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What paths to decolonized aid?

Groupe URD
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The decolonisation of aid. How do we approach such a sensitive subject? Should we do so? Are we the right people to take it on?

by Véronique de Geoffroy,
Groupe URD's executive Director.

All these questions were raised in Groupe URD before we decided that this would be the subject of our 17th Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid. We were influenced by the current geopolitical trend, with former colonies – those in the Sahel notable among them – demanding profound transformation in power relations between states. We were influenced too by growing demands from civil society in the 'global South' that their role be better recognised and supported by international aid actors. We were influenced by the antiracist struggles throughout society ...

It seemed to us that our research centre, with its view over Mont Ventoux, was a good place for the type of reflection required, enabling participants to step back a little and take time to think about the question 'What paths towards the decolonisation of aid?'

Some fifty participants and speakers took part. Together, we explored several aspects of the subject – historical, political, financial, semantic, etc. – from personal, organisational and social perspectives, in a safe space carefully managed to aid this type of discussion.

Our three days of reflection brought out the need for the humanitarian sector to challenge individual and collective attitudes that militate against the transformations expected, and needed, in a system that is still pervaded by the legacy of the past – and must therefore redefine its way of operating. The prevailing mood during the 2024 Autumn School suggested that more is needed than simple deconstruction to change boundaries; we need an injunction to take things further.

We hope that this issue of Humanitarian Aid on the Move, which includes articles as well as testimony from some of our speakers and participants, will recapture the lively sense of our discussions aiming at 'a renewal of solidarity', and play a part, too, in reflections among aid actors, whether as individuals, within organisations or in other collective spaces.

Semantics of Decolonisation

A glossary of key terms to clarify concepts related to the decolonisation of humanitarian aid.

Acculturation: A complex process of cultural contact through which societies or social groups assimilate or are imposed traits or sets of traits from other societies.

Anti-Racism: Anti-racism is the active and conscious opposition to racist doctrines, attitudes, and reactions, including both racial supremacism and all unequal attitudes of hostility towards ethnic otherness. As a political thought, anti-racism represents all political pressures and actions aimed at eliminating racism in social structures, institutions, and interactions between individuals.

Biopower: Biopower is a type of power exercised over life: the life of bodies and that of the population (biopolitics).

Colonialism: A project of domination and "subjugation of populations through an administrative, cultural, and military apparatus" established to educate the natives and bring them progress, development, and modernity.

Coloniality: Refers to the "planetary articulation of a Western power system" that has survived colonialism and rests on the inferiority of non-Western places, human groups, knowledge, and subjectivities, alongside the exploitation of resources and vital forces.

Community Approaches: The local approach to community problems involves its active participation at all stages. It is implemented by a group associating professionals and the population.

Contextualization: Contextualization is an aspect of localization; it is the process of considering the local situation to interpret existing norms and adapt indicators for meaningful application. Its importance lies in increasing the efficiency of humanitarian assistance and helping practitioners maximize local opportunities while minimizing errors.

Cultural Imperialism: Cultural imperialism is a way of altering lifestyles to resemble that of the dominant culture. In a context of globalization, internationalization, and economic warfare, cultural imperialism manifests through the pursuit of sociocultural influences.

Cultural Relativism: The idea that all beliefs, customs, and moral principles are relative to the individual's social context. In other words, good and evil vary across cultures, and what is considered moral in one society may be considered immoral in another. Since there is no universal moral standard, no one has the right to judge the customs of another society.

Decolonization: Decolonization refers both to taking control of the destinies of new nations by local elites and to a vehement denunciation of colonialism and everything that directly or indirectly recalls it.

Eurocentrism/Westerncentrism: Eurocentrism, or Europocentrism, is a form of ethnocentrism that considers European/Western cultures, norms, and values as universal.

Intercultural: Interculturality refers to the reciprocal exchange between cultural norms and visions that interact together, not in a logic of competition, but rather within a framework of cultural understanding and mutual value systems.

Interference: Unwanted intervention in affairs by a third party. Interference can occur on an individual, organizational, or international level. It takes various forms: political, economic, social, cultural, religious, or humanitarian.

Intersectionality: A concept aimed at revealing the plurality of class, gender, and racial discriminations.

Localization: Today, the second version of the Grand Bargain involves the same actors in reforming the humanitarian sector. Organizations commit to localizing their aid. This includes partnerships with local organizations, funding their activities, and including them in decision-making processes.

Neoliberalism: The renewal of liberal economic theories that have inspired the economic policies of Western countries. Neoliberalism does not aim to eliminate the state but to reduce its size. According to this concept, the state should play a limited role and leave significant room for the market.

Neocolonialism: A term used to denounce the maintenance or return of colonialism, i.e., the will for colonial domination, after independence, potentially in covert or subtle forms. The term thus describes a situation (the existence of political, economic, and cultural pressures).

Post-Colonialism: Development discourses carry a vision that promotes and justifies interventions while delegitimizing and excluding other visions. They involve power relations, with certain forms of knowledge being dominant and others excluded. Post-colonialism strives to connect discourses and the relations of domination within which they are produced. It also contests the lesser role given to local populations in development programs, calling for their voices to be heard and their ideas incorporated.

Socio-Cultural Analysis: Cultural and social analysis seeks to identify the constitutive elements of social, ethnic, religious groups, interest groups, and all characteristics that form common values within a society as well as the differences within it.

glossary

Traveler Model: "Traveler models" are standardized social engineering interventions typical of the development industry. Designed by international experts, supported, and funded by development institutions, they are massively exported to low-income countries in relatively similar configurations regardless of context.

Universalism/Pluriversalism: Conceptualized as "pluriversalism," which opposes universalism, this project aims towards a horizontal and plural universality resulting from a dialogue between epistemologies and the fruit of their interaction. Transmodernity proposes "diversality" as a decolonization project and an alternative to the Eurocentric version of modernity.

Glossary produced by Action contre la Faim

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Decolonisation of humanitarian aid: Groupe URD (re)launches the debate

by Groupe URD, with Damien Guillou

There have been a few well-intentioned efforts, but this subject is very often treated superficially. Despite some attempts in recent years to explore the decolonisation of aid, humanitarian actors – especially francophone actors – have not approached it in enough depth. The humanitarian sector finds it difficult, it seems, to properly address the subject, which is central to planning its own future. The reason may be lack of time or resources, or simply an inability to stand back and take stock. Groupe URD brought together for its 17th Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid some fifty actors representing humanitarian aid and development aid, as well as experts on the decolonisation of aid, for a full discussion of the subject, which is sensitive – and at the same time cannot be ignored. The 2024 Autumn School was possibly a landmark event.

