Time to Decolonise Aid

Insights and lessons from a global consultation

Full Report

About this report

In November 2020, Peace Direct, Adeso, the Alliance for Peacebuilding, and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security held a three-day online consultation with 158 activists, decision-makers, academics, journalists and practitioners across the globe. Participants and guest contributors exchanged insights and local experiences on the current power dynamics and imbalances that exist within the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. They discussed how structural racism manifests itself in their work, and how they envision a decolonised system that is truly inclusive and responds to their needs. The consultation received more than 350 detailed comments across nine discussion threads. This report presents the findings and recommendations from that consultation.

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1. Executive summary

As discussions about unequal power dynamics in the international aid system have entered the mainstream, local activists have become increasingly vocal about the ways in which power and resources in the system remain dominated by, and between, certain organisations and relationships largely based in the Global North. Despite the commitments to address the inequities in the system, most notably announced at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in 2016, little progress has been made in many key areas, including in the funding for local organisations and the way that decisions, power and control is still held by a relatively small number of donors and INGOs.

Following the Black Lives Matter protests that evolved into a global movement in the summer of 2020, those working in the aid sector have been forced to confront the reality that their own work is steeped in structural racism, something which has been barely discussed or acknowledged until very recently. Decolonising development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding – the movement to address and dismantle racist and discriminatory structures and norms that are hidden in plain sight in the aid system – is emerging as an urgent, vital and long overdue discussion which adds greater weight to the existing calls to transform the system. If policymakers, donors, practitioners, academics and activists do not begin to address structural racism and what it means to decolonise aid, the system may never be able to transform itself in ways that truly shift power and resources to local actors.

In November 2020, Peace Direct in collaboration with Adeso, the Alliance for Peacebuilding and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security, convened a three-day online consultation to discuss the issue of structural racism and how to 'Decolonise Aid'. Over 150 people from the development, humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding sectors took part in the consultation over three days, and we are indebted to all those who shared their insights, stories and analysis. Many of the key findings will come as little surprise to those who have been campaigning to change the system, but we acknowledge that there for many these findings may prove surprising, even shocking. Our findings include the following:

↗ Many current practices and attitudes in the aid system mirror and are derived from the colonial-era, which most organisations and donors in the Global North are still reluctant to acknowledge. Certain modern-day practices and norms reinforce colonial dynamics and beliefs such as the 'White saviour' ideology visible in fundraising and communications imagery used by INGOs, to the organisational structures of INGOs in the Global South and the attitudes of some White international aid workers working in Global South.

↗ Aid flows between former colonial powers and former colonised regions often mirror their past colonial relationships, with decision-making power concentrated in the Global North.

↗ Structural racism is so deeply embedded in the everyday culture and working practice of those in the sector that it has affected the way local staff regard their own communities and how they engage with INGOs.

Abbreviations

CSO
Civil Society Organisation

INGO
International non-governmental organisation

NGO
Non-governmental organisation

P4D
Platform4Dialogue

UN
United Nations

WCAPS
Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security

↗ Some of the language used in the aid system reinforces discriminatory and racist perceptions of non-White populations. The phrase 'Capacity building' was cited as one example that suggests that local communities and organisations lack skills, while other terms, such as 'field expert' perpetuate images of the Global South as 'uncivilised.'

↗ Many global north aid sector practitioners perceive themselves (and the wider sector) as operating neutrally, which is not only a fiction, it also reinforces the 'white saviour' and 'white gaze' mentality that has its roots in colonialism.

↗ Structural racism benefits organisations in the Global North and also those from the Global South who know how to 'play' the system. The most widespread example cited in the consultation was funding opportunities for programmes and research which benefit a relatively small number of 'usual suspects' i.e. INGOs with pre-existing relationships with donors.

↗ One of the most obvious manifestations of structural racism in the sector is the parallel system for employing staff in the Global South, not only in terms of salaries and benefits offered to Global South staff compared to the Global North counterparts, but also in how skills and experience are devalued in practitioners from the Global South.

↗ Programme and research design are rooted in Western values and knowledge systems meaning that many programmes inadvertently create a standard based on the West that communities in the Global South are required to meet. Local knowledge is, by default, devalued.

↗ The challenges faced by individual practitioners of colour are amplified if they belong to other marginalised groups, including women, the LGBTQ* community, the disabled community, the non-Anglophone community, etc. Attempts to bridge the global-local divide often focuses on a particular identity group failing to incorporate an intersectional approach.

The recommendations which emerged from the consultation, and which are expanded upon on page 37 include the following:

Recommendations for donors, INGOs and policymakers

↗ Acknowledge that structural racism exists and acknowledge that there is a collective responsibility to tackle the problem.

↗ Encourage conversations with grantees and communities about the power dynamics that influence the relationships between funder and grantee or INGO and local partner.

↗ Create space for change, especially for those with marginalised identities, and expect and encourage those groups to question the current system and the power relations that underpin it.

↗ Mind your language. End the use of outdated language such as 'beneficiaries' and involve communities in choosing new ways of describing terms that are no longer appropriate.

↗ Encourage an internal organisational culture of openness to critique, and ensure that this is cognisant of gender, age and any other factors that might impact someone's willingness to critique.

↗ Fund courageously and trust generously.

↗ Recruit differently, and in particular reassess the need for recruiting expatriate staff for any position based overseas. Commit to recruiting a greater diversity of staff in offices in the global North.

↗ Invest in indigenous knowledge creation and value local knowledge

Recommendations for INGOs specifically

↗ End the practice of 'White gaze' fundraising and audit your communications through a 'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' lens.

↗ Adopt a transition mindset for organisational strategies, which puts in place clear milestones for the transfer of power and resources to local organisations. Such a transition mindset should be enshrined in clear organisational strategies that measure success according to the extent to which an INGO is reducing, rather than expanding, its traditional organisational footprint.

↗ Avoid localisation spin. Don't reframe 'localisation' to defend a particular organisational position or to justify the status quo.

↗ Re-evaluate partnerships with local organisations so that they are more equitable, and mutually accountable, and support and strengthen local leadership and sustainability.

Recommendations for individuals

↗ Reflect on your identity and motivations for working in the sector, and what privileges and 'baggage' you bring to your work.

↗ Remain humble.

↗ Shift access and power to those who don't have it, in whatever ways you can.

↗ Organise and connect to networks and groups that support this agenda.

These recommendations are not new. They have been said, in one form or another, in various meetings, blogs, papers and conferences for several years now. Our hope is that in bringing them to the fore now, at a time when the system is in such flux, it will provide an opportunity for those in the system to seize this moment to shift power in ways that create more equitable partnerships, leading to better humanitarian, development and peacebuilding outcomes for all.

2. Introduction

In recent years, a growing chorus of activists and organisations have been pushing for the 'localisation' of development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding efforts. From the Grand Bargain agreement to centring local civil society actors in peacebuilding, locally-led approaches are increasingly a primary concern for international actors attempting to address unequal global–local power dynamics.

Despite a growing list of international commitments, attempts to 'shift the power' towards local actors have been inconsistent, failing to address the deep-rooted, systemic issues that exist. Beyond broad commitments to locally-led approaches, the development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding sectors have struggled to implement any significant structural change.

Following the racial uprisings that spread globally from the US in the summer of 2020, the aid sector has been forced into its own racial reckoning after decades of wilful colour-blindness. Practitioners of colour renewed their calls for sectoral reform, galvanised by the renewed attention placed on established movements such as Black Lives Matter. As more accounts of bias, discrimination and racism emerged, it became increasingly clear that the aid sector's attempts to localise had largely failed to consider race and how it interplays with other marginalised identities. Such attempts have too often resulted in the tokenistic inclusion of practitioners from underrepresented backgrounds within established international organisations. With conversations about race now in the mainstream, the incongruence of the aid sector's commitments to localisation without engaging substantively with race or the sector's colonial legacy is being increasingly viewed by many activists and commentators as untenable.[1]

While there is growing support for the idea of decolonising aid, there is little consensus on what exactly this would entail. Why has the sector been so reluctant to discuss issues of race? How could funding practices be transformed to better serve local communities? Should international practitioners have in-country offices, and should international staff be present 'in the field'?

To understand the deeper issues at hand, Peace Direct partnered with African Development Solutions (Adeso), the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security (WCAPS) to host a global online consultation aimed at discussing the colonial legacy of the aid system and identifying pathways to radically transform power relations towards greater equity.

Methodology

The findings and analysis in this report are based on discussions held during an online consultation that took place through Peace Direct's online dialogue portal, Platform4Dialogue (P4D), during 2–4 November 2020. Over three days, 158 participants spanning six continents and 49 countries participated in a series of online text-based discussions and four region-specific Zoom calls. During the consultation, participants examined the issue of decolonisation across the development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding sectors, and how practitioners are responding to the challenges of normalised racism and bias. This 'triple nexus' approach attempts to break down the silos between these sectors, thereby facilitating a broader, more comprehensive examination of the issue.[4]

Why are 'Black', 'Brown', 'Indigenous' and 'White' capitalised?

Peace Direct has decided to capitalise the colloquial racial designations 'Black', 'Brown', 'Indigenous' and 'White'. We are aware of the debates surrounding whether it is appropriate to capitalise these terms and our decision was made after numerous discussions. The main reason driving this choice is to acknowledge that these racial designations refer to social categories. This means that they are not adjectives but nouns, serving as shorthand for the complexities of groups that hold a collective identity, shared experiences and shared histories.

When the first letter is capitalised in Indigenous, this refers to Indigenous communities. When not capitalised, the term describes communities that are originally from the region[2] – the term 'local' is used interchangeably with this secondary definition.

We acknowledge that whether to capitalise 'White' is an especially controversial aspect of this debate. Given that we understand these racial designations as nouns used to describe identity groups, it is consistent to capitalise 'White' so as to correctly frame Whiteness as a racial construct that emerged in opposition to the constructs of Blackness, Brownness and Indigeneity.[3]

Participants were selected via purposive sampling, which took into account their responses to a pre-consultation survey and their demonstrated interest and experience engaging with issues of race, decolonisation and localisation in the development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding sectors. Particular attention was paid to ensuring gender balance and age diversity, as well as representation from a wide array of countries and continents. In addition to this selection process, Peace Direct approached several guest experts with whom we had prior relationships, asking them to contribute, moderate certain discussion threads and facilitate video-call discussions in their mother tongue. Throughout the consultation, participants responded to questions posed in each discussion thread, as well as points raised by other participants. Participants were given the option of posting anonymously should they deem their contributions to be sensitive, as well as for their own comfort. All text-based discussions were held in a password-protected area of the P4D platform.

