents; expands the practice of research where it is applied; and that builds networks, processes, and tools that grow the competence of practitioners and researchers.

Busara's philosophy of DEI rests in the understanding of who the organization is and wants to be. We also querying how our work needs to express our values and the many areas of power, difference, and community that we continuously navigate. As such, we think we have a unique role to play in this, due to the vast diversity of backgrounds that our staff has.

### **But what does DEI mean to Busara?**

Definitions are both necessary and a burden: they highlight a lack of clarity, and they can become part of a performance, as Ahmed argues, in which words get used to express a commitment without necessarily filling it with consistent meaning. To avoid this, we again take our cue from Ahmed, who—in recounting her experience of writing an institutional policy on diversity—sought to employ the word 'diversity' near the other terms that expressed the challenge it sought to address (“equality,” “whiteness,” and “racism.”)<sup>8</sup>.

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8 (Ahmed 2012, 81)



This allowed, she argued, that

*the conversation did not lead us to adopt an official definition of any of these words. What mattered was the creation of a space in which we could talk about the words themselves. The words became lines of connection between those of us who had been given the responsibility of translation.*<sup>9</sup>

In the spirit of seeking such connection, but also allowing some translation, Busara operates with a number of definitions that are designed to be living documents and underpinned by evolving thinking, rather than set in stone by word choices. Our commitment to DEI is also expressed through our organizational values.

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9 (Ahmed 2012, 81)



## Box 2: Busara's organizational values

**Act with curiosity:** We want to learn. We want to never stop asking the difficult questions in our work. We want to meet each other with openness and interest.

**Act with respect:** We want our work to be thoughtful and of high quality. We want to fulfill the need that we originally identified in pursuing a piece of work. We are careful about the complex issues we tackle, and mindful of the huge impact they have on people's lives.

**Act together:** We are collaborators, seeking to actively share knowledge and perspectives. We seek to communicate and contribute to achieving our shared purpose.

**Act with purpose:** We want to keep a clear line of sight of why we do what we do. We want to take responsible ownership of our work, and be held accountable to the standards we set for ourselves.

## Diversity

We define diversity, quite simply, as a descriptor of all ways in which people differ. However, simply looking at such descriptors through the obvious categories of identity can continue to perpetuate damaging patterns of the past, when categorization of people was used to control and judge.



Categorisation today continues to obscure systemic discrimination.<sup>10</sup> Often, the term diversity has become shorthand for quotas that make sure that crude identity categories are represented. We aim to go further to understand diversity in the way that Yunkaporta describes it:

*Diversity is not about tolerating difference or treating others equally and without prejudice. The diversification principle compels you to maintain your individual difference, particularly from other agents who are similar to you. This prevents you from clustering into narcissistic flash mobs. You must also seek out and interact with a wide variety of completely dissimilar agents. Finally, you must interact with other systems beyond your own, keeping your system open and therefore sustainable. Connectedness balances the excesses of individualism in the diversity principle.<sup>11</sup>*

Diversity is thus a way to be oneself without the need to align yourself with those seemingly in your category, without the need to be alone in who you are, and to be open about connecting with others who seemingly have no overlap with you.

## Equity

For our organization, equity means facilitating fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people. In short, equity means that one's

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<sup>10</sup> (Castillo 2023); (Schomerus 2023);(Smith 1999)

<sup>11</sup> (Yunkaporta 2019, 99-100)

identity cannot predict the outcome of one's pursuits. But for us, equity is also a little stealth and can happen through subtle adjustments in policies—which can be emotionally demanding (more on that later).

Equity is not a cuddly nice to have: it is an investment that creates value for the organization. Employee well-being and growth (through equitable access to opportunities) allows us to be more sustainable, stable, resilient—and just better at what we do.

## Inclusion

Mechanisms of exclusion can be overt or subtle—based on biases (some of which we ourselves have researched).

Name bias—where racist judgments of non-Western names create a distinct disadvantage when applying for a job—continues to be very real.<sup>12</sup> The established 'tall poppy syndrome'—a way to cut back on people who are seen as too successful or as too vocal about their own achievements—is something that particularly women tend to experience.<sup>13</sup> Gender stereotypes are prominent and can become particularly toxic when mixed with other mechanisms of exclusion, such as ageism.<sup>14</sup> Different educational profiles can often be assessed, subtly or not so subtly, maintaining a hierarchy.

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12 (Kline, Rose, and Walters 2022)

13 (Billan 2023)

14 (Chatman et al. 2022)



### **Box 3: Work/life balance**

The notion of work/life balance is very difficult to translate across cultures. For many Europeans and North Americans, leisure time becomes such through being able to disconnect. Withdrawal from social obligations is a concept that is much harder to imagine, for example, Kenyans: the notion that there is room and space to drop all contact with family and friends seems alien. The ability to entirely disconnect can come across as a privilege to those who are culturally not given that space.

For us, inclusion means that a variety of people have power, a voice, and decision-making authority. Inclusion is also something where we recognize both the performative aspect as well as the ability to obscure. People who call for inclusion are often met with eye-rolling or placating responses, so we are actively trying to find ways to counter this.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See for example (Ahmed 2012)

# DEI and knowledge creation in global development: paradoxically estranged

In the field in which Busara works—on the intersection of behavioural science, interdisciplinary research, programme implementation, and global development—DEI is a hotly-debated topic. Philosophies of fairness and equity (or diversity, possibly a less threatening term) are part of many organizations' public image.

This is encouraging, but also highlights the *raison d'être* for Busara more generally: we exist to support filling the huge data gap that exists when it comes to understanding human behavior. This data gap, described by numerous scholars, is profound. Most research conducted to understand psychologies and human decision-making is conducted amongst populations that represent a small, very specific percentage of the world's population—the populations that Henrich et al. have so memorably termed the WEIRD populations, meaning people who come from societies that are Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> (Henrich 2020; Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010) While the acronym must rank as one of social science's most memorable ones, Henrich et al. are also very quick to highlight that this term always needs nuancing.