In 2019, the multiplication of climate crises; in 2022, new ways of looking at the quality of aid; last year, the end of political innocence (...): for over fifteen years, Groupe URD has set powerful themes on the table at its Autumn Schools. 2024 was no different: this year's Autumn School provided a space for exchange and collaborative reflection on a sensitive topic: 'what paths towards decolonised aid?'. It was a bold but necessary choice – essential, in fact – to stir up something of a hornets' nest within the francophone humanitarian aid community. It belongs squarely in the current context of profound transformation of the international balance of power, against the background of the diminishing influence of the West. In the field, the basics of aid are increasingly questioned, or indeed rejected, by local actors who point the finger at hidden interests or continuing relationships of domination. Among the most recent examples of such tension is the way Sahelian countries no longer hesitate to break off their cooperation with aid actors and their partners. Bernard Taithe, professor at Manchester University (UK), where he co-founded the *Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute*, began by recalling the colonial legacy of the countries described as the global North: '*There's something here that we just can't deny, affecting not only power relationships or relationships around knowledge production, but also identity, our personal stories, and our societies in general. ... It's expressed in practice by things that are left unsaid, by the unequal exercise of power, and – it must be said – by certain types of violence. All these things must be acknowledged, before we can deal with the ensuing challenges.*' This launched the first Round Table into

very lively discussions on the reasons for talking about the decolonisation of aid. It also established a basis for later exchanges, which developed the issue of the need for a wake-up call – institutional and individual – on the imperative of change, and then on ways to achieve it. Eleanor Davey, an independent external consultant, studied power relationships and inequalities within Médecins Sans Frontières, and one of her key observations was about the influence of an emergency culture, often prevalent in the [humanitarian] sector: '*it tends to conjure up a vivid short-term picture derived from the need to deal with an immediate challenge which may not always reflect reality in the field. At MSF UK, this way of looking at things results in an operational model which requires decisions to be taken fast. This translates into a situation where local communities aren't consulted often enough, and teams despatched in-country are automatically thought of as experts and authorities. But if you see yourself as a saviour, you tend to neglect the independent judgement and the "savoir-faire" of those who are directly affected.*'

S THE OUTLOOK HOPEFUL?

Following on from Round Tables that Groupe URD devised to fully set out the issue of the decolonisation of aid, the Autumn School continued via forums where participants decided for themselves on discussion themes. Among numerous questions raised were the following: how can attitudes be changed at the level of the individual, but also at the institutional and political levels? How best should an unsettled geopolitical context be taken into account? What role do questions of coloniality play in current reflections on environmental footprints or adaptation to climate change? How far should NGOs take a stand – or indeed campaign – on the question of coloniality? Discussions were lively and intense, aiming to come up with boundaries, solutions and additional perspectives which might, tomorrow, open the door to humanitarian action that is better aware of the reflexes needing to

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be jettisoned. In reporting on the forums, one participant called first for '*the courage to question ourselves, for example when we still demonstrate at times a sort of white supremacy (of course), but also to warn, or to raise the alarm, when we observe postures of dominance being established*'. One working group considered the crucial question of access to funding by the humanitarian aid sector, and by a system which has numerous limitations, in matters of funding as well as in other areas. Other issues: international NGOs' and donors' fear of allowing local partners to take the initiative; risks linked to the modalities of taking responsibility for action; the need to demonstrate more innovation and flexibility; sharing responsibility: '*The donors must change their way of seeing things*', suggested a participant who works in West Africa. The participant next to him wholeheartedly agreed and recalled the example of green funds for the ecological transition which appear to be practically inaccessible to some organisations. In an even more radical tone – the word 'necessity' was heard several times from members of the group – some speakers argued in favour of introducing within French NGOs quotas for staff from the global South and/or below a given age, to create a more inclusive and representative governance dynamic. Points were also made about setting up alliances of actors to develop collective positions at international level, and about clarifying the principle of political neutrality. One working group spokesperson added on the latter point: '*The deliberate not taking of positions on certain issues at the present time is incomprehensible, particularly to the younger generation. Here too, taking risks is indispensable, no doubt of it.*' Persistent colonial models? Latent hypocrisy? Power relationships which in the end do not change and create tensions even among humanitarians themselves. What if the sector in its entirety were forced to redefine its own political project as well as its intervention models? The message emerging from the 2024 Autumn School is that more is needed than simple deconstruction to change boundaries; we need a formal injunction to develop further. '*From aid to aiding one another*' as one participant summed it up. The Autumn School reminded us that humanitarians and development actors are, more than ever before, at a crossroads.

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Groupe URD, with Damien Guillou

3 questions
for Ylva Berg

« INCLUSION ALSO ENTAILS REPAIRING. »

Groupe URD invited Ylva Berg – with her colleague Céline Gaza – to lead the opening sessions of the Autumn School. She explains in her responses to the questions below the importance of creating a benign, secure environment for the exchange of views at such meetings.

Why is it essential to have a resource person to deal with issues of conflict management during an event [like the Autumn School]?

Ylva Berg: Whatever the context, all groups are subject to tensions arising from power dynamics. My approach is to begin by creating connections between the group's individual members, and to heighten collective awareness of the sensitivities of the subject being discussed. When the subject is as sensitive as decolonisation, as addressed at Groupe URD's Autumn School, it's important to understand the dynamics of automatic exclusion or oppression that tend to make themselves felt, so we can repair damaged connections.

How did you proceed?

Y.B.: Our support began before the Autumn School, when we coached the organising teams, especially on how to design the programme in a non-colonial way, and to divide up the roles of the speakers more equitably. At the event itself, we first created a space for dialogue between participants, speakers and organisers, and thus a sense of security, to make it easier for people to reach out to each other and express what they feel. It's also very important to observe the verbal or non-verbal language of participants. This enables signs of exclusion, or toxic dynamics, to be identified, and connections to be reestablished.

A sort of inclusion is achieved by repairing?

Y.B.: Exactly. In fact, we experienced this from the first day of the Autumn School, when interventions had a specific impact on some participants. We were able to talk to them and react in response to the need they signalled for greater equity. A situation where things break down, followed by an action to repair it, will lead to collective awareness, and provide an example for others who may later, in their turn, take on shared responsibility for managing tensions.