To complement the text-based discussions, Peace Direct hosted four regional video calls for participants from: 1) Africa and Europe; 2) Asia; 3) the Middle East; and 4) Latin America. The linguistic groupings were chosen based on what is commonly spoken in the relevant region and the languages participants expressed comfort with. In acknowledgement of those who spoke other languages, we welcomed translators into the Zoom calls and the use of Google Translate for the text-based discussions. These four live calls provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the issues in real time, in, respectively, French, English, Arabic and Spanish. The video-call discussions were facilitated and subject to Chatham House rules. While the contents of the video-call discussions were used to inform the report, participants have not been quoted. All video-call discussions were held in password-protected Zoom rooms.

Quotes from participants are illustrative of the perspectives raised during the consultation, and are used with the explicit consent of those quoted. Some quotes were edited for clarity and length.

There are some obvious limitations to this type of research. First, while 158 people participated in the consultation, this is by no means a comprehensive representation of the sector as a whole. However, we attempted to mitigate the risk of limited perspectives by selecting as diverse a group of participants as possible, particularly from non-White, non-Western practitioners and academics. Second, we made no attempt to generate any quantitative data, and instead pulled out the key themes from each discussion thread in this report, using participant quotes to highlight certain points, particularly where there appeared to be general support for that viewpoint. To mitigate the risk of author bias in the selection of key themes, an editor cross-checked the report with the original transcript of the consultation to ensure that it faithfully reflected the consultation. Peer reviewers from Adeso, AfP and WCAPS also commented on the draft report, and the draft was sent to every consultation participant for their input.

Recognising that the consultation could only hope to cover a few of the key themes pertinent to the 'Decolonising Aid' debate, we found that, in writing the report, there were some areas which might benefit from additional context. Therefore, a number of text boxes are interspersed throughout the report, some of which contain case studies intended to deepen the reader's understanding of an issue raised during the consultation. Though based on participants' contributions, they incorporate follow-up interviews and email correspondence, used with the participants' explicit consent. Other text boxes provide historical context or the rationale behind use of certain terminology, while some address a topic not directly raised during the consultation but which Peace Direct felt was necessary to include in this discussion.

We want to acknowledge the tension that exists in Peace Direct, an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) based in the Global North, taking the lead on a report on decolonising development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding. During the research process, we were repeatedly confronted by the reality that the majority of research examining race, discrimination and decolonisation within these sectors is written by White Westerners. During the writing of the report, we attempted to centre the perspectives and experiences of consultation practitioners and of non-White academics engaging with this issue. Moreover, we made conscious attempts to avoid centring Whiteness, and encourage readers to look to our cited sources if they wish to delve further into the topic of structural racism and decolonising the aid system.

Given the need to decolonise knowledge within the development, humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors, the implications of choosing a report format to share the research findings must be explained. This format is one that is preferred by funders, international practitioners and decision-makers, who are the primary audience for the report's recommendations. The very nature of reports relies on external, 'authoritative' sources being used to corroborate the lived experiences of some of the consultation's participants. We invite the reader to reflect on why a formal written report is perceived as being more legitimate than other methods of dissemination.

Furthermore, in deference to the sensitivity of the topic and the vulnerability displayed by some of our participants, we have chosen not to include comments that detailed personal experiences of racism, discrimination and prejudice. While those accounts lie beyond the scope of this report, we wish to acknowledge that experiences of racism, discrimination and bias happen regularly in the aid system, and are deeply harmful and alienating for practitioners of colour. Addressing the more direct manifestations of discrimination is a vital step towards truly decolonising any institution or sector.

Outline of the report

Section 2 unpacks the language and terminology around decolonisation. Section 3 explores the colonial roots of the three sectors and their legacy in modern-day development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding. Section 4 focuses on current power dynamics, as well as the structural and personal barriers that cause the sector to remain imbalanced. Section 5 shares participants' 'manifestos' for decolonising aid, development and peacebuilding.

Finally, Section 6 concludes that decolonising the development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding sectors requires more than the efforts of those directly impacted by biased, discriminatory and racist practices and standards. If the three sectors are to meaningfully change, funders, decision-makers and practitioners from the Global North (see glossary for definition) must commit to deep reflection and bold, deliberate, transformative action.

3.

Unpacking the Language and Terminology Around Decolonising Aid

The three day consultation began with a discussion on terminology. While structural racism in the aid sector only became a mainstream topic in the 'Global North' in 2015, participants acknowledged that the language around decolonisation and structural racism has a rich history in academia. They also noted that discussions about race and discrimination are often complicated by our own identity, background and colloquial understanding of various terms. They agreed that a shared understanding of what we mean by these terms can ensure a common point of departure when it comes to engaging with each other.

What follows is an exploration of some of the key terms used in this report, as well as insights into consultation conversations around language and language specificity.

One participant, Salim Muhammad, raised an important consideration around how the language used in the sector ends up excluding many practitioners:

The excessive use of jargons is another dilemma of this sector where all agencies are trying to use new jargons to be seen as thought leaders and so on ... even looking at our conversation here, I felt that many, like me, would feel excluded as we may hardly understand the conversation given a very complex and jargonised language.

Structural Racism

Structural (or systemic) racism refers to the normalisation and legitimatisation of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage White people, while producing chronic outcomes for people of colour worldwide.[6] It is well established that the creation of racial classifications was part of the colonisation process, with the White European/Western man at the head of the hierarchy.[7] This hierarchy of privilege[8] persists to this day, to the detriment of all non-White, non-Western actors, particularly those who are not men.

When discussing structural racism, consultation participant Chrisantus Lapang observed:

> *In some organizations, your expertise does not matter provided you are and indigene of the recipient country. If for instance a qualified Nigerian is to go and work in the global office of an organisation, he does not get additional incentives and he is just a staff, but when American, British, French etc citizens come to work in African countries for instance, they are referred to as experts and what accompanies that portfolio in terms of benefits is better compared to what the non-experts get. All those structural conditions that are discriminatory have the racial character of colonialism.*

What does 'local' mean?

'Local' in this report refers to development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding initiatives and programmes owned and led by people working in their own context.[5] It includes small-scale grassroots initiatives, as well as activities undertaken on a wider scale. While intentionally broad, the term does not capture the nuance of who is considered 'local' and how this qualifier depends on the relative power of the observer. To an INGO, an organisation run by national practitioners based in the region's urban hub may be deemed local. Meanwhile, that same organisation may in turn consider a more rurally-based organisation to be local. We acknowledge that whether a so-called 'local' organisation has any relationship with the international aid system is dependent on the intersecting identities and privileges of the practitioners within that organisation – such as their fluency in English or socio-economic class.

During the consultation, an anonymous participant highlighted the limitation of the term 'local' as 'oftentimes, local organisations are still led by the elites ... and this just ends up perpetuating and reinforcing racial, class and caste hierarchies'. While this nuance should be considered a vital component of decolonising the aid system, this report will only engage with the subtleties of 'local' as a qualifier when the subject is specified by a consultation participant.

In this report, global structural racism is understood as both a cause and consequence of colonialism and imperialism. It impacts the political economy, as well as the interpersonal dynamics between practitioners. That said, this report is focused specifically on the structural racism underpinning the modern-day aid system and how it normalises discrimination against non-White practitioners and those from the Global South.

Decolonisation

According to its original usage, 'decolonisation' refers to the process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent. The term gained popularity in the mid-twentieth century as indigenous independence movements worldwide reclaimed sovereignty over their colonised territories.[9] Calls for the 'decolonisation' of aid are often regarded as controversial by policymakers and INGOs as they imply aid is a form of colonisation. Themrise Khan, a participant in the consultation, argued that:

> *[Decolonisation] conjures up an image of forced occupation which aid is technically not. Nations are sovereign and the decision to accept or reject aid lies with them. The fact that Western aid agencies have the controlling hand is a different issue.*

However other participants pointed out that the term decolonisation has a secondary meaning, referring also to the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies regarding the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches.[10] This second meaning emerged as a colloquial amalgamation of a number of intellectual movements, including indigenisation,[11] postcolonialism,[12] post-development,[13] decoloniality[14] and critical theory.[15] Thus, when people call for 'decolonising' aid, it is often this definition they are referring to. This was the case for the majority of participants, with Maurício Vieira observing:

> *In my perspective, 'decolonising aid' is more a critical thinking of the current practices on aid, rather than a new practice per se. It is a way that enables us to identify what are the trends and facts that evidence a colonised practice of aid.*

An anonymous participant built on this definition of decolonising aid, arguing that it means something different depending on a person's power:

> *[for] those who are most impacted by violence [decolonising aid means] producing knowledge, diagnosing problems, finding solutions to the problems and addressing them. For people in power, it means acknowledging and unlearning patterns of dominance, like taking charge, leading, making decisions. Getting out of one's comfort zone, materially, emotionally and sometimes physically, and following the lead of those who are most impacted by violence and injustice.*

Case study:

Why the 'localisation agenda' has been a disappointment for many local actors

The Grand Bargain, hailed as a major outcome of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, set out concrete commitments by major international humanitarian actors to provide more support and funding to local and national organisations. This was in recognition of the inherent benefits and value-added provided by national and local actors, namely that they are better placed to respond to crises and provide for community needs, and better able to build resilience to future crises.

However, soon after the ink had dried on the paper, the goalposts were changed. As part of the action plan, the Workstream tasked with operationalising the commitment to provide 'more tools and funding to national and local responders' was asked to develop a 'localisation marker' or definition for what counted as 'local', so that progress could be tracked against the commitment to channel 'at least 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders as directly as possible by 2020'. Through a consultative process, the following definition for 'local' was proposed: 'Local NGOs/CSOs operating in a specific, geographically defined, subnational area of an aid recipient country, without affiliation to an international NGO/CSO.' A similar definition was proposed for national organisations, though expanding the geographical reach to 'working in multiple subnational regions.' However, the definition finally adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (responsible for coordinating Grand Bargain commitments) included a clause which allowed country offices of INGOs to qualify as 'National' or 'Local' thereby enabling them to benefit from the 25% funding commitment. To make matters worse, the Grand Bargain commitment to get funding to National and local actors 'as directly as possible' was subsequently watered down, to include 'Funding to a single international aid organisation (including a federated/membership organisation) that reaches a local/national actor directly from that one intermediary.' What could have been a landmark moment ended up being a huge disappointment to local organisations worldwide. INGOs with country offices had protected their interests and their funding sources.

The '2020 Annual Independent Report for the Grand Bargain' acknowledged that substantive shifts in practice have largely failed to materialise.[16] This is partly due to a lack of strategic focus, a general failure to upscale positive practice, and a continued focus on institutional priorities over systemic changes.[17]

The failure thus far to translate grand rhetoric into practice stems primarily from the aid sector's reluctance to relinquish power to local actors.[18] As a result many activists now argue that localisation has become little more than a technocratic exercise, leading some groups to call for an end to the term being used.