But DEI is not just necessary to succeed in our knowledge-creation aims: it is crucial more broadly to improve working relationships in any organization and for better pursuit of global equity that addresses injustices of the past. There are countless examples of how inequity in global knowledge creation continues to show itself. Here are some:

- In 2008, Arnett argued to great acclaim that the most prominent psychology journals seeking to offer the latest science on understanding humans drew more than 70% of its research samples and authors from the United States (which at the time made up 5% of the world's population).<sup>17</sup> Psychology today is still exclusive: a follow-up analysis from 2014 - 2018 showed that while the percentage of US-American authors and samples had decreased to 60%, this was mainly to the benefit of European samples and authors, leaving 89% of the global population unrepresented in the study of their psychology, with less than '1% or less of samples' came from Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, or Israel'.<sup>18</sup>
- At the time of writing (April 2024), only 1% of authors in top psychology journals were from Latin America or Africa,<sup>19</sup> even

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17 (Arnett 2008)

18 (Thalmayer, Toscanelli, and Arnett 2021, 14)

19 This is drawn from the Busara-sponsored 'The Missing Majority Dashboard', which tracks authorship in six top psychology journals (Developmental Psychology, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Abnormal Psychology, Journal of Family Psychology, Health Psychology, and Journal of Educational Psychology) since 1987. In the future, the hope is to expand the dashboard to more disciplines and journals. (Thériault and Forscher 2024)

though the two continents represent roughly 27% of the global population.<sup>20</sup> Only 3% of members of editorial boards of academic economics journals that had at least 30% of their articles on Africa were based on the African continent; 25% of academic articles in economics focusing on Africa had at least one Africa-based author between 2005 - 2015.<sup>21</sup>

- Chelwa argues that economics knowledge on Africa is 'dismal' due to the underrepresentation of African scholars;<sup>22</sup> Jerven and Johnstone have highlighted how the data gap on African economies continues to skew policies inappropriately.<sup>23</sup> Lyall has shown that a broader dataset on wars (that includes diverse data from non-European places) would inevitably create an entirely different historical understanding of patterns of warfare.<sup>24</sup>
- Many aims are now global—such as achieving global health—but continue to be underpinned by what Manan et al. call 'historical power', that manifests itself in, for example, the fact that 73% of global health organizations are headquartered in only three countries in the Global North.<sup>25</sup>

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20 (Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (INED) October 2022). (Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (INED) October 2022)

21 (Chelwa 2021). (Chelwa 2021)

22 (Chelwa 2021, 78)

23 (Jerven and Johnstone 2015)

24 (Lyall 2020)

25 (Manan et al. 2023)



- In international funding mechanisms in the development space, we experience that as an African-headquartered international organization, Busara is at times not considered international, but regional, rendering us ineligible for certain funding mechanisms.

## The impact of the data gap

If knowledge does not reflect the reality of the world, then trying to change the reality of that world that created the knowledge imbalance in the first place is a tall order.<sup>26</sup> This further matters because there is a gaping knowledge hole in the understanding of what humans all over the world are like. The lack of knowledge can lead to stereotyping, which then in turn creates judgements. This is important in big ways in the world and in small ways in running a diverse organization: such stereotypes can have real-world influence on how in the workplace people's performance is reviewed and how they advance.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This line of argument is inspired by (Táíwò 2022, 104)

<sup>27</sup> (Chatman et al. 2022)



#### **Box 4: Equitable promotions processes**

Busara used to have a promotions policy that inadvertently supported inequity: a promotion used to require nomination by a line manager, meaning that the person seeking to be promoted needed to have the right connections and be confident in signalling their ambitions to their manager. Both require certain character traits, and not everyone is culturally inclined to be a vocal advocate of themselves—which is why a known DEI recommendation is to get rid of self-assessments (Bohnet 2018). In addition, people from Global North cultures tend to find waiting for a promotion extremely difficult—hence they are likely to be more pushy. Non-Europeans often live lives in which waiting is common; being used to this plays out in not necessarily pursuing career growth. If an organization does not have these patterns in its sight it can quickly mean that promotions favour one group of people—that then rises through the ranks much more quickly.

To make promotions more equitable, Busara switched from a nomination process to an application process. The results were swiftly felt—people from less-visible teams were promoted more regularly and the criteria what warranted promotion were more openly discussed. Internally, this change was simply framed as an improvement, without the baggage that the vocabulary of equity can sometimes carry.



This data gap and its influence on knowledge and policy is not just true when it comes to understanding psychological mechanisms, economics or human conflict. Most of the literature dealing with questions of DEI in the workplace is also rooted in the so-called WEIRD contexts. It is common to see an organization seeking to implement policies that allow for more diverse workforces within their context, as it expresses their broader mission (such as Global North universities who want to be seen as global universities).<sup>28</sup> However, getting DEI programs to be effective in the spheres of Western/ Global North corporations has been challenging.<sup>29</sup> The knowledge of what might work in those contexts is only being shaped right now; how similar thinking might apply and be challenged in a non-Western/ Global South context is only just starting to form.