WHAT THE PARTICIPANTS SAID

The semantics must be reviewed

One of the violences done by colonisation is to take away the identity of the other, subjugating him or making what you want of him. The aid system has inherited, among other things, a specific semantics. Calling other people 'targets' is doing them violence. I'm thinking too of the systematic way people describe themselves as 'experts', but who is really the expert in a situation? The person who's living that situation, or us, with our academic knowledge? 'Exploratory mission', 'field', 'benefits', 'needs', etc.: we need to begin by reviewing our semantics.

Martine Gwana Passa,
support officer in Gret's scientific department.

A sector driven into a corner

In some parts of the world we're coming across the phenomenon of saying 'no' to the status quo, and so the [humanitarian] sector is driven into a corner by partner states, civil society, youth, and has to question itself anew, and put new frameworks in place. Being here, together, looking at this crisis, is a powerful sign.

Alexandra Vasseur,
independent consultant on the management of transitions for inclusive sustainable development.

A subject that requires nuanced analysis

I'm always a little frightened by the dogma and dominant thinking about the decolonisation of aid, which is tricky and, in my view, requires nuanced analysis. Let's be clear: there are states/countries without the freedom of association that would allow us to work with local NGOs. We need to be aware of this, because it's another subject we must work on.

Carine Magen-Fabregat,
specialist in qualitative methods and community approaches in the department for skills and advocacy, Action Contre la Faim.

Ideas germinating

Why am I here at the Autumn School? To learn from the ideas germinating here and share them with different branches of Médecins du Monde. The decolonisation of aid is still an extremely complex subject, which goes to the very heart of our personal and collective histories. It's a long process, which I want to go on disseminating in my organisation, as part of the implementation of our strategic plan.

Christophe Vavasseur,
specialist in strategic development, Médecins du Monde.

Review the position of international NGOs

The way the international solidarity system works, even today, gives the impression that local NGOs or other local organisations can't manage funds, write reports, have proper governance arrangements, etc. This isn't the case. While we wait for these assumptions to be overridden, international NGOs continue to garner most of the available funding and to do the thinking for the [affected] communities, only setting up partnerships at a later stage. A relationship of trust between donors and local actors has yet to be created. For their part, the NGOs need to review their position, and – for example – recognise that theirs is an intermediary role, since often there are teams or groups in-country with proven specialist knowledge and competencies, well able to take charge.

Hamet Diallo,
Project leader for integrated water resource management, Gret.

Take inspiration from the Autumn School for my own work

I've met here at the Autumn School people with whom I intend to stay in touch. In addition, I'm taking away with me a better understanding of decolonisation, and of its potential importance within systems and structures as well as at the personal level. I plan to do more to take the subject into account in my own work from now on.

Felicity Fallon,
Head of Learning and Events, Sphere Standards.

STATEMENT FROM GROUPE URD

DECOLONISING AID: AN EMERGENCY NEEDING IMMEDIATE ATTENTION

We knew before the participants arrived: making the decolonisation of humanitarian aid the central issue of our Autumn School was likely to get people talking. It did. As a matter of fact, that was the case even among our staff, when we were trying to decide what the theme should be in 2024. Our intention was not just to encourage debate, but to give ourselves time to take stock of a situation which we believe is a matter of urgency for the whole humanitarian aid sector.

The time has come to take a stand, and put an end to ways of operating, and other post-colonial reflexes, that even today are endemic in every part of our work. The consciousness-raising is done, and now it's time to act. It's time to face up to the history of our organisations, to deconstruct, redraw the lines, define a new model and – without fear of words or worse – assure the future of international solidarity which, in our view, is as much under threat from external changes as from its own routines.

From this perspective, and for all these reasons, Groupe URD calls on all the actors of the humanitarian aid sector to decide where they stand, join in, and make progress on the issue of decolonisation. Recognising the capacities of civil society and of in-country contingents; new ways of assisting each other; readiness to work in cooperation on common causes; inclusion; other types of associative projects (...): we call on associations and NGOs to contribute alongside us to the development of a general movement of reflection: a movement that will be crucial to our future.

interview
with Sabrina Guerard

Sabrina Guerard worked for ten years in the international cooperation directorate of France's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and has subsequently worked for over fifteen years at the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), France's development cooperation agency, where she held several different positions (geographical coordinator, agency director, head of evaluation/lesson learning). She now works in AFD's Campus Group as a training programme designer (pedagogical engineer), specialising in organisational change.

Your role in AFD's Campus Group requires you to question AFD's current ways of doing things. How do you introduce the (de) colonisation of aid into your discussions?

Sabrina Guerard: Before answering that question, may I say something about AFD's Campus Group? It's AFD's corporate school, and it's unusual in that it's intended for people both inside and outside AFD. The Campus Group works to develop a common understanding of the challenges faced by a world which is fundamentally changing; it enables experiences to be shared, and the required skills to be acquired by the different professional bodies represented in the Group, and by those in the global South who are responsible for the conception and implementation of policies or projects which speed up transition processes.

To meet the challenges of the 21st century, the Campus Group's training programmes are based on the idea that it's essential that training should be done differently and propose new skills. We call it 'transformational training'. We need to go beyond what is obvious, or what we already believe, and stimulate new awareness. We can then take action and question our approaches and assumptions, including those derived from a colonial mindset.

Thus, the Campus Group aims to create experiences which we describe as transformational, by means of individual training programmes that are very introspective, taken by clusters of people, with five stages. The first stage is diagnosis, achieving a proper awareness that our viewpoint is fixed and territorialised. Then we identify what motivates us, whether personally or as part of our organisation: our energy, our goals. We then imagine what [changes] are possible and desirable and attempt to define them in terms of actions that will help us realise them in a sustainable way, with the support of a community of other like-minded actors. The Campus Group's PLAY programme is based on this U-shaped curve of transformation.

Beyond the historical starting point, the value-added of the Campus Group in discussions about coloniality is to make us question our professional practices via the transformational approach I've

described, which speaks simultaneously to mind, body and emotions. The aim is not to stop at discussion, but to act.

How do you think the question of the decolonisation of aid affects relations between donors, NGOs and local actors?

S.G.: Encouraged by the President of the Republic, France is engaged in a process of questioning colonial attitudes.