The participant emphasised the importance of centring resolution of an issue around those closest to it. Dany Tiwa developed this idea, arguing:

> *decolonising aid means that the focus should be on what people identify themselves as important. What we have noticed is issues that receive attention from aid donors are often more important for them than for the beneficiaries.*

Decoloniality

The concept of 'decoloniality' was introduced by several participants during consultation discussions as a more accurate framework to describe the structural power shifts being discussed. Decoloniality expands on the second definition of decolonisation, and refers to the process of examining the matrix of power that emerged during and after the colonial period. It also examines how these dynamics have lasting effects, privileging a Eurocentric conceptualisation of the future from which a number of marginalised groups, including people of colour, are excluded.[19]

This matrix of power includes the privileging of Whiteness, the imposition of the concept of modernity, using development to approximate the colonies to European modernity, and the creation of financial systems that enrich the few at the expense of the many. Though the term decoloniality emerged out of Latin American postcolonial thought movements, the consultation highlighted that a decolonial perspective is needed to examine long-established norms and structures. Rita Trias Prats highlighted how decolonial thought helped:

> *reveal that the underside of 'modernity' (this idea of linear development and progress promoted by institutions and organisations situated in the Global North) cannot be understood without addressing 'coloniality'.*

In reflecting on this issue, she went onto ask herself and other participants:

> *What is seen as expertise? Should we be there in the first place? Can development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding actually be disentangled from whiteness and coloniality?*

As Prats indicates in her questions, many of the values, goals and practices of development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding programmes reflect a Eurocentric interpretation of modernity and progress. This means that when programmes are implemented they impose these values on the beneficiaries of aid. Another participant, Jenny Aulin, in taking about decolonisation, summarised how it:

> *links structural aspects (resources, decision-making, geopolitics, education) to the personal and interpersonal (how structural racism is internalised and reproduced in attitudes, perceptions, relationships).*

For the purposes of this report, our focus is on how decolonial thought, or decolonisation, can shed light on the practices and structures that inadvertently perpetuate unequal international–local power dynamics. As Aulin phrases it, the decolonising agenda, 'helps us see the bigger picture and it shows us that dealing with racism is not just a matter of "removing the racists" but that it affects all of us'.

White Gaze

The lack of trust in non-Western, non-White practitioners' abilities is a manifestation of the 'White gaze', a concept that came to the fore during the consultation's discussion around the modern-day aid system's replication of colonial patterns and norms. The 'White gaze', also sometimes known as 'the imperial gaze', is the term for the process by which people and societies are viewed through the lens of White ethnocentrism, which assumes that Whiteness is the only referent of progress.[20] This 'gaze' means that institutions, White people and even other people of colour may engage with non-White people, practices and institutions on the basis of their perceived inferiority to White institutions and norms.

During the consultation, Amjad Saleem invited participants to interrogate whether standard practices in the aid system were perpetuating the 'White gaze':

> *If we have a problem with a country because in our eyes it has questionable 'human rights' or we term the leader authoritarian, whilst it has performed remarkably in terms of GDP, then is this not the 'white gaze'? If we lecture a country of the Global South in terms of taking in refugees and their treatment of migrants, but only take in a handful and then lock up their kids, is this not white gaze? We do suffer from white gaze which seems to find problems of fraud and corruption in countries in the Global South but not apparent internally.*

Saleem's examples demonstrate what academic Robtel Neajai Pailey identifies as the 'White gaze' of development. It is a perspective that is specific to development and 'measures the political, socio-economic and cultural processes of Southern black, brown and other people of colour against a standard of Northern whiteness and finds them incomplete, wanting, inferior or regressive. In essence, white is always right, and West is always best'.[21] Though Pailey focuses on development, the White and Eurocentric understanding of progress she identifies is also applicable to aid and peacebuilding. Participants were eager to critique the impact of the 'White gaze' of aid, development and peacebuilding. Katie-Jay Scott spoke to the mentality of White Westerners, stating:

> *People, organisations, institutions, philanthropists need to stop thinking that we are better or are the experts and instead ask how we can help, if help is needed, and trust that the people know what they need, and that if they need our help, they will tell us the best way we can support.*

Meanwhile, Liliana Pimentel noted how easily and inadvertently the 'White gaze' can be adopted:

> *Colonising Aid is the behaviour we got used to observing and sometimes adopt even if it is with no intention, perception or consciousness. I guess we have to look at our own behaviour which is much more difficult and how we ourselves repeat sometimes this 'colonising mind'.*

Rhya A. shared an example of how the perception of non-White actors differs based on other intersecting identities:

> *I am an Arab American woman. I've noticed how Westerners and especially those in international aid focus on Arab (read: Muslim) women, and often presume they make zero decisions and have zero control within their life. The assumption is that the men in their lives have complete control. I think it is an injustice, especially as many of these organisations focus on women's rights, yet they perpetuate gender essentialised ideas of submissive women.*

This is an example of the relationship between the 'White gaze' and the 'White saviour' complex. Rhya A. went on to highlight how women – especially Arab Muslim women – are instrumentalised as part of the Western imposition of a Eurocentric idea of progress:

> *Women have zero control in their lives, and we (international aid services) are here to give you control in the ways we see fit, based on our own (capitalist, individualist) beliefs.*

Through the lens of the 'White gaze' all Arab women are subjugated and powerless, with Western practitioners positioning themselves as liberators who will ultimately teach such women 'how' to be liberated. More broadly, the 'White gaze' presumes that all non-White women are similarly in need of saving from the perceived oppression of their context. While non-White women do face discrimination on the basis of their gender, it is clear that gender-based discrimination occurs everywhere. The 'White gaze' of the aid system focuses on the detrimental effects of patriarchy on non-White, non-Western women, and pushes a solution based in Western values and understandings of gender equality. This paternalism results not only in a failure to meaningfully engage with what non-White, non-Western women actually want, but also with the reality that gender-based discrimination affects White, Western women as well.

Moreover, as highlighted by Katie-Jay Scott, the 'White gaze' perceives White Western practitioners not merely as experts, but as neutral actors in all contexts.[22] The inference being that, in addition to lacking the capacity necessary for project leadership, local practitioners are not neutral actors and so are unable to provide services for all. The perceived neutrality and expertise of White Westerners positions them as benevolent humanitarians instrumental to the 'advancement' of the contexts they are operating in, reinforcing the 'White saviour' mentality that is pervasive across the sector. Given the aid system imagines itself to be operating neutrally, prioritising locales in most need without any racial consideration, discussions around lingering colonial dynamics are often controversial, if not taboo.

During the consultation, Degan Ali pointed to the connection between the 'White saviour complex', the perceived neutrality of Whiteness, and the idea that international workers in the aid, development and peacebuilding fields are innocent and well-meaning:

> *There is a notion that aid workers cannot be racist because they sacrifice their lives to help brown and black people in Africa. Because of their assumed self-sacrificing and inherently benevolent work, white development workers are taken as 'good' and 'trustworthy'.*

Willy Kokolo expanded on the concept of the 'White saviour' by focusing on the Western practitioners themselves:

> *I believe every Western aid worker who works in the Global South does that for selfish reasons … There's plenty of things to be done to help people in Western countries as well (homeless persons, social misery, etc.), there's no need to go to the Global South to feel useful.*

Summarising the discussion around terminology and in particular the concept of decolonising aid, some participants asked whether the aid system could in fact be decolonised. In response, Ana Werkstetter Caravaca argued:

> *Aid and peacebuilding cannot be decolonised any more than you can decolonise the state, the police or academia … these are all institutions that have been instrumental in creating the colonial, modern world system and which indeed sustain many of its global hierarchies. You cannot dismantle coloniality within the very institutions that uphold it.*

Richard Ndi agreed, asking:

> *Can we deconstruct aid from colonialism? I think this will be a chasing after the wind … Colonisation put the colonial powers in a vantage position with the colonised, and structures were put in place by the colonisers to perpetuate this vantage position. It will be difficult for the Western powers to give aid to dismantle structures they put in place to sustain their vantage position to the colonised countries.*

4. The Colonial Roots and Legacy of Aid and Peacebuilding

An important first step towards decolonising development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding is examining how the three sectors came to take their current form. On the first day of the consultation, participants focused on contextualising the aid system's current challenges within its colonial past, sharing examples of two major fallacies underpinning the modern-day aid, development and peacebuilding system – that it is historically and geographically neutral.[23]

Addressing the first of these fallacies, Rita Trias Prats stated that:

> *Starting the story of 'development' and 'aid' in the present as disconnected from the past turns questions of responsibility and structural reform into matters of empathy and generosity. The tendency in the development sector and international institutions of exercising wilful amnesia/active forgetting of colonial histories risks turning 'aid' into a move to innocence. Why is it that we talk about 'aid' rather than about 'repair'?*

The term 'repair' connects to the viewpoint that the modern-day aid system should explicitly be understood as a form of systemic reparations for the violence inflicted in many donor countries' colonial and imperial past. Academic Althea-Maria Rivas argues that this deliberate neutralising of the aid system's violent past is another manifestation of its 'White gaze'. [24]

Another way the aid system has disassociated itself from its colonial legacy is through an insistence on a neutral form of 'professionalism'. An anonymous participant delved into this phenomenon, arguing that the modern-day aid system:

> *emerged out of professionalisation of social movements but this professionalisation has had the effect of neutralising or depoliticising activism and social movements, to the point that activists and movements working towards structural transformation are considered radical.*

The modern aid system's supposedly apolitical stance, whereby it strives to meet community needs without addressing underlying political causes, mirrors the colonial powers' relief efforts. Participants discussed how colonial powers would organise humanitarian aid for populations suffering as a consequence of living under colonial control. Beginning in the nineteenth century, humanitarian efforts were primarily organised by colonial powers in colonised territories, with resources distributed first to Europeans and then to colonised indigenous populations.[25]

As a perceived indication of the inferiority of colonised peoples, race became both a motivating factor in humanitarian efforts and a legitimate cause for discrimination and exclusion.[26] Lumenge Lubangu shared examples of how similar patterns of racial stereotyping continue today, using an example from DRC:

> *We are witnessing other factors of indirect racism where the most marginalised populations, victims of the effects of repeated war, are so isolated, lack of fair justice, lack of assistance. The historical links between development and colonialism, the motivations and the thinking which designed the existing system depend on the management of public goods by the colonies and the capacity of the population to eradicate the poverty line and recover a lasting peace.*