An international Global South organization with an African headquarter seeking to clarify its approach to DEI for human resource (HR) decision-making thus has to figure out which starting point to use when there is only Global North literature on DEI and HR. The operational literature on this can be quite reductive, projecting a notion of inclusion that is based on crude identity categories—Hire more women! Hire more people of color!—rather than on categories that determine how people in an organization interact with each other and understand what they bring to it.<sup>30</sup> Starting points matter more than identity markers with which a person was born;<sup>31</sup> in fact, taking such categories for granted can often obscure broader systemic inequities and racism, as Castillo and Gillborn argue.<sup>32</sup>

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28 (Ahmed 2012)

29 (Dobbin and Alexandra 2022)

30 (Aden, Ngugi, and Schomerus 2023)

31 (Shipow and Singh 2020)

32 (Castillo 2023)

### **Box 5: Language part 1 - categories**

Thoughtless or demeaning communication is very common in the global development sector, which often still operates with language patterns that implicitly create categories of people. There is the tired vocabulary that, for example, describes someone who moves from the Global North to the Global South for a job as an expat, but that would call someone moving the opposite direction—or even from one country in Africa to another—an economic migrant. There is the hierarchical difference that is established, ever so subtly but noticeable to all, by referring to someone as international, national or local staff. Phasing out such language is a long-term project, but crucial to DEI work. As Sengeh reminds us: ‘You cannot promote an agenda of inclusion if you do not identify, name, and recognize all the ways in which people are excluded, as well as the associated impacts and costs of that exclusion. You must define your terms precisely if you are to see the opportunities that exist for solving the problem.’ (Sengeh 2023, loc192) Unless we capture with that precision also the challenging emotional impact of recognising and acknowledging privilege based on race, we continue to perpetuate an environment of racist structures (Diangelo 2018). We no longer use the word expat and distinguish simply between national and non-national staff.



## The roots of research in the Global South

The history of many research methods is deeply racist in both overt ways in seeking to use race as an essentialist classifier as well as in more subtle deployment of research methods.<sup>33</sup> When trying to understand identity in the Global South—and particularly in the context of conducting research for global development—it is necessary to be aware of how identity has been a tool to control, suppress, and exploit populations. In the past, research rooted in colonial traditions was pursued to establish what could be considered the exact opposite of DEI. It was more like a pursuit of HIE—homogeneity, inequity and exclusion. Tuhiwai Smith reminds us of the oppressive power of categorizing people, of making differences between people unseen so that they could be controlled and governed, and of how research findings were used to maintain superiority.<sup>34</sup>

These mechanisms have not yet entirely disappeared because power does not just disappear. Power is expressed through establishing knowledge hierarchies, resource flows and—to some extent—power continues to seek homogenization. As such, the ideas of including those who have long been excluded can be and are usurped by those that the same process seeks to challenge. Yunkaporta offers a beautiful description of how power plays out even when the very ideas on the table are supposed to challenge that power:

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33 (Walter and Andersen 2016; Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008; Winston 2004)

34 (Smith 1999)

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*In the same way that plants can be tweaked at the genetic level to become the intellectual property of one company and then replace all similar crops in a region, ideas can be re-engineered to serve the interests of the powerful. It's not a conspiracy; it's just power doing what power does.<sup>35</sup>*

Ahmed argues along a similar line that 'power can be redone at the moment it is imagined as undone.'<sup>36</sup> This happens, for example, by reasserting the social capital that Bourdieu has identified, which elites can use to maintain distinction from others through their tools of power.<sup>37</sup> It is the opposite mechanism to the one Yunkaporta suggests, which is to understand 'your own culture and the way it interacts with others, particularly the power dynamics of it.'<sup>38</sup>

Power is a particularly important thing to consider when working in behavioral science and experimentation, as Fejerskov reminds us:

*The contemporary experimental movement does not form open-ended or collaborative learning processes characterized by an inclusion and diversity of voices. Rather, it often seems aligned with the interests of the already powerful, bounded in terms of who can and may speak.<sup>39</sup>*

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35 (Yunkaporta 2019, 74)

36 (Ahmed 2012, loc345)

37 (Khan 2011, 48)

38 (Yunkaporta 2019, 97-98)

39 (Fejerskov 2022, 181)



Power is also invisible. How is it expressed for us in our work with each other? One way to think about power is that it means to assume to have the right to speak, act, decide, direct, claim, determine, and judge. Changing power and its dynamics is an incredibly tough thing to do because, in global development and research, it can also be subtle. Power can be exercised through the formulation of key performance indicators, decisions made, and valorizing certain types of knowledge (or oranges—remember?). It is not surprising that BOND, the UK network of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), in its guide to localization as an anti-racism practice, highlights the steps as ‘redefine success, inclusive decision making, shift access and power, redefine expertise’.<sup>40</sup>

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40 (Bond not dated)

### **Box 6: Implicit expectations**

Office environments are always a place for observing each other: who is the person who always leads in conversations? Who is the most popular? Who is the most connected? Who seems on top of their work and competent? Who seems to struggle? Who notices who works late and who leaves early? The last question is not an innocent one: it can create discord in teams. In multicultural teams, the question is more profound than simply who leaves at what time: family obligations, amount of support that for example women get when it comes to care of children or elderly parents (who might live without access to services in remote rural communities) can add up very differently for people from different cultural backgrounds. How to acknowledge this while also rewarding performance and commitment to work in equitable ways is an ongoing challenge.



# Why DEI matters for our research work

We continuously learn through our work how difficult it is to be part of the crucial debates, to be listened to, and to challenge power by offering alternative viewpoints. We also learn from Táíwò that simply being in the room when such debates happen does not actually mean inclusion and equity.<sup>41</sup> The path to the room is full of structural obstacles that we observe, even in something seemingly as simple as getting research respondents to participate in our research projects. People whose identity poses a risk when it is articulated (such as LGBTQI+) or who live removed from infrastructure that allows reaching them are easily overlooked even in research projects designed to be inclusive so that, argue Shipow and Singh, ‘researchers perpetuate a vicious cycle whereby findings preclude—or may not apply to—the people with both the greatest needs and the most apt insights.’<sup>42</sup> Even paying people to attend a research session does not go far enough; certainly just getting someone in the room does not mean that their knowledge is heard.

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41 (Táíwò not dated)

42 (Shipow and Singh 2020)



**Box 7: Age - the diversity category that affects every one**

Busara is a young organization, which can mean that those who do not feel part of that category can feel excluded. Ageism is a particularly interesting DEI concern as it happens regardless of race, gender, or ethnicity and can go in both directions: those that are older than the average can feel disregarded; those that are younger can feel like their young age is holding them back. One way to deal with ageism in both directions as a DEI concern is to have very clear promotions guidelines that allow acknowledgement of experience and leadership as well as set clear guidance on what level of skills is required to advance to the next step.