> *Changes of attitude entail being already aware that there's a problem. A relationship of dominance is usually unconscious, so first you need to identify it and deconstruct it, then work on it at the individual then the organisational level*

France's presence in Africa and our policy of development cooperation are evolving and have yet to slough off their old skin. We've been engaged in this process for something like twenty years, in response to the rise of global challenges, the end of the stark division between the blocs of North and South and the fundamental transformation of Africa, illustrated by recent events in the Sahel. Renewing France's policies on Africa, especially on development cooperation, and more broadly changing attitudes and professional practice in the French public institutions which are active there, all need to be speeded up. The same is true of the underlying narrative. The 2017 Ouagadougou Conference and the 2021 Montpellier Summit were inflection points that enabled development actors to make progress on these issues.

Maintaining our relationship with these [partner] countries entails sending signals that indicate that we've understood 'how we must change' and then translating this into concrete action. The first change is perhaps to clarify why we are interested in trying to agree on cooperation policy. Clarifying our own interest, and explaining it to partners, is the essential starting point of a relationship based on trust, treating the Other as the subject not the object of development policy. Asymmetry between countries is a given, and the trend is for cooperation policy to attempt to lessen the inequalities. What is at stake in the relationship is due less to this asymmetry, but more to the posture of domination that is still too often evident in cooperation policy. This is what we are criticised for, and this is what we must work on at individual level, at organisational level and across the system as a whole.

What are the principal challenges facing donors trying to further a more equitable and decolonised approach to aid, and how might they be met?

S.G.: Awareness-raising and changes of attitude are complex and take time. Changes of attitude entail being already aware that there's a problem.

A relationship of dominance is usually unconscious, so first you need to identify it and deconstruct it, then work on it at the individual then the organisational level: it's a long job! Plenty of humility and perseverance are required, if you're not simply following a fashionable trend, but sincerely attempting to make progress.

Care should be taken to avoid falling back into domination mode by insisting that coloniality/decolonisation must be on the agenda. Obviously, it's done with good intentions, but in the end, it means you're deciding what is or might be 'good' for the Other. Instead, we need to maintain a dialogue with, and listen to, partners, allow them power and space, including on the way they themselves would like to treat the question of coloniality.

Finally, in practical terms, these learning journeys supported by the Campus Group may take the form of residential training lasting two or three days, like the 'Plaisians Group' (see the box below) or, similarly, AFD's in-house meeting in Arles.

> *There are swarms of similar initiatives everywhere, especially in the humanitarian aid sector. It's our wish that we come together to construct subsequent phases of this policy.*

These meetings enabled areas of work to be identified, such as the need to clarify our interest in and our expectations of this [revised] cooperation policy; or reflection on decision-making processes and power relationships in the procedures for implementing projects financed by AFD; accountability initiatives; evaluation; the right use of technical expertise, with everyone's role or function defined; and there's an additional area of work on communication about the operations AFD finances, remembering to put ourselves in the right place in the photograph, that is in the background.

We're testing these formats and need to improve them further. The next step will be opening up these meetings – intended for exchange and reflection – to partners from the regions of the global South, to set up new frameworks for dialogue based on attitudes we've reviewed, so that we can talk about our relationship, about what makes it what it is, and also about concrete modalities of work.

It's a huge job, which will take time. The essential point is that we approach it with humility and in collaboration with the actors directly concerned, including the partners we cooperate with as well as civil society, the private sector, foundations and parliamentarians. There are swarms of similar initiatives everywhere, especially in the humanitarian aid sector. It's our wish that we come together to construct subsequent phases of this policy.

A Working Group met at Plaisians in April 2024, at the invitation of Groupe URD. It adopted Chatham House rules. The objective was to launch a process by which we identified and went beyond the 'habitus' of the practices and attitudes we adopt in cooperation in Africa, as they have developed in the relevant institutions since the era of decolonisation. We aimed to propose new modalities of action.

This group had no formal mandate or institutional legitimacy. Participants expressed their own personal views. We were challenging ourselves to launch a dynamic of transformation, which we might then take back to our respective institutions.

This group is pursuing its work on clarifying France's interest in cooperation with Africa, aiming to reinitiate a relationship of trust, both to repair the connection with our partners and to reestablish our own credibility, so that they're ready to listen when we speak up for interests related to the universal common good.

The following organisations took part in the Plaisians Group: the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE), the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry for Overseas Departments and Territories (Ministère d'Outremer), the Ministry of the Armed Forces, France Média Monde, the Institute for Research for Development (IRD), the French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development (CIRAD), AFD, Expertise France, the French institutes, the French Agency for Development Media (CFI). A researcher from Cameroon was present as a 'counterbalance' to the exchanges.

Questioning power structures and values, the range of responses from French civil society organisations (CSOs)

by Anna Diaz, Mélanie Pelascini, Anaïs Tamani

In francophone regions, and especially within French civil society organisations (CSOs), the decolonisation of aid is emerging as a key issue of debate. Impelled by the challenges of partnerships, by the localisation of aid and by social and political developments, CSOs are increasingly questioning their own practices. This process of questioning and reflection in relation to theoretical concepts that are not easily defined or decoded (decolonisation, decentralisation, localisation), is dealt with by each CSO as available staff and resources allow, as flexibly as possible. The sensitive nature of the issue, and the constraints on fully taking it on board, result in widely varying responses from CSOs.

UNDERSTANDING THE DECOLONISATION OF AID

Coordination SUD, the national coordinating body of French NGOs working in the field of international solidarity (international solidarity organisations, or ISOs), sets out in the article below points for consideration in the debate on how to transform French ISOs in the light of growing interest in decolonisation. Our article offers a critique of the current general situation, as well as of Coordination SUD and its member organisations, recognising the origins of aid, and its link to France's colonial legacy. Our analysis draws on – and is limited to – experiences encountered in Coordination SUD's work.