Lubangu was one of numerous participants who could see the parallels between past colonial dynamics and modern-day challenges. One such parallel that came up frequently is how relationships between INGOs and indigenous populations replicate colonial dynamics, with Amjad Saleem arguing that:

> *when we are still debating in terms of localisation, how and what it means to have that local indigenous person to be represented there, then we are upholding the fact that the 'local black and brown subjects' are not ready to take control of their destiny. When our 'local partners' come from the elite of the country we are working in, speak in English, say the jargons we want them to say, then we are definitely reproducing the colonial mentality of seeking out the 'brown sahibs' who were seen as the buffer with the colonials, who were the elite and had power but could 'represent' the colonial power.*

Participant Marie Huyette agreed, commenting that:

> *Today…the "local" elite fails to challenge this new structural colonialism and so often comforts northern humanitarian workers in their doing-good, so that the power and importance given to them is not taken away.*

While this report is not arguing that the modern-day aid, development and peacebuilding sectors are a repackaging of colonialism, it is important to note that this perspective came up both in research[27] for this report and during the consultation. As countries gained independence, newly established states had to adapt to the existing international structures created by their former colonisers. As a result, some suggest the decolonial moment merely transformed the nature of, rather than eradicated, colonial dynamics.[28]

Catherine Martha Agwang summarised the opinion of the modern-day aid system as a method of continued colonialism as:

> *countries ravaged by colonialism continue to be ravaged by loans that leave postcolonial nations worse off economically than before and keep them in a never-ending cycle of debt to the West … Structurally, developmental aid further reinforces the systems it purports to change.*

Other participants pointed to the aid system's ideological roots in a Eurocentric understanding of development and progress, which serves to reinforce racially-based hierarchies of knowledge, power and control. In some cases, the violence of colonialism is sanitised in order to promote its supposedly 'positive' outcomes, such as the British construction of intricate transportation systems.

Several participants noted that the idea of linear progress towards a common, 'modern' future is a fundamentally colonial concept, a point that was discussed in more depth on day one of the consultation during the session on the use of terminology such as modernity. Previously colonised aid recipients in the Global South are transformed into 'objects of development', perceived as lacking agency and in need of capacity building from the Global North.

This critique of the aid system perceiving non-White, non-Western actors as requiring its assistance arose frequently during the consultation. Participants went as far as stating their awareness of needing to cater to the 'White gaze', as well as the White saviour complex of certain international practitioners, in order to acquire necessary funding. Facundo Rinaudo Correa observed that trying to meet the current interests of the aid system has resulted in a:

> *lack of long-term processes that allow real change, [an] immense amount of time (and resources) that grassroots organisations use to access to funding could be used in doing actual peacebuilding. At the end, we are wasting a lot of social capital.*

Correa's point demonstrates how a paternalistic insistence on centring the interests of Western funders, coupled with the assumption of a lack of capacity, in fact ends up decreasing local organisations' capacity. Participants concluded that regardless of the good intentions of many employed in the aid, development and peacebuilding sectors, dismantling long-established colonial dynamics is a challenge that requires rethinking almost every structure.
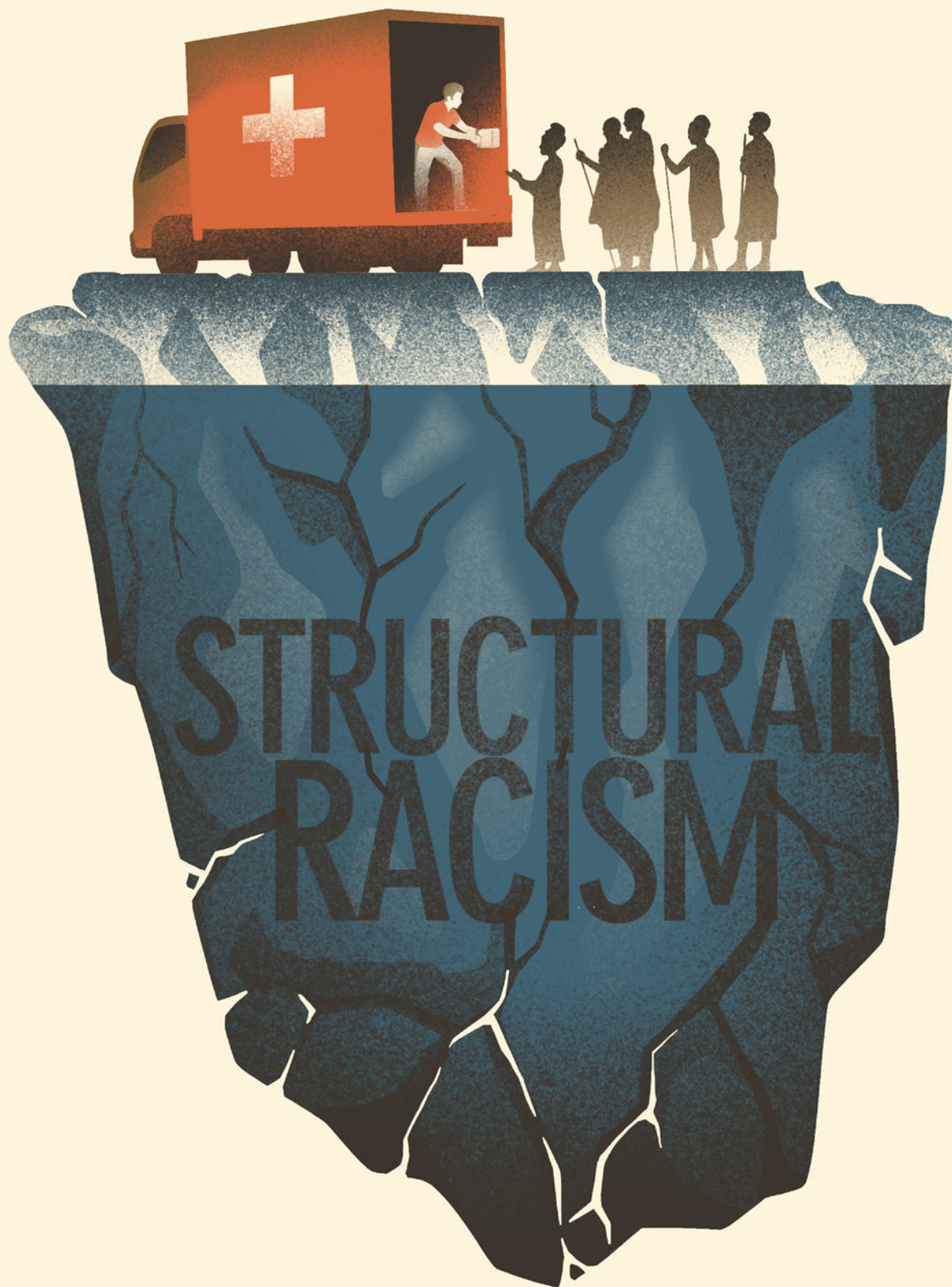
STRUCTURAL RACISM

5. Structural Racism in the Modern-Day Aid System

The second day of the consultation focused on the structural and programmatic barriers facing local actors, and how these often were rooted in structural racism.

Structural barriers

Participants reflected on the current aid flows from the Global North to the Global South, which often map onto the soft power politics between former colonial powers and the states they previously colonised, a point that has been made by various academics over the years.[29] Several participants wondered if this represents a continuation of extractive colonial global–local relationships, with foreign aid serving to justify the presence of international actors in country. Sara Torrelles built on this interpretation, asking:

> *Are INGOs aware of the history of the countries where we work before they start engaging with them? Are they aware of what their presence (predominantly if not entirely white) there can trigger?*

Adrien Mutabesha agreed, saying:

> *'It is difficult to discuss decolonization as all the negative memories of the inequalities are still observable. We must then discuss recolonization or neo-colonialism through [the eyes of the] African man instead'*

During consultation discussions, participants highlighted how 'national' staff are often made to conform to 'international norms', while international practitioners do not alter their behaviours according to the cultural norms of project contexts. They also shared experiences of less experienced international staff being favoured for project leadership positions over local staff based on nepotism and fear of local corruption and mismanagement. Throughout this discussion, participants repeatedly referred to their experiences as manifestations of 'unconscious racial bias.' An anonymous participant challenged that interpretation by stating:

> *The element of 'unconscious bias' seems to be a recurring issue when it comes to recruitment and accountability. However, if organisations/agencies refuse to hire senior leadership from the countries they are operating in because they might be susceptible to corruption, then is that still an 'unconscious' bias?*

Participants repeatedly pointed to how asymmetrical power dynamics are further cemented by the aid system's conventions and norms, with language a key example. In addition to practitioners having to speak working-level English (as the language dominates the system to the near exclusion of any other), there is an expectation that, in order to successfully navigate the aid system, practitioners be familiar with the ever-expanding list of sector-specific jargon.

Sara Torrelles demonstrated how the sector's linguistic norms can alienate some people from engaging, asking other participants to reflect on whether they could:

> *be unintentionally excluding some people from these conversations just by using such [academic] language? Is this one of the ways in which [those working in the INGO/NGO sector] have been affected by the perceived legitimacy that is assigned to the one who is articulate, speaks 'good' English and can provide references? In my experience, this is not the language that national CSOs, activists and movements use or relate to.*

Participants frequently noted how unequal power dynamics between practitioners from the Global North and those from the Global South are further reinforced through so-called 'accountability' systems that have become progressively more codified and professionalised. In an attempt to minimise risk, corruption and programme failure, INGOs have created complex administrative norms and unachievable benchmarks, which, according to Chrisantus Lapang, result in some locally-led organisations being 'treated like they have a track record of criminality when in reality they have worked amicably with these organisations.

With practitioners from the Global South scrambling to be viewed as competent, their existing skill-sets are often minimised or overlooked.