If we miss out on those people who struggle to share their insights due to structural barriers, we miss out on hearing their voices, their way of speaking, and their worlds. Criado Perez has impressively documented what this means when it comes to excluding women from the data: 'Failing to collect data on women and their lives means that we continue to naturalize sex and gender discrimination—while at the same time somehow not seeing any of this discrimination.'<sup>43</sup> These mechanisms also extend to other kinds of discrimination.

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43 (Criado Perez 2019, loc5,286)



Not making discrimination and exclusion visible can sometimes be done by design: research can be commissioned to determine the most common denominator rather than the biggest difference. In those situations—while rarely explicitly stated—the nuance of difference is an irritant rather than of interest. As a knowledge-creating organisation, this is a concern for Busara because it is our duty, in the words of Yunkaporta, to ‘allow yourself to be transformed through your interactions with other agents and the knowledge that passes through you from them.’<sup>44</sup> Without explicitly cherishing diversity or by continuing to valorize one difference over the other, we fail to learn as much as we can.

Yet not quite allowing other types of knowledge and insight to pass through us meaningfully is not alien to us when it comes to how we conduct ourselves in our daily work. In the heat of the moment of fundraising, project deadlines or employment policies, it is easy to try and minimize diversity rather than elevate it. While diversity is rewarding, protecting, and nurturing of each other, it is also costly and threatening.

As individuals in an organization, we are all attuned to delivering knowledge that looks a certain way: it is written and usually offered with infographics for easy comprehension for those who know how to read infographics. It might offer statistics. To deviate from this to offer different ways of presenting knowledge usually requires more negotiations, more time spent on familiarising your audience with the work, and more adjustments.

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44 (Yunkaporta 2019, 99-100)

Recognizing diversity allows us to do our work with greater specificity. This specificity can form the backbone of ethical research because detailed knowledge of each other also allows for a better articulation of ethical behavior and of, as Táíwò argues, ‘building and rebuilding actual structures of social connection and movement, rather than mere critique of the ones we already have.’<sup>45</sup> Only by being specific about each other’s values, understanding how people live and experience them, and articulating what social structures make a person feel included or excluded will we be able to fulfil our organizational mission and live our values.

Recent years have seen heated debates on what constitutes credible knowledge or evidence for policy making. However, the emphasis on rigorous evidence through experimental research designs (which forms part—but not the entirety—of Busara’s work) also has created situations in which power relationships that homogenize and exclude populations are replicated. Fejerskov argues that

*experiments may change the life-courses of people, both for the better and the worse, and equally for those directly or indirectly involved. Historically, the real-world environments or labs of experimentation have inherently been unequal and coercive ones, conducive to identifying, recruiting, and exploiting human subjects.*<sup>46</sup>

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45 (Táíwò not dated)

46 (Fejerskov 2022, 12 and 184)



Even today 'experimentation as we have seen it practiced then doesn't so much seem to inspire emancipation as uphold unequal relations of power and resources.<sup>47</sup>

Our effort to make ourselves an organization that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive is also underpinned by the hope that HR efforts can translate into different approaches in research work. This would allow for various kinds of knowledge to emerge and be publicized and for rigor to be defined in ways that are appropriate for the contexts in which we work. This could become part of the 'fundamental rebalancing of the global science and research ecosystem' for which the 2023 *Africa Charter for Transformative Research Collaborations* calls.<sup>48</sup>

We expect this to have a knock-on effect on the quality of our work: Sengeh reminds us that 'research from the world of business and management shows that teams perform much better when they are diverse, and not just in gender, race, language, and all the other crucial aspects of identity that so often divide us, but in opinions and life philosophies.'<sup>49</sup> It means not just doing better work, but having better experiences while doing it.

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47 (Fejerskov 2022, 12 and 184)

48 (Perivoli Africa Research Centre (PARC) et al. 2023, 2)

49 (Sengeh 2023, loc142)

## What are our DEI goals?

Our goals are to increase the diversity of staff (based on identity, background, education, demographics, discipline, thinking, and perspective) to build an inclusive workplace that invites collaboration on equal terms, creates a better experience and thus creates incentives for people to dedicate their professional lives to Busara. The organization's aim also covers the need to be accountable to each other to support us in our differences.

DEI is crucial for the sustainability of Busara as a business, as it creates a welcoming workplace that allows staff to thrive, grow and remain content in their employment at Busara. A diverse workforce continues to use its learning to continuously benefit the organisation, and can be more deeply linked with the communities with whom our researchers create knowledge or the communities to which they disseminate knowledge. Part of this sustainability is also that the voice of researchers working at Busara is heard and acknowledged.

### **Goals for knowledge creation**

In the process of knowledge creation, a DEI philosophy helps us to take learning from research projects to also learn to talk about difficult issues. This seems more obvious than it is. Even though a research organization wants to create knowledge, sometimes, in the world of research for global development, research is designed as exclusive: not every organization that conducts research wants to publicly speak about their findings. Sometimes,



data and insights are not shared (due to contractual agreements or because a researcher simply runs out of steam in also producing a public-facing output). This reduces the insights into diverse experiences that research has uncovered. The organization is slowly and steadily working towards sharing insights in more committed ways to acknowledge the contribution of respondents and to strengthen the voices of researchers at Busara.