Going beyond the familiar use of the term, 'decolonisation' is increasingly the subject of debate within the social sciences, and within the international solidarity sector, i.e., among the ISOs. Theories of decolonisation are progressing from observations about a given situation to interest in a *process*, moving on from a historical phenomenon at a fixed point in time towards the goal of *emancipation*, although the chronological, spatial and political dimensions of this emancipation are still undefined. These theories of decolonisation draw directly on critiques of neocolonialism. The definition of decolonisation does not, therefore, conclude with colonised nations' struggle for the territorial and administrative independence that they obtained in the twentieth century. It draws on South American theories, especially the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano's theory of

coloniality.[1] For Quijano, coloniality is a more complex phenomenon than colonialism, understood as 'the condition of submission of some peoples to – essentially – the administrative and military authorities of the metropolitan entity'.[2] It makes reference to the mistaken assumption about the existence of 'western' knowledge, hegemonic and universal, used to justify a geopolitical arrangement of power based on 'what is claimed to be the natural inferiority of non-western places, population groups, types of knowledge, or subjectivities'.[3] The ISOs have taken ownership of this theory as a means of decrying the persistence of colonialism and of inequalities which imbue relationships among its own actors.[4] The decolonisation of aid refers to a process of wholesale transformation of ISOs' modes of thought, actions and internal power structures.

Criticism intensified in the wake of the *Grand Bargain*,[5] the outcome of the 2016 World Summit on Humanitarian Action, which introduced the concept of the localisation of aid with the aim of involving local and national CSOs in every phase of humanitarian action. Despite the commitments made, the key objective of the *Grand Bargain* – that by 2020 at least 25% of the humanitarian aid budget should be channelled directly to local and national organisations – has, in 2024, still not been achieved. CSOs – local and national organisations – are frequently still the passive beneficiaries of humanitarian aid, and if they take an active participative role, they do so at the discretion of the western donors. Less than 10% of financial aid recorded by the DAC (the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD) is earmarked for CSOs in the global South.[6] International donors' financing modalities still too often entail the provision of targeted assistance, which leaves no scope for local CSOs to set their own priorities, or to decide on implementation methods. Contractual, financial and administrative approaches are closely modelled on western management criteria and practice, which tend to favour similar types of CSO. Even though investing at local level would enable aid to be 'swifter, less costly and better anchored in the specific reality of a given context',[7] implementing the localisation of aid is proving to be very difficult. After

1 *A. Quijano. Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y America Latina'. In E. Lander (ed.), 2000. La Colonialidad del Saber: Eurocentrismo y Ciencias Sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas. Buenos Aires : Clacso. pp.201-245*
2 *A. Escobar & E. Restrepo. 2009. Anthropologies hégémoniques et colonialité, Cahiers des Amériques Latines. 62. pp.83-95.*
3 *Ibid.*
4 *D. Alaouf-Hall. 2022. 'Entre « universalisme » et « localisme », Les Degrés de Percolation des Standards SPHERE'. In Revue Canadienne d'Etudes du Développement 43, no. 4. pp. 487-508 ; WACSI. 2023. Décolonisation de l'aide : perspectives de la société civile d'Afrique sub-saharienne francophone. Accra, Ghana ; Partos. 2022. La décolonisation de l'aide au développement.*
5 *The Interagency Standing Committee. 2023. About the Grand Bargain.*
6 *Peace Direct. 2024. The founding bias against the Global South. p.9.*
7 *L. Ricart. 2024. Quelle(s) localisation(s) pour le travail humanitaire de demain ? Alternatives humanitaires. No 26. pp.30-38.*

consulting more than 150 CSOs, *Peace Direct* has warned of the risk of the localisation being reinterpreted to shore up organisational arrangements which reflect western systems and practices, thereby justifying the *status quo* and the intervention of international CSOs.[8] This is what happens when, for example, an ISO sets up a country office and

> ***If localisation fails to recognise that colonialism is embedded in the international solidarity sector, it will be no more than a set of technocratic managerial manoeuvres.***

describes it as a local organisation rather than as a sub-office of an international (and western) organisation. If localisation fails to recognise that colonialism is embedded in the international solidarity sector, it will be no more than a set of technocratic managerial manoeuvres.

The scepticism aroused by the reinterpretation of localisation, and the associated challenges, have highlighted the need to question the entire system of values on which the ISOs rely. Once we start asking questions, we see that there is clearly a gap, with differing interests and levels of awareness among the IOSs.

TOWARDS A SHARED CONSTRUCTION OF AID THAT GOES BEYOND THE COLONIAL LEGACY

Rooted in the development policies of the 1960s, international aid frameworks have primarily been developed from a western standpoint. Although these frameworks have improved, they are considered not sufficiently flexible, or too 'technical', often inhibiting local and national CSOs from taking the initiative. There are two risks: first, that all local entities – whether formal or informal – that do not match the expectations of these frameworks will simply be excluded; second, that there will be a general movement towards the standardisation of CSOs, of their adopting the methods and organisational practices of western ISOs, thereby (un)consciously replicating the very premises of international aid that are criticised as inadequate. Some CSOs do manage to work independently, outside the standard frameworks, although they are the exception not the rule. Examples include CARE's local offices in India and Morocco, which have been set up independently of CARE USA and CARE France.[9]

8 *Peace Direct. 2020. Décolonisation de l'aide et consolidation de la paix. p.11.*
9 *L. Caramel. 2020. Le mouvement Black Lives Matter contraint les ONG humanitaires à un examen de conscience. (The Black Lives Matter movement has humanitarian NGOs examining their consciences.) Le Monde. 7 July 2020.*

French CSOs, like so many others, depend on the aid frameworks referred to above, and reinforce them. They attempt to meet different stakeholders' expectations and to maintain some degree of balance. We see this approach adopted by, for example, intermediary funds such as the (French) Support Fund for Feminist Organisations (*le Fonds de soutien aux organisations féministes*).[10] Backed by consortiums of international CSOs as well as CSOs from the global South, the Fund's objective is to provide financial and technical aid to strengthen local feminist CSOs (projects, technical capacity, networking ...). Although some of its actions may be transformative in their effect, in practice the Fund comes up against the hard realities inherent in contractual obligations, which ISOs and their local representatives have internalised.

With non-western countries the key stakeholders, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) theoretically bear witness to the UN's willingness to explore the possibility of constructing shared values, and promoting solidarity by setting out agreed, interdependent targets and risks (on issues such as climate, biodiversity, water, peace, migration). Some French CSOs rediscover their original DNA within this type of framework that treats the issues not as competing but as complementary. A notable example is the organisation *GRDR Migrations-Citoyenneté-Développement* (Research into and implementation of rural development), which guarantees that at every strategic level, from governance to operations, priority will be given to local input. The organisation acts as a site of encounter and exchange between professional migrants from the basin of the River Senegal – who constitute the members of the organisation – and French know-how designed to help them provide for their home communities. GRDR's vision of international aid puts local skills and expertise front and centre.