Throughout the consultation, participants shared experiences of their skills as local practitioners being devalued in favour of those of international practitioners. Prince Charles Dickson expressed frustration at having his particular skills overlooked due to his race, sharing:

> *National staff and Global South staff bring particular skills, competencies and experience to the sector. Often, we can offer special insight into the dynamics of a conflict, born of our lived experience. In some cases, we speak local languages. Our backgrounds can mean we're adaptable in maddening conditions. Clearly black aid workers have a lot to offer the humanitarian sector when given the chance. Still, we're not valued by the powerful agencies and their Western staff who run the sector. We had no idea that the colour of our skin would define our work so deeply to the extent of questioning our ability, enthusiasm and purpose in life.*

The devaluing of practitioners from non-Western contexts is due in part to their being viewed as would-be 'beneficiaries' of any programme that might be implemented – they are assumed to require saving, thus making it incongruous that they may be qualified, have certain skills and be able to provide aid themselves.[30]

The notion that local organisations and communities 'lack capacity' surfaced throughout the consultation, across almost all the discussion threads, indicating that participants regarded it as one of the most overt examples of structural racism in the sector. Inspired by Séverine Autesserre's book *Peaceland*,[31] consultation participant Lorina McAdam noted that:

> *Many NGOs for example, hire 'technical expertise' rather than 'contextual expertise', which – intentionally or otherwise – gives international staff an advantage over national staff … even though so many of the solutions to many complex issues will be found through an understanding of the context, rather than the theory. There is somehow an assumption that context can be learned (by international staff), but that the theory etc. can't (by national staff).*

Participants observed that, in a continuation of colonial dynamics, aid, development and peacebuilding policies, concepts and practices are mostly developed far from the communities where the work will eventually take place. While the aid sector has attempted to create opportunities for local practitioners to provide feedback, rarely are they invited to input on the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a project.[32]

Peace Direct's opinion: We need to talk about country offices

INGO country offices are a well-established part of the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding landscape. They enable INGOs to extend their reach and impact globally, while providing accountability to donors and an audit trail of financial flows and effort from the 'Global North' to the 'Global South'.

Country offices are also one of the most visible and entrenched manifestations of structural racism in the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding system. They enable INGOs to extend and maintain control of much of the 'value chain', which starts with donor funds being awarded to the INGO headquarters in the Global North and ends with the (typically White, Western) humanitarian worker 'in the field' directing activities. Such control is often framed as being a necessary part of large complex organisations' accountability to their donors. However, the maintenance of country offices also reinforces power imbalances between the INGO and local organisations, entrenches Western notions of 'low capacity' in the host country, and cements existing relationships between Western donors (both those in Western capitals and those based in the host country) and Western-educated, mostly White, senior staff. This model has proven remarkably resistant to change.

While there are many variations of the country office structure, they are almost always subordinate to a global headquartered organisation, often based in the Global North. In this way, the governance and strategy of the country office is secondary to the strategy and governance of the 'parent' organisation. Country offices have been known to open and close at short notice due to changes in INGO strategies or shortfalls in INGO funding. At its worst, the INGO country office operates like a neo-colonialist outpost, staffed by White Western expatriates, dominating the funding for development, humanitarian and peacebuilding work while implementing programmes with little local input, thereby competing with – and displacing – local organisations.

Even the most well-intentioned country offices – for example, those that do not implement directly but fund and support local organisations – unwittingly reinforce structurally racist norms, such as participating in INGO-dominated (and sometimes INGO-exclusive) coordination mechanisms and becoming part of a close-knit, exclusive expatriate network, where who you know can be the key to securing the next grant, and is often more important than the integrity and local rootedness of the work. All INGOs are guilty of this to some degree, and Peace Direct is now looking at how we have benefitted from this system.

Since the Grand Bargain, there have been signs that some INGOs are starting to shift their model(s) by attempting to fund more local entities and even transition out of their role as overseas offices. [33] But there is also a risk that 'localisation' could be reframed to simply mean hiring more local staff or having more local staff in senior positions, including on the Board of country offices. Such technocratic 'solutions' do not address the structural problems inherent to the INGO country office structure. Until we talk about power, who holds it and how it can be claimed by those we purport to serve, current INGO structures are unlikely to change.

Another group often absent from decision-making spaces are young people. Mamsu Kallon emphasised the importance of youth having:

> *the power to communicate their own priorities rather than [those] being left to well-meaning philanthropists in the West. Decolonised aid would [place] expertise firmly in the hands of those who are the so-called subjects of aid.*

A key part of ensuring that local interests are prioritised is allowing local communities to lead on financial decisions. Yet, only 12% of international grant dollars from US foundations goes directly to organisations based in the country where programmes are implemented.[34] Thus, everything from who controls the disbursement and accounting of funds to who defines the success of a project is rooted in the values and beliefs of the Global North, with the Global South required to apply this framework in order to access resources.

Procedural barriers

Local actors are faced with additional procedural challenges as a consequence of the systemic racism and discrimination that legitimises the centralisation of power in the Global North.

Procedural barriers in programme design and funding

In recent years, INGOs have made concerted efforts to consult with local practitioners when designing programmes. Though these efforts have sought to ensure local buy-in and context-appropriate programming, programme development is itself rooted in Western approaches. Cathy Amenya elaborated on this point, pointing out:

> *many of the theories of change were developed by Northern academics and practitioners. When we are implementing projects, the agenda and theories are set by Westerners and therefore, even if you are implementing a project developed by locals, the methodology and theories of change have an influence on how you structure the project.*

Peace Direct's opinion: Racism in communications and fundraising

One key example of the inequality between the Global North and Global South is how images of Black, Brown and Indigenous people are used by communications and fundraising teams. Nikki van der Gaag, a gender and development consultant, points to conversations that took place in 1987 as part of an international research project on the need to rethink the images selected to encourage donations.[35] African consultants shared how the infamous images of hungry children and Black people lining up for food not only divorced photographs' subjects from the wider environmental, social and historical realities that led to the 1983–1985 famine in Ethiopia, but presented Africans as passively incapable of addressing their own challenges. This image of Africa as a land of endless struggle, dependent on the West to save it, exists in the shared imagination of the aid system and is rooted in the 'White gaze'. In financially supporting the organisations using such images, passive Western consumers are positioned as 'saviours' of Black and Brown bodies. Those organisations tend to be located in the West and run by people with no personal connection to those photographed. The harm such images inflict cannot be overstated: they dehumanise and exotify Black, Brown and Indigenous people in crisis-affected regions; reinforce the sense of the White Westerner as saviour of the less capable non-White population; and have, at times, impacted non-White, non-Western populations' sense of capacity.

Furthermore, these frameworks are rooted in concepts and language imposed by state and institutional donors, which grant recipients then have to adopt as stipulated in their funding contracts or tight result frameworks.[36] Bassim Assuqair gave the example of the UN Humanitarian Appeals:

> *Local actors are feeling isolated or not up to the level to understand the imposed system, which creates a power of knowledge relation where local actors are in the position of being unaware or not capacitated.*

While participants acknowledged that nominally these frameworks are there to better support development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding projects, the actual result is that money from the Global North ends up hindering the effectiveness of practitioners in the Global South. One example of excessively complex paperwork is the templates required for donor reporting, which Cathy Amenya argued:

> *are so advanced that it inadvertently excludes the local communities and organisations. The requirements favour international organisations that employ many of the citizens from the donor countries, the monitoring and evaluation processes so advanced that it automatically excludes the local communities, yet it is the local communities that need help.*

Catherine Martha Agwang elaborated on this point, observing:

> *Funding mechanisms incentivise gaming the system like submitting perfect proposals that aren't actually based on local needs or contexts. And funding is not accessible to those who are often the most effective actors: local organisations. So this funding comes with 'Donor Templates' which are tools, tailored to what the donor needs, not what the communities or beneficiaries need. It's even more worse when measuring the outcome of the aid; still there are templates … It is not designed with local values, knowledge and experience at the heart of it, where the Western people see African people as lacking the capacity to execute projects or in utilising the aid. But this just doesn't match the reality I know.*

In addition to local actors bearing the brunt of the administrative work, there is the issue of accountability, where the emphasis is on donor accountability rather than accountability to communities. On this subject, Katie-Jay Scott argued:

> *We can no longer be 'accountable' to our donors. We must be accountable to the communities we are working alongside. That is what will bring us towards mutual aid and mutual liberation.*

Case study:

An intersectional view of #AidToo sexual abuses and global accountability

With the #MeToo movement galvanising global action against sexual violence, aid workers began using the hashtag #AidToo on social media to discuss the prevalence of sexual violence and harassment in the aid industry. A large-scale study carried out by the Humanitarian Women's Network surveying over 1,000 women across 70 aid and development organisations highlighted that 86% of respondents knew of a woman who had been sexually abused.[37] Further investigations into the aid industry led to high-profile scandals in the sector, prompting aid organisations and donors to dismiss staff for inappropriate behaviour, update codes of conduct and safeguarding principles, and generally overhaul their organisational culture.

Yet, these measures fail to address the deep-rooted structural imbalances underpinning the issue. Many of these abuses, committed by high-level international staff – mostly White men from the Global North – on national staff or local women and girls, have highlighted the unequal power dynamics inherent to the aid sector,[38] with incidents of sexual abuse often tolerated, hidden or buried. Furthermore, they point to the perpetrators' prevailing attitudes towards local communities, as such sexual violence cannot be separated from the wider context of power structures embedded in the international aid system and the history of colonial violence.

The intersections between gender, race and identity play a major role in how sexual abuse takes place in the aid sector. According to NGO Safe Space – an intersectional feminist platform created to hold sexual abusers to account and support survivors – the aid sector harbours a 'white saviour complex' that fails to acknowledge its entrenched privilege and the harm it inflicts on vulnerable groups, notably women of colour.[39] Zimbabwean feminist activist Nancy Kachingwe further claims that racialised perceptions of sexual violence have enabled a culture of impunity in the aid sector: 'By posing sexual violence and abuse in the South as a problem of the racialised other, and by contrast, presenting NGOs as white saviours, the sector has allowed itself to drift down a treacherously slow river of denial and obfuscation about its own sexual abuse problem until it has hit the fierce rapids of reality.'[40]

This reinforces the harmful colonial narrative that relegates issues of sexual and gender-based violence to the 'uncivilised' Global South. Such narratives harm non-White communities, especially African/ Black men, who have historically been positioned as inherently dangerous and sexually aggressive. They also harm White communities, as by insisting such problems are limited to the Global South, instances of sexual and gender-based violence in the Global North are overlooked, minimised or normalised. According to Kachingwe, responding to these issues requires more than procedural measures around safeguarding and gender sensitivity. Indeed, despite some key advances in safeguarding, sexual abuse and exploitation remain widespread across the aid sector.[41] What should be emphasised instead is stronger inclusion of women – particularly from the Global South – in decision-making, prioritising and supporting women's leadership across the sector, and providing funds directly to women-led groups.