## Goals for hiring

The organization's personnel goals are more ambitious than offering a diversity policy document. We see this process of thinking through DEI as crucial in helping everyone in the organization understand what it means to be an international Global South organization during a time of much change, much debate and realization of how unfairness and inequality of the past need to be addressed today. This is a moment of much reorientation in what it means to work in global development. Busara's version of localization means to be embedded in the values of the people who work at Busara. For example, broadly for the African context, this includes taking into account what people from different backgrounds consider beneficial to society,<sup>50</sup> what they expect of each other, and how their communities shape the way they make decisions.<sup>51</sup> However, this example also points to a fundamental need for us to keep revisiting and refining what we mean by understanding a context—or what even is described when we use the word context. Context—and knowledge about a context—is in itself a multidimensional, complicated and dynamic idea.

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50 (Gyekye 2011)

51 (Kombo 2023)

### **Box 8: Gifts**

Gifts and giving are an essential part of Kenyan culture. Particularly in moments of distress, the community will collect money to cover funeral costs or other unexpected expenses. For non-Kenyans, being asked to contribute to the funeral of a colleague's uncle can be an awkward moment, requiring some engagement with one's role in a place that is not one's home country. Some of the perks that are considered par for the course of office life for non-Kenyans (such as having an office Christmas party or lavish food offerings at social events) can be difficult to enjoy for Kenyans, who might be more acutely aware that their families are not benefitting from these things—and who might prefer a bonus payment for Christmas that they can spend on their families, rather than a party at the office.

The process requires us to relinquish control—counterintuitively in parallel with setting out some parameters on DEI thinking. As Yunkaporta argues, top-down practices are disrupted when new self-organizing ecosystems are allowed to develop

*and the patterns and innovations emerging from these ecosystems of practice are startling, transformative and cannot be designed or maintained by a single manager or external authority. They cannot even be imagined outside of a community operating this way. This is the perspective you need to be a custodian rather than an owner*



*of lands, communities, or knowledge. It demands the relinquishing of artificial power and control and immersion in the astounding patterns of creation that only emerge through the free movement of all agents and elements within a system. This impacts the way we are managed and governed.<sup>52</sup>*

If we fail to approach the questions this Groundwork poses comprehensively, and with a sense of relinquishing control, we are missing out in numerous ways. For example, we would fail to create the learning impact we want by not always talking openly. We would curtail our own opportunity to talk to diverse audiences and engage with communities that might be radically different from each other and from us. We would not allow new equitable practices of inclusion to develop. It is Busara's goal to make sure that these negative scenarios do not happen.

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52 (Yunkaporta 2019, 93-94)



### **Box 9: GSGS/GSGN/GNGN**

Hiring is particularly tricky in a Global South organization working in an international system that sets strong rules for what it means to function well in this system. Aden developed the idea that Busara needs to look not just at someone's passport, but also their educational profile for diversity (Aden 2023). People who have gone through an educational system that trains them in processing and using information in a way that conforms to North American or European standards tend to settle into their global jobs much more quickly. This can be even more so if that person is from a Global North background, as well as having enjoyed an education in the Global North (what Aden calls GNGN). However, GNGN are unlikely to ever attain the level of deep local knowledge that comes with having grown up and been educated in the Global South (what Aden calls GSGS). GSGS are the people who give Busara precious insights, but they are more challenged by the ways of talking and acting of the Global North. Then there is GSGN: those brought up in the Global South, but educated in the Global North. Global development loves GSGN people because they can speak international jargon and still bring local credibility—they are, in a sense, what Ahmed describes as those who 'are welcomed on condition they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture, or by "being" diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their



diversity' (Ahmed 2012, loc788). This comes at a price for GSGN, who often are assumed to act as a translator for the international world while also carrying a heavy burden of expectation from their communities. They easily become symbolic of inclusion, despite often representing the upper echelons of society in their home countries. Táíwò gives a vivid description of this challenge (Táíwò not dated).

## How do we define our work culture with a DEI perspective?

Like many organizations with a social calling at heart, but working on capitalist business models, we can be torn.<sup>53</sup> Solid finances will underpin the success of our organization. Nonetheless, we have to champion that, within this business model, people from different backgrounds can thrive and find an own way of working while being supported by the organization. Unless we recognize that our business model and social purpose can be in tension with each other—and directly address this tension by emphasizing DEI—we will inadvertently sabotage our mission by hiring so selectively within a narrow set of parameters of people who represent the ability to function swiftly and with minimal adjustment in the business model.

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53 (Goh 2017)

But the tensions are real: we operate in a very high-pressure environment where funding is increasingly tough to secure. There is a strong push towards localization (which we interpret to mean that setting the research agenda, holding the prime responsibility, and delivering context-sensitive work), evident, for example, in the aim of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to ‘create space for local actors to exercise leadership over priority setting, activity design, implementation, and defining and measuring results’ in at least half of its programs by 2030.<sup>54</sup>

Creating space is an ambiguous goal that is more widely plagued by implementation challenges. The reality of shifting power is that there is still a long way to go. In the global development sector, changing how organizations work, are funded, and can make decisions is still curtailed by practice, as Bond argues—even though a localization approach is also a way to address racism and other prejudices.<sup>55</sup> How non-localized practices are expressed are multifold: preferring certain educational profiles<sup>56</sup> or championing the use of particular jargon are just two examples.<sup>57</sup> It turns out that even receiving the localized funding comes with challenges for the targeted local organizations, who might struggle with government regulations that curtail the ability to receive funds, whose compliance needs set up contradictory scenarios, or who need to have tough conversations because, as Bastian et al. write about

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54 (United States Agency for International Development 2023, 1)

55 (Bond 2022; Peace Direct 2021)

56 (Aden, Ngugi, and Schomerus 2023)

57 (Errington-Barnes 2021)



Busara's experiences, 'localization is often implicitly expected to make things cheaper.'<sup>58</sup>

And a localization discourse does—as yet—little to change practices and challenge knowledge hierarchies. It can perpetuate them through an arm's length imposing of standards that were created in a different context and that reward local organizations that offer what Khan calls 'culture as a resource' where individuals can '(inter)act in ways that mark belonging'—in other words, a local organization that can speak the jargon and offer the demeanor with which an international funder is familiar.<sup>59</sup>