Recognising local knowledge, and getting away from the colonial legacy, crystallises numerous hopes and expectations. A major challenge for sustainable development is reversing the invisibility of local knowledge. Such knowledge was abandoned in favour of extractive economics, and industrialisation, enriching the colonial powers while destabilising local communities' ecosystems, ways of life and traditional structures, including social structures. Within the aid system, taking account of local knowledge and local skills is primordial. In 2023, F3E, which leads France's specialist evaluation network – which addresses capitalisation and training (among other issues) – organised a panel of CSOs from five continents to debate the way that powerful knowledge and skills have been lost or made invisible.[11] The panel concluded that 'the South' is treated by the North as a 'zone of experimentation',

10 https://www.afd.fr/fr/fonds-de-soutien-aux-organisations-feministes-fsof.h *The website provides further information about the Fund.*

11 *F3E. 2023. 'Equité et apprentissages dans un contexte de la localisation de l'aide : « Déplacer le pouvoir de la connaissance : quels chemins vers une plus grande équité dans les processus d'apprentissages ? »' Webinar. April 2023.*

where western organisations develop approaches, methodologies, tools and processes that they themselves have devised, with the implication that this zone is essentially bereft of knowledge, even though there is a remarkable degree of oral transfer of knowledge and skills. Knowledge production is thus constrained by western frameworks. It is not even-handed. It therefore misses out – unfortunately – on crucial knowledge.

DOUBLE STANDARDS UNDERMINE THE LEGITIMACY OF NGOS

Aid distribution records indicate that colonising countries direct their aid budgets to their former colonies.[12] Two regional examples: in 2021 the majority of France's official aid went to West Africa;[13] and Belgium gave most of its official aid to the DRC.

As well as being criticised for aid distribution patterns, countries are criticised for instrumentalising their aid budgets for strategic purposes. This becomes more obvious during geopolitical crises. Western countries often operate double standards in their foreign policy. Recently, France punished the military regimes in Mali,[14] Burkina Faso and Niger by suspending some of its official aid, including aid distributed via French and local CSOs – but it did not crack down on neighbouring governments in Chad, Guinea and Gabon. A direct consequence was that local populations were punished, being left without aid to fend for themselves. Defending strategic and economic interests at the expense of the rights of local populations, or of democracy itself, attracts severe criticism.

Taken together, the above observations tend to heighten our awareness of those 'patterns of behaviour' [15] that are the legacy of colonisation.

NEW AND FAR-REACHING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS ENCOURAGE CSOS TO EXAMINE THEIR OWN ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES

In recent years, several social movements emphasising respect for the dignity and integrity of the person have denounced discriminatory procedures and systemic inequality. *Black Lives Matter (BLM)* and *#MeToo* have confirmed the value to anti-discrimination movements of the concept of intersectionality, first proposed in 1989 by the American lawyer Kimberley Crenshaw.[16] Analysing structures of domination and inequality in terms of

12 *D. Chiba & T. Heinrich. 2019.'Colonial Legacy and Foreign Aid: Decomposing the Colonial Bias'. In International Interactions 45(3). p.474-499.*
13 *France Diplomatie. Bilan de l'aide publique au développement française en 2021.*
14 *On 16 November 2022, France confirmed its decision to suspend its aid to Mali, including aid distributed via NGOs, while maintaining its humanitarian projects. The Malian authorities replied with a communiqué which forbade any international cooperation project involving French finance. (Communiqué 042 of the transitional government of Mali, 21 November 2022.)*
15 *WACSI, op. cit.*
16 *K. Crenshaw. 1989. 'Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'. University of Chicago Legal Forum. Vol. 1989. Issue 1.*

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the intersection of different, mutually reinforcing types of oppression, results in social movements bringing different actors together to tackle issues of power relationships and dynamics. The ensuing claims about discriminatory practices have influenced CSOs, encouraging them to examine their collective conscience[17], looking at systemic discrimination and the power structures that depend on western systems underlying the international solidarity sector. This exercise in introspection begins with an acknowledgement that we have failed to 'combat institutional racism and [the assumption] of privileged white culture', as recognised by Médecins Sans Frontières International, responding to the fury generated by the *BLM* movement.[18] Taking this as their starting point, organisations belonging to the Plan International network have established frameworks for fundamental changes in their habits, attitudes and practices, which they have concluded are based on western paradigms. These new frameworks propose first the deconstruction of paradigms, followed by restructuring towards an organisational culture which guarantees fair treatment for all stakeholders. Plan International France now trains its teams using a module called 'Power, Privilege and Cognitive Bias', developed in 2016, and further strengthened in 2020 in the light of the *BLM* movement. Teams explore their conscious and unconscious prejudices, and the use and abuse of their powers and privileges. Overall, the aim is for an inclusive organisational culture, reflecting strategic priorities of '*being managed locally and connected globally*', and of being recognised as anti-racist.

> ***French CSOs reflect the diversity of the sector, with many different institutional attitudes to the decolonisation of aid, and what this might entail in practice.***

FROM WESTERN ORIGINS AND IDENTITY TOWARDS DECOLONIAL APPROACHES

French CSOs reflect the diversity of the sector, with many different institutional attitudes to the decolonisation of aid, and what this might entail in practice. In general, many initiatives aim at better balanced, more equitable and more reciprocal partnerships, setting aside the ideas of 'doing' or 'having someone do' in favour of 'doing together'. The path towards the decolonisation of aid takes account of contextual dynamics, the demands of social movements and the urgently critical voices of non-western CSOs. Major geopolitical shifts, tending towards a multi-polar world, transform the different

17 *L.Caramel. op.cit.*
18 *Ibid.*

contexts and geographical areas where ISOs are active: they are forced as a result to have discussions among themselves which are necessarily uncomfortable.

The changes described have a destabilising effect on French CSOs' 'raison d'être', calling into question their value to society. A complete rethink is required: of practices, attitudes and skills. The entire aid architecture must evolve and develop a collective, equitable response, with each organisation finding and defining the right place for itself.

The need to act collectively in a context where tensions abound strengthens the ISOs' determination to change. Coordination SUD has therefore launched a study which will research in depth the scope for action. This study – due in 2025 – will record and analyse how changes at the global level presuppose and require the remaking of French ISOs.