Kyra Buchko agreed, but cautioned:

> *we must be strategic in moving away from donor accountability. Donors themselves must truly buy into the value, advantages and centrality of locally-led engagement. We have seen a lot of lip service from various donors, but in the end, there are (and have always been) foreign policy/national interest concerns – albeit at different levels of importance – which shape the objectives of any international development assistance programme. While that will be very difficult to change, no matter how the political winds blow, we will continue to engage with donors to elevate the key role of local leadership in achieving positive impact.*

Prince Charles Dickson reminded the group that, in order to effect meaningful change, the systemic racism and flaws within the aid system must first be acknowledged:

> *Without this understanding, we are building on quicksand, trying to transition to being anti-racist, for example, whilst clinging to structures that can be perceived as racist. Instead, we must forge a new path towards 'power with' humanitarian action, working with people affected by conflict and violence and elevating work focusing on diversity, inclusion and accountability.*

Themrise Khan shared a similar concern, though her critique is of the approach taken by donors to women's issues:

> *They want to play it safe with training and capacity building and empowerment [for women]. None of this will be successful if we don't address the systemic issues that plague us first.*

Programmes directed at supporting women's rights focus on gender-based violence/violence against women and girls, and reproductive and maternal health, thereby reinforcing stereotypes about the issues that matter to women – that is, issues that pertain either to what has been done to them or to women fulfilling their 'natural purpose' (motherhood).[42] The narrow focus of funding for women's issues and the fact that 99% of pledged funds for women's issues never reach local organisations make apparent the aid system's paternalistic relationship in this area.

Throughout the consultation, participants reinforced a desire to build meaningful connections not only with donors, INGOs and policymakers, but with other local practitioners.

Stephanie Kimou, the founder of Population Works Africa, invites funders to allow local practitioners to be the architects of their own futures, investing in them as 'resource deployment – not ideology deployment, not values deployment, not white body deployment'.[43] If this were to happen, projects involving capacity building or women's empowerment would no longer be co-opted as forms of neo-colonial education, arising from the paternalistic assumption that non-Westerners need to be taught the Western, or 'right', way of doing things.[44] As Sawssan Abou-Zahr commented during the consultation, 'There is a thin line between aid and disguised colonisation'.

Case study:

How the 'Shift the Power' movement emerged: From theory to practice

Over the past few decades, INGOs have emerged as an important player in promoting global democratisation and accountability. Their ability to fill service delivery gaps and bolster good governance agendas, coupled with their perceived independence and flexibility – unburdened by government bureaucracy – has enabled them to transform the profile and scale of the civil society landscape. INGOs have become much bigger, more numerous and increasingly professionalised, with significant development assistance now channelled through them.[46]

Ironically, this unparalleled success has highlighted significant systemic issues that are undermining INGO's effectiveness and added value. INGOs are increasingly dependent on international donors, placing pressure on them to be more accountable to funders than beneficiary communities. Moreover, donors' insistence on working with 'professional' INGOs has shifted aid delivery into being a technocratic system that prioritises results and value for money over wider structural and transformational changes.[47] Partly as a result of this, many INGOs have found themselves increasingly divorced from their civil society roots, which has directly impacted their relationships with local practitioners. Local actors have claimed that INGOs are 'out of touch' and 'corporatised', crowding out local actors and ultimately undermining diversity in local civil society.

This situation has provoked increasing demands for INGOs to be more driven by 'Southern agendas', emphasising the agency of local civil society actors. Such demands led to the hashtag campaign and movement, #shiftthepower, first introduced by the Global Fund for Community Foundations in 2016, which calls for a paradigm shift to address the inherent power imbalances of the international aid system. This successful campaign, coupled with recent high-profile scandals and the limitations of the localisation agenda,[48] has pushed many large INGOs to reflect on their practices and make practical changes.

The momentum from this initiative has led to several practical initiatives, including:

- ↗ A number of like-minded organisations deliberated and signed a 'Shift the Power' manifesto in 2019, outlining the movement's key principles and values;
- ↗ A group of local and international organisations led by Partos banded together to establish a Shift-The-Power Lab and develop a Power Awareness Tool to analyse how power affects partnerships in development;
- ↗ The Shift the Power project, led by the START Network in a consortium with six INGOs, focused on strengthening the capacity and influence of local and national humanitarian actors, as well as re-balancing the aid system in a more equitable manner;[49]
- ↗ Rights CoLab, a network of global social change leaders, established the RINGO Project, which seeks to re-imagine how global civil society is shaped, focusing particularly on the role of the INGO in this space.

The unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic present a key opportunity to accelerate this shift. As lockdowns spread throughout the world, expats flew home or were confined to their home offices in capital cities. 'Monitoring visits' by donors and INGOs were cancelled and the entire sector had to rely wholly on local organisations. In addition, local researchers led in-field research, providing the majority of the information and data needed by academics, advocates and policymakers. This has served to highlight that the key issue has not been a lack of capacity but rather a lack of opportunity. With humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work disrupted, what was striking was how much activity continued at the community level, led by local organisations and groups. As one commentator noted, 'The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to confront that our normal was the problem'. The question is whether the aid system will use the seismic disruption caused by COVID-19 to re-evaluate its own role and recognise the need to give up power and control so that local groups can lead their efforts, or whether the gravitational pull of the status quo will propel the sector back to where it was before the pandemic hit.

Procedural barriers in research

Another area where this fine line becomes apparent is research. Researchers in the Global North usually lead the proposal stage, then later invite practitioners located in the Global South to contribute. Michelle Parlevliet stated that:

> *When it comes to patterns from colonial history being replicated, complicity of international actors in reproducing colonial hierarchies, and the presence of 'white/imperial gaze' – just consider the dominance of white voices in academic and policy literature on and in humanitarianism, development and peacebuilding.*

Participants noted that just as with all aspects of the aid system, practitioners from the Global South who have existing connections with practitioners or researchers from the Global North, whose level of English is advanced enough to work in, or who have studied at universities in the Global North, are more likely to be invited than practitioners without similar familiarities with the West. In addition, local practitioners or actors who do not speak one of the three primary languages of the international systemEnglish, French, and Spanish, or who don't use the 'right' type of language, may simply be excluded from the research process, despite potentially having extensive, pertinent knowledge on the issue. Prince Charles Dickson shared an example of this phenomenon, recounting how a White American team leader:

> *rebuked beneficiaries up in Bentui – north of South Sudan – for referring to themselves as 'niggers'. He excluded the young men from any decision-making entirely because of the self-speak that the White man considered unsavoury.*

This story is a prime example of the subtle ways the 'White gaze' can manifest, and how it can centre the comfort of the White practitioner over that of non-White practitioners.

Participants also pointed out that non-Western practitioners who are invited to participate in research are usually relegated to the role of 'expert in the field', with Western researchers leading the research design, methodology development, tools and data collection.[45] Moreover, local researchers are positioned as field assistants and, once the field research is completed, Western researchers take the lead in writing the expected outputs and are credited with the work. There are many ethical concerns when it comes to extracting stories from local populations and then tasking someone divorced from the context with disseminating these stories to others even further removed from the context. Mamsu Kallon suggested peer research as a research approach that could meaningfully shift power to a variety of marginalised communities, including youth, giving them 'the power to communicate their own priorities rather than that being left to well-meaning philanthropists in the West'. Through centring the most marginalised within the humanitarianism system, rather than the most privileged, such an approach could contribute to genuinely shifting asymmetrical power dynamics.

Diagram

How structural racism shows up in the sector

Recruitment

Implicit bias in recruiting western educated, white staff into management positions over locally educated staff

Strategies

INGO emphasis on professionalization and impartiality that implicitly devalue local knowledge and ways of working. Organisational strategies that prioritise income growth and expansion of staffing/activities over shifting power to local actors

Fundraising

INGO fundraising/ communications that portray people in the Global South as helpless and without agency, to generate sympathy and funding, and to reinforce the notion of the white saviour or 'professional' INGO

Knowledge Generation and Analysis

Implicit preference for western led analysis of contexts in the Global South. This includes the dominance of western models of monitoring and evaluation.

Partnerships with local actors

Donors and INGOs seeking 'implementing partners' and establishing disempowering partnerships that focus on a contractor-contractee relationship

Attitudes

Donor and INGO assumptions of the inherent neutrality of their work; that local communities lack capacity and skills and require external training; that local communities can't be trusted to manage funds

Funding

Calls for proposals limited to western INGOs or NGOs of a certain size and structure; Due diligence requirements that exclude local organisations; lower risk threshold when dealing with local orgs.

Organisational Structures

Establishment and maintenance of INGO country offices which extends and entrenches the INGO footprint rather than reducing it over time

Relationships

Establishing networks and ways of working that privilege relationships with people from the Global North, including informal discussions where resource allocation decisions are made

Language

References to low capacity of local actors and 'beneficiaries'; of 'least developed' countries; risks of fraud and mismanagement

6. What Would a Manifesto for Decolonising Aid Look Like?

The final day of the consultation focused on solutions and suggestions for activists and the wider donor and INGO community.

Participants were first asked what would a manifesto for decolonising aid look like? Below are a selection of the responses:

Funding and programme development

Catherine Martha Agwang:

"*First, fund courageously. Donors must have the courage to accept uncertainty and messiness in humanitarian response and rely less on perfect proposals that have to be submitted in strict templates and timelines. And INGOs who are often sub-granting to smaller organisations must also have the courage to take a chance and invest in local actors, especially by making it easier for them to apply for funding independently. Second, trust generously, in particular seeing more local and national staff as decision-makers. Third, measure differently, in particular asking yourself whether there is space for what local communities value. And finally, be a bridge, not an expert. If INGOs keep imposing their well thought Western-centric project management standards onto local people and staff, they will always see them as lacking in capacity. The task, therefore, is not to assume the lack of expertise, but to connect colleagues to the resources and power they need to implement successful projects — transforming capacity building, into capacity bridging.*"

Pascal Richard:

"*Develop other funding modalities and systems (community philanthropy and others) is a potential key leverage point with international funding for peacebuilding dropping in the face of COVID and lower GDPs.*"

Hassan Mutubwa:

"*Some of the key issues which need to be considered include transparency and accountability in funding, inclusion and involvement of the beneficiaries, and not imposing ideas on or without involving people.*"

Degan Ali:

"*If we change the framing of humanitarian and development funding to reparation, then the funding that is currently withheld from locals as if they are 'risky' and lacking capacity, is a RIGHT and not a favour being awarded to local organisations.*"

Attitude of practitioners

Angie Whitehurst:

1) Respect the rights of everyone and their socio-economic cultural differences. 2) Lead not by self-righteousness, holier than thou power pressure profit politics. Lead with an economic compassion and foster and enable self-sufficiency without creating further colonial control, dependency and purposeful persistent denial of equity in education, science, technology, economic growth and development. 3) Chastise not. 4) Condemn not. 5) Be open minded.