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58 (Bastian, Schomerus, and Mburu 2024, 31)

59 (Khan 2011, 124)

### **Box 10: Language part 2 - the power of speech**

We have lost count of how many languages are spoken by Busara staff—at least 50 (but that is probably a conservative estimate). These languages can be different natural languages (at any given time you might be able to hear at least six different languages in the office in Kenya). They can also be different types of jargon, as different technical expertise develops. Or they can be different versions of either, which is where it becomes apparent that different types of speech are being valued differently: certain types of speaking resonate more with leadership, with certain educational backgrounds and so forth. Those who are not as fluent in the type of speech used in a particular setting have, as Táíwò reminds us, ‘real, morally weighty experiences of being put down, ignored, sidelined, or silenced.’ (Táíwò not dated). Speech is a highly emotional subject: it expresses who we are, what we value, how we relate to our world. Being aware of the power of one’s speech can be also very discouraging if it is not the speech that seems to guarantee visibility and being listened to.



Within Busara, finding ways to function with these tensions as well as seeking to change them creates parallel work cultures that, at various times, can be champions or hinderers of DEI efforts. On one hand, for organization building, we seek to work in thoughtful, predictable, slow-and-steady ways. On the other hand, for organizational survival, we have to work in intense spurts, under tremendous deadline pressures and to tight budgets, with partners and funders who are often struggling to clearly articulate their needs. It can be thrilling and it can be exhausting—and it can be at the expense of including people from different backgrounds, with different ways of working.

These different ways of working, the need for the sometimes high-octane push towards achieving what we set out to do, is part of what we do. But it also means we can lose sight of the people in it. Part of our work culture thus has to be that we understand the need for people to feel taken care of, to have the space to take care of themselves, and to make sure that there is always room to learn. That is the work culture we aim for and we think that DEI is our tool to use to make it happen and to hold us accountable when things get tough.

### **Box 11: Tara Mistari and learning**

Knowledge exchange in the world of global development follows established patterns: there are reports, conferences, presentations. These can be very exclusive if you are not sure how to navigate a conference or a presentation in front of senior decision makers. It is part of privilege to be taught—through the institutions of higher education or exposure to power—how to, as Khan calls it, ‘negotiate these hierarchies. This negotiation is an interactive and corporeal skill—what Pierre Bourdieu calls habitus.’ (Khan 2011, 54) To bring Bourdieu into our lives, we instituted Tara Mistari, Busara’s annual research festival that seeks to build unexpected intellectual connections while practicing our habitus of knowledge exchange. More on Tara Mistari and our efforts to become a learning organization can be found in our 2024 Yearbook Tafakari (Schomerus 2024).



# The three pillars: belief, practice, emotion

There are three distinct stages in how we aim to articulate, exercise, and protect our approach to DEI. These three pillars—belief, practice, and emotion—are deeply connected: advancement or growth in one area will lead to a spike in activity in the other. They can cross-pollinate, but also obstruct each other; spelling this out is part of honesty, of meeting challenges with creativity, and of taking steps on the path towards acknowledging reality without judgement.<sup>60</sup>

- **Belief:** Belief is expressed through our principles, which can include aiming to act in the interest of the people in our community, and having a deep commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Practice:** Practice is how we make our beliefs come alive. This can be through policies, norms, our research methods, and client approaches. The practices we adopt determine whether we walk the talk.
- **Emotion:** DEI is about people and people are emotional beings. How we feel (positive or negative) about diversity, equity, and inclusion can significantly affect our behaviors and decisions.

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<sup>60</sup> A summary of this approach is (Ngugi and Schomerus 2023)



**Comparing oranges and oranges:** working towards diverse, equitable and inclusive knowledge creation in an international Global South organization

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To allow ourselves the utmost creativity and honesty, we are overlaying our three pillars of belief, practice, and emotion with three interlocked steps:

- **Building:** what we are putting into place;
- **Doing:** implementing and testing the practices that we are seeking to establish;
- **Learning:** how we make sure that we record what we do, what we learn, and what we are changing.

## Belief

For our beliefs, we define DEI as a situation where every team member can thrive and feel included, and where diverse identities are represented at all levels. This includes looking at diversity through the lens of identity categories (race, gender, language, education, ethnicity, age, physical ability, sexual orientation) but also going beyond that and understanding that inclusion is not experienced simply by becoming a representative of an underrepresented category. As much as possible all staff should receive equitable treatment in their work and in the benefits they enjoy. That requires reviewing individual experiences to ensure they generate the same level of fulfilment and that the observation of another's benefits and experiences does not create discontent.



We recognize that our beliefs must continuously be articulated, questioned, and sharpened. We also know that our beliefs or the underpinning principles can guide us, but they alone will not make Busara a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization. We further believe that we need to create and nourish spaces for learning and debate as part of our work culture. One part of learning is to learn where power relations exist, how they can be made visible, and which ones require disruption to achieve our DEI goal.

So far, we have articulated some of our beliefs concretely, for example, by addressing inequities that had crept into our policies. This Groundwork (and the previously published summary of initiatives we have taken) as well as the Busara Yearbook Tafakari are part of our effort to be transparent and open.<sup>61</sup>

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61 (Busara 2024; Ngugi and Schomerus 2023)

**Box 12: Language part 3 - scare quotes are exclusive**

Busara works in a jargon-heavy environment (see Language, part 2). Learning jargon and the *habitus* that comes with it is difficult enough for people from different backgrounds. It gets even harder when writers assume that they are speaking to an ingroup—meaning that they assume to be part of a group of people that understands subtext in their writing. In order to avoid making assumptions of how people might read our language, we are avoiding so-called ‘scare quotes’ in Busara publications—meaning quotation marks around text that is not obviously a quote. Scare quotes can signal to the reader a number of things and all of them are confusing: the reader can assume that the writer uses the term sarcastically or metaphorically (but might not understand the nature of the sarcasm or metaphor and thus feel excluded). Or the reader assumes that the term is a direct quote from a debate that they are not part of. Both can create a sense of exclusion or avoidance and put an additional processing burden on the reader (Schlechtweg and Härtl 2023). In fact, it has been argued that people use scare quotes when they do not want to be held to account for what they said, leaving the option open of later claiming that something was meant sarcastically (Saner 2017 (14 March)). Best practice on how to deal with scare quotes? Skip them and say what you really mean to include everyone in the conversation.