Coordination SUD is a national platform grouping 180 French ISOs. Established in 1994, it brings together, strengthens, represents and supports actors in this sector.

Anna Diaz, Research and Analysis Officer - OngLAB, Coordination Sud

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The decolonisation of humanitarian aid and localisation: a critical synthesis

by Carine Magen-Fabregat, Myriam Aït-Aïssa and Pierre Alexandre Maiziere

As an international NGO, *Action Contre la Faim* (ACF) – Action Against Hunger – is expected to take a position on world events and crises and needs to reevaluate the way it responds to them. We launched an analytical research project on the decolonisation of humanitarian aid,[1] taking as its starting point the aim of localising humanitarian aid, as discussed at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. The project's objective was to help us, as an organisation, work out where we should be going in our strategic and operational evolution. We carried out a critical study of some of the many available resources (bibliographies, lectures, practical handbooks, etc.) that deal with decoloniality in the humanitarian aid sector. The term 'decolonisation' elicits emotional and ideological responses which may hinder the development of a relevant, effective strategic position. This article aims to set out the results of our research in a way that helps rationalise the debate and to identify theoretical and practical recommendations, for our own organisation and for humanitarian actors more generally.

NGOs are very much involved in the increasing complexity of the geopolitical situation and the accompanying decline in people's living conditions in many different parts of the world. It is incumbent on them to set out clearly and openly their experiences, including sensitive examples, of dealing with North-South inequality, or – to put it more straightforwardly – the rich versus the poor. As a matter of urgency, they should:

- Improve the quality and efficiency of their programmes.
- Look for solutions to the major problem of humanitarian access.
- Improve the way in which their presence is viewed by the people affected, and thereby to improve the security of humanitarian workers.
- Question the future of international NGOs: should they exist indefinitely, and how legitimate will they and their work continue to be?

THE TERM 'DECOLONISATION' AND THE DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATED WITH IT

The word 'decolonisation' is immediately associated with the historical process of former colonies gaining political independence. The word is, nonetheless, ambiguous. In the nineteen-sixties, decolonisation referred to a political process often

1 *Methodology: We conducted a review of 42 academic papers by international and national/local NGOs, and donors. We also reviewed discussions in the media and by journalists. We attempted thereby to identify trends of thought and semantic choices adopted by the authors of the material reviewed, and also to organise, or classify, the topic as a whole. The objective of our research project is to think about decoloniality – decolonisation – in terms of the key themes raised in the source material: funding, partnership, language and communication, gender and feminism, racism. This approach leads to operational recommendations, which are grouped according to the three transversal axes of values, knowledge and power.*

characterised by violence, which led to the establishment of a local colonial order, without disturbing the underlying power structures. Today, the difficulty with the 'localisation' of humanitarian aid can be seen as a reproduction of that same pattern: we attempt to set up local representation for an inequitable system that is not fundamentally changed.

Does the term 'decolonisation' mean the same thing to us when we use it and to the countries concerned (former colonies)? How can we analyse the denunciation by humanitarian actors of the colonisation of aid when they do not have anything like the same historical experience, and probably do not have the same issues in mind when they speak of neocolonialism, the western-centred approach, the 'White Saviour'[2] or North-South relations? Semantic choices are never neutral. It is essential to understand the implications of such choices if we are to have a fair, effective relationship with the people affected by humanitarian crises.

We experience deep unease when we find authoritarian or reactionary voices instrumentalising decolonial terminology and appropriating it for their own ends. The neocolonialism or the coloniality of humanitarian aid can in fact be used paradoxically, to undermine the credibility of feminist viewpoints, or the defence of LGBT rights, or the protection of people who are highly marginalised within their own countries.

How can we deal with the semantic contradiction exemplified by an activist at the Cameroon AfraVIH (translator's note: VIH = HIV) conference calling for the decolonisation of the fight against HIV, [3]when the Cameroon government considers the protection of LBGT rights as a 'colonial influence'? How can we explain that armed anticolonial forces in India have today become militia that oppress their country's Muslim population?[4] How can we address the perverse perspective by which representatives of native peoples, or anticolonial militants – in the French DOM-TOMs, for example – play a part in the Baku initiative,[5] which is orchestrated by Azerbaijan?

It is crucial to work out how to escape from the postcolonial guilt trap which obliges us to acknowledge accusations by dictators or authoritarian governments of importing western values, while we try to resist pressure to deny the burden of the colonial legacy or the perpetuation of inequalities that this legacy entails.

Is the concept of decolonisation appropriate in the face of today's geopolitical, humanitarian and climatic challenges?[6] This is the key question

2 *In French, 'le Sauveur Blanc'.*
3 *DiscoursSerge.pdf(coalitionplus.org).*
4 *'Le nationalisme hindou: histoire et fonctionnement'. Conflits : Revue de Géopolitique. (revueconflits.com).*
5 *https://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/memoires-du-colonialisme/article/231223/le-siecle-de-nos-decolonisations-le-groupe-initiative-de-baku-2*
6 *The authors of Critique de la raison décoloniale show that decolonial theories offer a simplistic reading of power relationships: they focus on questions of ethnic or racial identity, consigning the fundamental opposition rich/poor to the background.*

as we attempt to steer a course in an increasingly complex global landscape.

Who is it, in fact, that talks of colonialism? Does discourse on the colonisation of aid have equivalent value no matter who engages in it? Is it a discussion the North has with itself, embarrassed by the postcolonial legacy? How far is it the subject of discourse in the South? Is it only invested in by local NGOs who want to establish a more equitable relationship

> *Might it not constitute real progress if we asked for views on the issue from the communities involved – but whose views we do not know? They are unquestionably the most exposed to the coloniality of humanitarian aid via direct interventions on the ground.*

with international NGOs (we might consider in this context the different 'open letters' from Ukrainian or Jordanian NGOs, among others, addressed to international NGOs, denouncing colonial attitudes)? Might it not constitute real progress if we asked for views on the issue from the communities involved – but whose views we do not know? They are unquestionably the most exposed to the coloniality of humanitarian aid via direct interventions on the ground. Do they experience aid provided by a local NGO differently from aid provided by an international NGO? Does an endogenous response entail risks that are specific to power relationships affecting these communities?

How should we react to the 'travelling model' described by Olivier de Sardan, i.e., a standardised social engineering intervention devised and extensively exported without any reference to realities on the ground?