Amjad Saleem:

*We need to be **willing to test out new methods of operation and engagement, fail at them, and then learn from that** … I would perhaps want to add the following commandments: 1) listen, listen, listen; 2) act with humility; 3) be open; 4) be inclusive and accessible; 5) admit failure and learn from that. Would add the spirit of compassion as well to the manifesto – treat others as they wish to be treated.*

Danny Gotto:

*There is a need to create **meaningful partnerships** between INGOs and local CSOs and this partnership shouldn't be tied to only when Requests for Proposals come through, which makes the relationship exploitative. INGOs must take it upon themselves to have lasting relationships with local actors, share knowledge, skills and other opportunities beyond the grants and potential joint projects.*

Monitoring & Evaluation and reporting

Lorina McAdam:

*1) Donors require extensive reporting, and audits; and accountability is typically defined in terms of how money is used. To decolonise, donors and local partner recipients will agree on essential factors required to demonstrate accountability, perhaps using local auditors, and engaging the participating community. **Accountability is defined in terms of impact on the community,** as judged by the community. 2) Donors require complex M&E frameworks, impose required indicators, sometimes accompanied by external evaluations carried out by consultants. To decolonise, donors, local partners and participating community agree on how the success of the project will be measured, what will be needed to demonstrate that, and allowing for that to change over time as the community learns and evolves.*

Pratima Narayan:

*Language matters, but also, we also need to think about **how we value knowledge, knowledge production and agency.***

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Throughout the consultation, participants stated time and again that they wanted to be meaningfully included in aid system decision-making. Past attempts to remedy the unequal global–local power dynamics that privilege Global North countries have focused on localising development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding efforts. Yet, these attempts have had limited success, due in part to a failure to address the aid system's colonial legacy and ongoing racism.

Decolonising norms, institutions and systems that have developed over decades will inevitably take time, requiring the dedicated efforts and collaboration of governments, international organisations and local civil society. However, as this report has explored, decolonising the aid system is a necessity if we are to shift global power dynamics and ensure the sustainability of development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding projects.

Those who constitute local civil society are currently being overlooked, and their context-specific knowledge, innovativeness and strong local networks are not mobilised to their potential. The aid system can no longer afford to overlook, minimise and under-value local knowledge and leadership. Moreover, it can no longer afford to perpetuate the 'White gaze', which privileges practitioners from the Global North – particularly White practitioners – to the detriment of local actors and the wider community.

To truly decolonise aid, development and peacebuilding, a multi-pronged process is needed. International organisations, governments and funders must address the prejudices and stereotypes that may be impacting their willingness to trust in local (non-White) practitioners. They should also consider the value of indigenous knowledge, incorporating alternative ways of thought into their reporting and evaluating. Furthermore, they need to assess their policies, organisational culture and relationships with local practitioners in order to identify whether existing norms promote extractive relationships over serving the needs of local communities.

Participants suggested a variety of strategies and new approaches that could address some of these challenges and, in time, ensure the inclusion of marginalised communities. It is not enough to localise projects; if non-White, non-Western individuals do not hold structural power, the system will simply continue replicating itself, skewing global power dynamics ever more in favour of the Global North. Beyond tokenistic hiring or performative programmes, decolonisation requires existing norms be fundamentally disrupted and dismantled. It requires a commitment to the redistribution of power and resources.

Recommendations for donors, INGOs and policymakers

↗ **1. Acknowledge that structural racism exists**

Acknowledging that structural racism exists does not erase the good that the sector does, nor does it signify a complete rejection of international assistance/cooperation. Moreover, acknowledgement does not imply personal guilt. Nevertheless, there is a collective responsibility to tackle the problem. Donors and INGOs can help by auditing their assumptions and practices, in the process assessing how structural racism may be showing up in their work (see diagram X). This could involve examining how ingrained racist, discriminatory or biased assumptions have impacted the donor or INGO's relationship with local organisations and people, especially if local actors hold multiple intersecting marginalised identities. An important first step would be to put a public statement on the organisation's website and in its communication materials acknowledging its power and position within the aid system, the biases that may have informed the organisation's past actions, and the systemic power dynamics that privilege certain people over others.

↗ **2. Encourage conversations with grantees and communities about power**

Donors, policymakers and INGOs need to spend as much time listening to the concerns of local groups and communities about the imbalances of power in the system as they do about their material, economic and skills needs. Conversations about power, who holds it and how it is wielded will not often be raised by local groups. Thus, donors and INGOs need to allow opportunities for a critique of their power and practices. This could be started by asking grantees to complete an anonymous survey that solicits their perceptions of the organisation, its staff and its past interactions with them. This can then be built on by gathering more detailed feedback from grantees. Such a process could both form the basis of a conversation and create the conditions that would allow for this.

↗ **3. Create space for change**

The changes needed in the system will be driven by actors across the spectrum, so it is important that donors and INGOs create spaces and opportunities for local groups, organisations and grantees to share experiences and strategise together. It is especially important to create spaces centred around those with more marginalised identities, such as women, youth and disabled people. While such strategising may lead to groups challenging an organisation or individual's power, they must be prepared to accept this, however uncomfortable. In fact, if a conversation about power is not uncomfortable, it is unlikely that open or honest opinions are being shared, or that the necessary enabling environment has been created. Donors and INGOs should also be aware that some groups will claim space for change, rather than waiting to be invited into a newly created space, and must be open to relinquishing control of these processes.

↗ **4. Mind your language**

Reassessing existing language, as well as adopting new language and terminologies, can help in shifting from frameworks rooted in colonial histories to new, inclusive and creative approaches. Donors and INGOs should phase out terms that are no longer appropriate, such as 'beneficiaries', 'capacity building' and even 'aid' (a term used in this report). Local communities should be allowed to lead the change in terminology, with organisations deferring to them where possible and re-evaluating where not.

5. Encourage a culture of openness to critique

A culture needs to be created that is actively opposed to racist, discriminatory and prejudiced language and practices. This requires everyone to speak up when they witness incidents of racism and/or discrimination, rather than putting the responsibility on non-White, non-Western actors. This requires all organisations to establish safe spaces for internal critique, particularly for people of colour within White-dominated organisations. These safe spaces must be cognisant of gender, age and any other factors that might impact someone's willingness to critique. Moreover, leaders of organisations should acknowledge their own failings to encourage a culture of self-reflection and honesty.

6. Fund courageously

'Fund courageously' is an invitation to funders to create funding pathways that are more accessible and inclusive, as well as to accept greater levels of uncertainty and possible failure. When funders accept the possibility of programme failure, it opens the door to innovative and flexible funding approaches, such as funders taking on the brunt of the bureaucratic work or adopting context-specific measures of success. Efforts and examples in this realm include organisations pooling funds to mitigate risks, direct funding, PEER funding, the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, setting targets for the provision of unrestricted funding for local organisations, adapting due diligence requirements for local organisations, and modifying eligibility criteria that give preferential treatment to Western INGOs.

7. Recruit differently

Organisations must end the practice of first seeking expatriate staff for any position based overseas. Instead, it should be assumed that all positions can be filled by local staff. For those organisations based in the 'Global North', INGOs should ensure they have policies and strategies to recruit a more diverse pool of staff. Resources such as the WCAPS 'Orgs in Solidarity' 12-point solidarity statement should be used as a basis for such work.[50]

8. Invest in indigenous knowledge and local researchers

Part of decolonising the aid system is examining what is considered legitimate data and who is considered skilled enough to collect it. Funders and organisations should invest in local researchers rather than funding Western researchers' travel, with research rooted in local indigenous values and incorporating indigenous methods. When designing a programme, INGOs should work with local leaders to examine existing models, logframes and theories of change, and adopt new ones rooted in local approaches. Programmes must be evaluated through culturally-specific frameworks, established by local practitioners. Expertise should be reframed to require the inclusion of guidance from, among others, youth experts, feminist experts, women experts and faith/religious experts, thereby allowing for contextual solutions, technical expertise and active locally-led decision-making. To ensure that the relationship between funders, INGOs and local communities is not extractive, the results of the programme and/or research must be shared with the local community, and should serve its needs above those of the organisation.

Recommendations for INGOs specifically

↗ **1. No more White gaze fundraising**

INGOs should end the practice of using imagery and language that diminishes the agency and dignity of communities in its fundraising/marketing materials. Moreover, they should conduct an audit of their external and internal communications to provide a benchmark for future improvements, and consider alternative and collaborative approaches to documenting efforts in the Global South.

↗ **2. Adopt a transition mindset for organisational strategies**

INGOs should consider adopting a transition mindset, putting in place clear milestones for the transfer of power and resources to local organisations. Special attention should be paid to ensure the local organisations that are most proximate to the Global North and most familiar with the international aid system are not privileged. Such a transition mindset should be enshrined in clear organisational strategies that measure success according to the extent to which an INGO is reducing, rather than expanding, its traditional organisational footprint (for example, the number of staff it employs, the level of income it attracts and the number of people and communities it directly serves). Direct implementation should be phased out in favour of a shift of resources to local organisations, and reserved only for exceptional situations at the request of local organisations. Country offices should have clear targets for supporting indigenous civil society organisations, including channelling at least 25% of funding to local organisations, with much more ambitious targets set for the next 5–10 years.

↗ **3. Avoid localisation spin**

INGOs should avoid 'spinning' (i.e. reinterpreting or reframing) localisation to defend a particular organisational position or to justify the status quo. Examples of this practice include defining a country office as 'local' based on the number of locally employed staff it has, the registration of the organisation as a 'National' organisation and the percentage of funds that it raises nationally, rather than from its international 'parent'. If an INGO has a country office, it should accept this identity as an INGO and explain through external communications that it is aware of the power it has and the responsibility it bears to relinquish power.

↗ **4. Re-evaluate partnerships with local organisations**

INGOs should end the practice of seeking short-term 'implementing partners' and instead establish long-term strategic partnerships that are not determined by project cycles. Peace Direct's nine partnership principles of effective partnerships might be a good place for INGOs to start. These are (1) Acknowledge and challenge power imbalances; (2) confront racism and prejudice; (3) Support local leadership; (4) Strive for mutual accountability; (5) Establish long term partnerships; (5) Provide unrestricted funding; (6) Be adaptable, and promote adaptability and resilience with your partners; (7) consider non-financial resources; and (9) Ensure that partnership transitions are a collaborative endeavour.

Recommendations for individuals

↗ 1. Reflect on your identity

In order to dismantle the pervasive 'White gaze' that still dominates the aid, development and peacebuilding sectors, every practitioner – both those who are locally based and those who work internationally – must reflect on their motivation for being involved in this industry. Questions to be asked include: What privileges do your identities afford you? In what ways have you reinforced the 'White gaze' of the sectors?

↗ 2. Remain humble

The history of the aid industry rests on the idea that the West holds the answer. Disassembling the established hierarchy requires international practitioners to approach their work with greater humility. It is vital that they remain open to criticism and feedback from actors in the Global South, and that they reflect on those comments. Part of de-privileging Western knowledge is remaining open to local approaches to knowledge and context-specific understandings of development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding.