But we have a long way to go: we need to consciously continue to build the spaces of learning and debate and to communicate both internally and externally what we have done (for example, through reports like this one). We also need to find clearer ways to measure progress and link these to an organizational strategy that reinforces and makes space for this commitment.

## Practice

For our practice, this means that we express what we experience with honesty and tackle challenges with creativity. We seek to avoid jargon and code speak in order to be open about experiences and challenges, bold in our recommendations, and honest about what has and hasn't worked. It means that we actively pursue a variation of voices, viewpoints and vehicles of communication in how the organization presents itself to the world. When we experience that something in this practice is lacking, this requires paying attention to: is it missing because it does not fit the current articulation of beliefs? Are there emotional reasons why it is missing?

Practice holds a double identity: it is the most exciting part and also the most boring part of DEI. Why? Because to breathe life into beliefs is one of the great challenges, while guiding an organisation towards doing that is primarily a bureaucratic and sometimes diplomatic exercise. How does this play out in practice?

It means acknowledging that DEI is not intuitive. It means tying a very tight knot between beliefs, resources, and practice. Equity is expensive for an organization (as is not being equitable). If the belief is that there should be equitable staff benefits, what exactly does the practice of spending money on these then need to look like? Why are we committed to pay people of all genders equally, but in practice also still struggle with how to narrow our gender pay gap?<sup>62</sup> It is also challenging (or maybe impossible) to achieve perfect equity as beliefs, identities, experiences evolve. Thus, one practice to support equity cannot solve all problems; it cannot even solve one problem for all times.

In the practice of DEI, an organization can show its true self through the policies it designs, implements and champions. The choices an organization makes are a way to communicate with its staff what the organization is choosing to support. Is the organization buffering specific groups or individuals?

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62 (Singh and Ngugi 2023)



### **Box 13: Equitable health insurance**

Busara recently changed its health insurance setup because the original policy offered different benefits to citizens of Kenya and citizens of other countries, with those considered international receiving better care. The change meant that non-Africans now have slightly less-favourable insurance coverage; however, their non-European colleagues are now receiving the same benefits as Europeans. This was a change that was difficult for some of those who lost some benefits and who felt—as it was expressed—inconvenienced. Despite the fact that in the global development sector different benefits for national and international staff are the norm, this change was necessary for Busara: it expresses the value of equity and an interest in the well-being of all its people.

Equity may be the quieter cousin of advocacy. To sustain equity requires having a champion who sees it through, and who knows that even when individuals might roll their eyes at the mention of equity, the organization has the champion's back. Someone has to advocate for equity and ruthlessly implement it—and have the institutional support to be annoying about it.

It is also in the practice of DEI that the challenges lie. There is a long history of how bureaucratizing DEI allows it to become formulaic or to continue the very

same patterns of exclusion that it seeks to address.<sup>63</sup> The Code of Conduct of progressive climate advocacy group The Leap stated for example, that

*Codes of Conduct have a history of being used to justify racist, sexist, ableist, and otherwise oppressive practices within institutions. They can be formulated and applied to set boundaries around “appropriate” behavior without acknowledging how definitions of “appropriate” behavior are used to marginalize people, especially BIPOC [black, indigenous and people of color], queer, and feminine individuals. This marginalization can occur in a range of ways: from tone policing, to practicing respectability politics, to fostering toxic work environments and unjust terminations, among others.*<sup>64</sup>

It is known that establishing policies or tasking a person with being the champion for DEI can mean that management can delay implementation of such policies, on the basis of having such policies in the first place.

Using the insights from an internal DEI working group, Busara has committed to a number of concrete steps on hiring, performance measurement, and management practices. These include defining, building, and rewarding performance, meaning that policies, procedures, and practices should target building high performance across teams and individuals. This includes

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63 (Ahmed 2012)

64 (The Leap 2021, 2)



defining and measuring performance, goal setting, motivating staff, salary structures, promotions, opportunities for learning and exposure, people and project management and so forth.

We continue to slowly implement and then test these policies. There is continued need to incorporate DEI into all policy documents that are aimed at broad audiences. These come with many nuances. For example, what are relevant markers against which we need to figure out what makes a policy family friendly? Do people of different races and ethnicities have different needs? Do we distinguish between nuclear and single-parent families in our policies? How do we cover non-traditional family structures? What additional support can be given to parents with differently-abled children that is still equitable to everyone?



#### **Box 14: Peer review**

In our work on building Busara as a knowledge and learning organization (Schomerus 2024), we are figuring out the best ways in which to make our work rigorous and tested for quality. In academia, that process is usually done by peer review: a journal sends out an article to researchers working in the same field and asks them to assess the quality and contribution of the article. A crucial question for Busara in strengthening its review processes is: who are the peers that could review the work—as peers—from researchers with very different educational backgrounds and research socializations? In this question the challenges of the research ecosystem become very apparent: in a much smaller, less-resourced research ecosystem (Perivoli Africa Research Centre (PARC) et al. 2023), the pool of genuine peers is very small indeed. Unless the efforts to strengthen researchers as participants and peers are seriously pursued, (Mughogho, Adhiambo, and Forscher 2023), a peer review system as it functions now is inherently unfair.



