

TOWARDS A MORE DECOLONIAL, ANTI- RACIST AND FEMINIST PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

SUMMARY

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About the ICN

The Inter-Council Network (ICN) is a coalition of eight provincial and regional councils for the international cooperation committed to global social justice and social change. The ICN's work is guided by five strategic directions: (1) inspire Canadians to act as global citizens; (2) inspire decision-makers; (3) increase the capacity of member network; (4) strengthen the ICN and Councils; and (5) deepen and broaden thought leadership.

About the Research

This report is a summary of a research project on public engagement conducted by the ICN between November 2021 and June 2022. The research focuses on better practices in public engagement in the international cooperation sector. To strengthen sector actors' public engagement work, the ICN explores decolonial, anti-racist and feminist approaches. Broadly, this research focuses on big social justice questions around equity and power. This research provides space for introspection and aims to:

- Highlight decolonial, anti-racist and feminist practices in public engagement from different locations with different actors;
- Curate tools and practices that can inform more ethical practices in our decolonial, anti-racist and feminist work;
- and shape narratives and priorities in policy and practice within the sector that will hopefully contribute to transformative change.

Methods

Recognizing that knowledge making processes, such as this research project, are political and are sites in which inequalities can be reproduced, this research adopted elements of participatory action research. Various research tools including roundtables, focus groups and secondary literature review were applied to explore the use of decolonial, anti-racist and feminist approaches in public engagement. To conclude the data analysis process, a research validation exercise was held with some of the research participants.

Findings: Key areas of action

For a more decolonial, anti-racist and feminist approach in public engagement, this research highlights five key actions that both governmental and non-governmental actors can take including: centre communities, invest resources, foster open dialogues, build relations of trust and solidarity, and develop critical reflexivity mechanisms.

1. Center Communities

Communities are integral to public engagement not only as mere recipients or beneficiaries of public engagement activities but also as agentic actors in their own right. Centering communities involves recognizing, acknowledging, and embracing difference among communities, listening to them, amplifying their work and recognizing and supporting their autonomy.

2. Invest Resources

Resources are central to the use of decolonial, anti-racist and feminist approaches in public engagement. This research recommends that the sector as a whole rethinks its approach to resources, adopts a redistributive approach to global resources and invests more resources specifically in decolonial, anti-racist and feminist work.

3. Foster Open Dialogues

This research finds that public perception of decolonization, anti-racism and feminism is a major factor in the use of decolonial, anti-racist and feminist approaches in public engagement. There is a fragmentation in how these concepts are understood and perceived by the public in different contexts. Open dialogues are useful in bringing such diverse perspectives together. They are also fundamentally important as safer spaces for building trust and co-imagining alternative realities.

4. Build Relations of Trust and Solidarity

Relations that are in active resistance to colonial, racist, patriarchal, extractive and imperialist practices are essential for decolonial, anti-racist and feminist work. Relations of trust and solidarity enable actors to create space for communities to express their connection to their work, their lands, and their aspirations in a variety of ways. They also create space to move beyond top-down approaches to approaches that foster co-learning and the co-construction of projects based on the priorities of the communities as identified by the communities.

5. Develop Critical Reflexivity Mechanisms

Critical reflexivity provides an opportunity for introspection. It highlights the intricate channels via which structures of power function in systems, institutions, organizations, discourses, and knowledges to shape people's lives. It provides space for actors to examine their actions because working in a sector that is colonial and racist implies that actors can reproduce and perpetuate these practices in their work. The mechanisms via which reflexivity is conducted are indeed sites of political action and therefore central to decolonial, anti-racist and feminist work.

Conclusion: Change as Process

This research finds that public perception of decolonization, anti-racism and feminism is a major factor in the use of decolonial, anti-racist and feminist approaches in public engagement. There is a fragmentation in how these concepts are understood and perceived by the public in different contexts. Open dialogues are useful in bringing such diverse perspectives together. They are also fundamentally important as safer spaces for building trust and co-imagining alternative realities.

To read the full research project, please visit www.icn-rcc.ca/research