↗ 3. Shift access and power

Throughout the consultation, participants shared numerous experiences of a White person from the Global North being given preferential access and opportunities over a person of colour from the Global South. Global North practitioners can thus help shift power towards excluded communities by redirecting opportunities towards marginalised practitioners who would otherwise be overlooked. Those with institutional power and leadership positions could encourage openness around conversations about racism, discrimination and decolonisation. The role played by practitioners from the Global North in decolonising these fields will sometimes be to leverage their power to push for inclusion and sometimes to step back, making space for local practitioners to occupy the space.

↗ 4. Organise

Local activists and practitioners wishing to challenge structural racism and shift power in the system will often find themselves excluded from discussions with those in the system who wish to retain power, or even vilified by them. To address this, it is important that activists organise themselves and connect with other groups both nationally and internationally. There are networks and groupings that support this agenda, such as the NEAR network, CIVICUS and the START network, as well as more informal groups of activists willing to raise this issue at a national and international level.

Appendix A   Glossary of Terms

Anti-racism: the policy or practice of opposing racism, promoting racial tolerance and equity.

Brown (racial category): Brown is used figuratively to refer to people of colour from the Global South who are neither Black nor White. This includes Asian people, Latine and Hispanic people, etc.

Decolonisation: the action or process of a state withdrawing from a former colony, leaving it independent

Global North: consists of the richest and most industrialised countries, which are mainly in the northern part of the world.

Global South: an emerging term, used by the World Bank and other organisations, identifying countries with one side of the underlying global North–South divide

Intersectionality: a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.

Neocolonialism: the practice of using economics, globalisation, cultural imperialism, and conditional aid to influence a country instead of the previous colonial methods of direct military control or indirect political control.

Post-colonialism: the critical study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonised people and their lands.

Racial prejudice: a set of discriminatory or derogatory attitudes based on assumptions deriving from perceptions about race/skin colour.

Structural/institutional racism: a system of structures that have procedures or processes that disadvantage individuals or groups on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group.

Unconscious bias: a term used to describe the associations that we hold which, despite being outside our conscious awareness, can have a significant influence on our attitudes and behaviour.

White Privilege: inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterised by racial inequality and injustice.

White/imperial gaze: a process where people and societies are viewed under the scope of white ethnocentrism, which assumes that whiteness is the only referent of progress.

White saviour complex: refers to a complex where a white person provides help to non-white people in a self-serving manner.

Appendix B   Participant List

Below is a list of the participants who took part in the online consultation. We also acknowledge the contributions made by participants who wish to remain anonymous. The details included here represent those provided by participants at the time of the consultation, and may no longer reflect their current roles.

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Appendix C   Additional Reading

Structural racism in the Aid System

This Medium article by Aid Re-Imagined, this compilation of testimonials from aid workers who had experienced or witnessed racism, and this Al-Jazeera article by Janaka Jayawickrama detail the current ways the aid system structural racism manifests in the aid system and provide some introductory recommendations to transition the aid system to better redress unequal global-local dynamics. An anonymous article in the Guardian expands on the previous article's points and names many of the aid system's challenges as symptoms of White supremacy.

Shifting global–local dynamics is also apparent in global campaign efforts such as the 2015 UNSC Resolution 2250 on youth, peace, and security. Anam Ahmad's article explores the role of young people in peacebuilding and how established practices exclude youth and other underrepresented civil society actors from participating in meaningful decision-making in the aid system. Intensive campaigning and advocacy efforts have gradually changed the perception of youth so that they are increasingly viewed as potential actors for peace.

Robtel Neajai Pailey's article both introduces the idea of the "White gaze of development," as well as some valuable ways to de-centre this perspective. Kelly E. Maxwell's article builds on this idea, providing some guidance for White practitioners first engaging with the realities of structural racism. WCAPS 12-point solidarity statement with numerous INGOs and donors who have committed to addressing structural racism in fields of peace and security.

For an in-depth example of what a decolonial development project might look like, look to the 'Stopping As Success' project. Jointly organised by Peace Direct, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects and Search for Common Ground, this project identified positive examples of how partnerships based on collaboration, mutual trust and respect led to post-conflict transitions being more successful and locally-led institutions becoming more sustainable. See https://www.stoppingassuccess.org/

Yuen Yuen Ang published an article detailing the history of international development's past failures to localise, which also laid out a number of recommendations which complements the lessons learned of the 'Stopping As Success' project.

As explored in the 'Time to Decolonise' report, too often conversations about prioritising locally-led efforts have struggled to address the issue of race. Maria Faciolince's blog post asks whether international development has a problem with racism and examines how this might have impacted localisation efforts.

K. Nwajiaku-Dahou and C. Leon-Himmelstine's blog post provides some actionable suggestions of how to confront race and racism in international development. K. Magendane and Y. Goris' long-read provides an in-depth examination of how racism and the privileging Whiteness have impacted the development sector. Hugo Slim's article asks the uncomfortable question about whether humanitarian aid's struggles of localisation is rooted in racism.

On Andrea Kathryn Talentino's article on the perception of imposition in peacebuilding provides some needed nuance to the discussion of how local communities might perceive international peacebuilding interventions. This article by Jessica Murrey provides an oft-needed reminder that peacebuilders with marginalised identities may be working to build peace not only professionally but also personally.

As conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion enter the mainstream of the aid system, Angela Bruce-Raeburn's opinion piece is a vital warning for organisations to ensure that their DEI and anti-racist efforts are informed and guided by those most impacted by structural racism.

Donor practice

This article by D. Kaufmann, E. McGuirk, and P. Vicente investigates how different communities in various states feel about overseas development assistance, providing an analytical grounding to the discussion of donor practice. This report on financial sustainability from LINC, Peace Direct, Foundation Center, and USAID examines this issue's importance that issue when engaging with local civil society organisations. This builds on a number of the 'Time to Decolonise' recommendations.

Peace Direct, in association with researcher Riva Kantowitz, published this report on the need for a different type of funding mechanism to address the flaws in current donor practice.

The Whitman Institute's Trust-Based Philanthropy Project exemplifies these beliefs: the project, building on existing trust-based funding practices that recognise the power imbalance between funders and grantees, works to address these imbalances while centring equity, humility and transparency.

Women's organisations such as FRIDA and AWID have been modelling the benefits of this type of funder–grantee relationship for decades. Such 'feminist funding' has long centred the priorities of funding recipients and included long-term relationship building as part of the grant process.

USAID's PEER funding programme is another attempt aimed at shifting the unequal power dynamic between funders and grantees. The PEER programme focuses on funding scientific research or capacity-building activities that would benefit the development of the scientists' communities. The trust built into these programmes, as well as the funding flexibility, reflect many of the suggestions made during the consultation regarding the funding changes necessary for funders to decolonise their relationships with local grantees. In addition, USAIDs 'Localworks' initiative is attempting to drive innovation and experimentation in locally led development.

The Peace and Security Funders' Group (PSFG) guiding principles on funding local orgs is a general overview of good donor practice and Peace Direct's funding approach. Another PSFG report identifies the challenges and opportunities for funding local orgs.

The Global Fund for Community Foundations provides some excellent blogs on community led philanthropy and charts the '#ShiftThePower' movement which they launched in 2016.

Race and the colonial origins of the aid system

Learning about the colonial construction of race can be an important step for many seeking to decolonise their thinking. Understanding that race, as we understand in the modern-era, is largely a colonial product that served to reinforce the imposed hierarchies. Anthony J. Christopher's piece explores in more depth how the British Empire used the census and how it illustrates the gradual rigidity of racial classifications.

Language

Alf Gunvald Nilsen's essay explores how the language of development centres White, Eurocentric perspectives and approaches in development discourse, though his argument can be applied to the aid system at large.

Many institutions have been grappling with the difficult decision of whether to capitalise the first-letter of identity words. Amidst the numerous conversations about language that emerged following the racial uprisings of the summer of 2020, this piece by Nell Irvin Painter and this piece by Kwame Anthony Appiah explore the especially controversial topic of whether to capitalise the 'w' in White.

Georgina Stewart's editorial explores the term "Indigenous" and describes how the identity term serves as an umbrella term. A British Columbia professional learning series provide helpful guides to include consideration and respect for Indigenous peoples into institutional frameworks.

Communications and marketing- the 'White saviour complex'

Many of the articles shared in this section touch on how INGOs, funders, and multi-lateral organisations use images of impoverished and harmed Black, Brown, and Indigenous people for their marketing materials. Mallence Bart-Williams' TEDx Talk invites viewers to shift their perspective on the global-local dynamics and consider the truthfulness of the Western image of her country, Sierra Leone, Africa more generally, and its people.

The 'White saviour complex' as examined in the 'Time to Decolonise' report is further discussed in this article by Teju Cole which describes the industry and systems which prop up beliefs that non-White, non-Western individuals are helpless, dependent on the West. Sabene Gomes, an aid practitioner, shares her experiences witnessing the privileging of White, Western perspectives that insist on the lacking capacity of non-White local communities.

Intersectionality

The following resources engage with the experiences of people holding identities that overlap with multiple marginalised identities. The first is the seminal article by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw where she coined the term "intersectionality." Nancy Kachingwe's think-piece critiques the international aid system's instrumentalization of feminism without meaningful inclusion of women. Ruth Smith's article explores the experiences of women in international development. Fionnuala Ni Aolain's article looks at gender in humanitarian crises and argues for the application of a feminist lens through which to consider humanitarian aid and its impacts. Heather Laine Talley's examines the particular position of White women practitioners in the international aid system and how they may inadvertently reinforce the White supremacy of the aid system.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the aid system will be felt for years to come. This article by Melanie Pinet and Carmen Leon-Himmelstine explores how the pandemic could be a catalyst to decolonise development research. This article by Michelle Lokot and Yeva Avakyan exnaines the gendered implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in development and humanitarian contexts, specifically around sexual and reproductive health.

Anti-racist educational resources for individuals

The Anti-Racist Educator has a number of media that explore a wide variety of topics on how situations are experienced by non-White people and how structural racism manifests. This Google document by Healing Solidarity provides a long list of links to various anti-racist readings, guides, and actions. Another list of resources and anti-racist guides can be found on this Google document.

NGO Safe Space is a platform for intersectional feminists in the aid system to engage with issues of gender discrimination, as well as racism.

Partnerships

Peace Direct's paper on partnership approaches provides some guidance on how to develop more equitable partnerships. The Partos Shift-the-Power-Lab provides a Power Awareness Tool also helps organisations assess how power dynamics impact partnerships.

This report by the Re-imagining International Non-Governmental Organisation (RINGO) project details steps and approaches to fostering equitable North-South civil society partnerships.

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