An area that still needs much consideration is how we assess the performance of researchers without only considering published reports or talks given. This means establishing DEI metrics that reflect what the approach is supposed to do: measure performance in ways that are diverse, equitable, and inclusive. It might mean to establish metrics that counter the human instinct to make DEI performative but also to acknowledge a contribution that is made by simply being present during research debates to broaden the perspective. Often, for individual researchers, this can mean to carry the burden of representing the research participants, who continue to be quite removed from the knowledge production process, even though they are the center of interest and attention.<sup>65</sup>

One commitment of what we will do next is to name challenges. We will also create a deliberate DEI function to tap into a broader range of perspectives, experiences, and talents, which are essential for driving innovation, growth, and problem-solving. Additionally, a strong DEI function demonstrates our commitment to social responsibility and ensures that we are a competitive employer and a leader in promoting equity and inclusion within global development and behavioral research.

Our commitment to learning is expressed through recording and reflecting on DEI initiatives thus far, for example through publications or webinars.<sup>66</sup> Even writing this Groundwork is part of learning as it allows us to sharpen our vocabulary.

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65 (Singh 2023)

66 (Ngugi 2024; Schomerus 2024; Singh and Ngugi 2023)

## Emotions

We define DEI as being a catalyst for emotional experiences. These can show themselves as the challenge that someone can experience when they realize that on paper, they are representing a category that strengthens diversity, but in reality their experience is that of feeling excluded. Emotions can create pushback against the kind of change that true DEI creates. Such pushback can be tough to handle for an organization, sometimes leaving it paralyzed or less courageous in putting its stated beliefs into practice.

### **Box 15: Information sharing**

It is an axiom that a good workplace is one in which teams and staff share information freely. It is the cornerstone of the philosophy of Open Science and has been highlighted as the cornerstone of success in tech companies (Bock 2015). Yet, what seems straightforward as an idea can come with additional, often unseen challenges in a multicultural organization steeped in a sector in which knowledge hierarchies are real. Not everyone might be comfortable sharing information due to uncertainties and asking themselves: Is my information good? Will I be judged? Am I bringing anything new here? Do I know enough? These are common worries that people might have and that require conscious mitigation and learning.



DEI work can easily become performative, particularly at the belief level: it is often relatively easy for an organization to express its beliefs, making it easy to proclaim something without follow-up that describes these beliefs in practice. That is why for Busara the loop between belief, practice and emotion is so crucial: is it much more difficult, if not impossible, to be solely performative at the levels of practice and emotion.

## Conclusion: orange and orange equals orange

To no longer draw a subtly-judgmental line between international oranges and local oranges in knowledge production in the Global South requires deep changes in how one part of the world imagines the other. It requires spelling out what implicit values are attached to being from a place. It means to be honest and open about the challenges that come with seeking to build an organization that wants to play a role in how to do this better.

This is a work in progress and it is full of contradictions and murkiness. As we move organizationally towards being more present in the debates that concern our work, the organization's philosophy is to have a voice that also expresses the commitments made in this Groundwork. Even as an organization that publishes in well-established formats—reports, slide decks, blogs, articles, books—Busara does not have one voice: it has many. The strength of the organization is that it allows variation in voices, viewpoints and communication. These are expressed in our engagement in the relevant conversations through events, commentaries, exchanges, and relationships, with which we make an intentional effort to make the knowledge contribution that is needed to better inform the shifts towards localization—or, as Onsando puts it in his reflection on his works as Busara's manager for Voice and Impact: 'Through our voice, we seek to make ourselves known to the world and thus make the world known to us'.<sup>67</sup>

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67 (Onsando 2024)



In addition, we practice inclusion by doing justice to the time and emotional labor that research respondents shared with us to allow us to create research findings that affect them. We do this with the ethos that underpins both our work and our organization building: creativity and honesty. We take this to mean that our work is creative, hopefully sometimes surprising, thoughtful, and, above all, honest.

### **Box 16: Quality and rigour**

Our work stands and falls with its quality; social science achieves quality through academic and scientific rigour. Yet, within established knowledge hierarchies rigour can be quite narrowly defined. It is one of the tasks of an international Global South research organization to be rigorous while simultaneously learning how different versions of rigour within different knowledge traditions might look. Not simply adhering to one definition of rigour can easily be misinterpreted as seeking to cut intellectual and scientific corners. But it is in fact a deeply demanding technical and philosophical task. If we take positionality seriously—meaning we accept that someone’s perspective is shaped by who they are and their socialisation—then our understanding and judgement of rigour needs to take that positionality into account. As Táíwò reminds us, drawing on Harding: if rigour is also judged by the willingness to question established hierarchies of knowledge and power, then one that takes positionality (or standpoint epistemology) into account requires much deeper pursuit of objectivity, which in itself is a path to more rigorous reflection and analysis (Táíwò not dated; Harding 2004).

Allowing different ways of acquiring and presenting knowledge to become part of who we are supports both our commitment to DEI and our efforts to strengthen our voice.



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## About Busara

Busara is a research and advisory organization, working with researchers and organizations to advance and apply behavioral science in pursuit of poverty alleviation. Busara pursues a future where global human development activities respond to people's lived experience; value knowledge generated in the context it is applied; and promote culturally appropriate and inclusive practices. To accomplish this, we practice and promote behavioral science in ways that center and value the perspectives of respondents; expand the practice of research where it is applied; and build networks, processes, and tools that increase the competence of practitioners and researchers.

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## About Busara Groundwork

Busara Groundwork lays the groundwork for future research and program design. As think pieces, they examine the current state of knowledge and what is needed to advance it, frame important issues with a behavioral perspective, or put forward background information on a specific context.

## How to cite:

Ngugi, Stanley; Schomerus, Mareike. *Comparing oranges and oranges: working towards diverse, equitable and inclusive knowledge creation in an international Global South organization*. Busara Groundwork No. 12 (Thought Piece). Nairobi: Busara, 2024. DOI: [doi.org/10.62372/KLJE3595](https://doi.org/10.62372/KLJE3595)

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