How may we resolve the tension between a universalism that has been imposed on us and a cultural relativism that strips our policies of principles, especially moral principles? The principles of progress and equality were fundamental to the colonial project which can be summed up as ethnocentric positivism:[7] our own values and skills are so good that it seems generous to spread them more widely, at the cost of the cultural obliteration of other types of knowledge or skill.

The way humanitarian aid is structured limits, by definition, the services provided: there are constraints of time, management capacity and resources. The concept of the 'off-the-shelf kit', claimed as a practical means of 'scaling up to reach a maximum number' in fact makes a maximum number ill at ease. The organisation's very structure makes it necessary to standardise or simplify interventions. Perhaps we

7 https://msf-crash.org/fr/rencontres-debats/le-colonialisme-un-projet-humanitaire

might call this the 'technologisation' of humanitarian interventions?

The economic model of development aid is in the process of changing. Donor countries no longer shrink from using development aid as a diplomatic lever, or even as a means of punishment.[8] Development professionals must also take care that funds are not used by people or groups classed as terrorists. This politicisation of aid is without question a new form of 'colonialism', which calls into question the principle of humanitarian universalism. Interventions are self-interested. Furthermore, capitalist principles introduce among local humanitarian actors the notion of competition, to the extent that they vie with one another to be innovative, to develop projects that are potentially prestigious but whose running costs make them difficult to implement.

There is a consensus around human rights – the rights of man/men, or the rights of women as Olympe de Gouges reminds us – which makes us reject social or cultural evidence which appears to challenge them. In practice, we deal every day with a sort of back-and-forth, often well intentioned, between respect for the values of others and the primacy of values we hold to be universal. Human rights are not as universal as they should be, as the existence of several more specific charters or declarations.[9] Are we prepared to extend – to amend – our idea of individual liberties to take account of a particular group, religion or cultural specificity?

SHOULD THE DECOLONISATION OF AID BE SET IN THE CONTEXT OF THESE DIFFERENT FACTORS?

Historically, there were three basic pillars of colonisation: the use of armed force, economic exploitation and the imposition of norms, values and skills. This historical frame of reference helps us understand the dynamics of humanitarian aid today, where similar pillars or principles are deployed.

1. Armed force: military intervention has long been a key element in colonisation. Sometimes armed forces have claimed a humanitarian alibi, blurring the distinction between military intervention and humanitarian aid, and compromising both the legitimacy and the security of NGOs.
2. Economic exploitation: colonialism goes hand-in-hand with economic exploitation, often serving as a sort

8 *In Mali, the French government's withholding of funds from NGOs harms civilians. See https://www.courierinternational.com/article/analyse-au-mali-l-interdiction-des-ong-a-financements-francais-pese-sur-les-populations-civiles#:~:text=Le%2016%20novembre%2C%20Paris%20a,urgence%20et%20l'action%20humanitaire*

9 *African Charter on Human and People's Rights, Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam, Arab Charter on Human Rights, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Bangkok Declaration on Human Rights, Andean Charter for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, etc.*

of laboratory of modern capitalism.[10] Economic domination continues to shape the relationship between North and South. These days, it is often perpetuated by economic actors from the former colonies. Since the colonial period, continued economic domination by the North (largely European countries as far as Africa is concerned, with France and the UK in the van) has been complicated by an increase in agents of economic domination from the South, especially China and India.[11] It is nonetheless still the reality, and part of the colonial

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10 *Witness plantation society, which has been described as the first economic model of modern capitalism, with the trade in Black people constituting the capital which financed the industrial revolution in the North. Eric Williams. Capitalism and Slavery. University of North Carolina Press: 1994.*

11 *Use of the proper name 'India' may be considered as an element of the colonial legacy. The Indian government therefore suggests the name 'Bharat' instead. The suggested change of name does not meet with universal approval, since it might be taken to imply a refusal to recognise the Mongolian Muslims who settled on the sub-continent 300 years ago. See https://fr.euronews.com/culture/2023/09/11/linde-rebaptisee-bharat-voici-pourquoi-certains-pays-changent-de-nom*

legacy. The dominant European powers may now have some competition in exploiting resources, but we should note that the new economic actors, China and India among others, obtain exploitation or operating permits in exchange for financing infrastructure projects. A country's dependence on exploitation by third parties adds to its debt burden, part of the colonial legacy that is unjust, but nonetheless persists. Europe plans to reaffirm its leadership in Africa by means of its 'Global Gateway' initiative emphasising private sector investment but omitting the principle of CSO involvement (for example).

3. The imposition of norms, values and skills: the colonial enterprise was characterised by its imposition of western norms and values, justified by the claim that the whole enterprise was a multi-faceted civilising mission. A similar phenomenon has recurred with humanitarian aid where, for example, biomedicine, post-1968 feminism or western management models are regularly imposed on local societies, often at the expense of their own knowledge and skills. However, there should be no question of refusing to base policy on the latest scientific advances, simply for the sake of trying to 'do the right thing'.

DISCUSSION POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To repeat: the way humanitarian aid is structured inevitably limits the services provided. Constraints of time, management capacity and resources often lead to the standardisation of interventions, exemplified by the use of 'off-the-shelf' kits. These kits are devised to be practical, with their use readily scaled up as necessary; but they entail simplification, making it difficult to adapt them to the specific requirements of local communities. Implementations intended to respect universal values may not take account of local specificities: there is a risk of involuntary colonialism.

The term 'decolonisation' requires careful use. The 'colonial accusation' may sometimes be used as a pretext by conservative authorities to call into question fundamental human rights, or to disguise a 'pseudo-localisation' which has no real impact on the forces of global domination. NGOs must denounce and refuse this dynamic, especially in countries of the North, even if their influence in those countries is limited. It should be reiterated here that although the term is widely used, its use among or by people who are primarily concerned, as recipients, with humanitarian aid is not well documented. Paradoxically, the term has greater currency, therefore, among the dominating powers.

Admirable though it is to wish to reset the balance of power, the way forward requires us to define boundaries, and take precautions, if there is to be progress. The boundary that probably needs most discussion or revision derives from the fact that current attitudes and

interventions tend to be 'one size fits all'. The humanitarian sector in general neglects local specificities and has difficulty in taking account of elements and factors outside its own format for humanitarian action. Decolonising humanitarian aid entails understanding different situations and places, including local specificities, and finding ways of strengthening endogenous resources by providing solidarity and support for social justice.

> *As a result, the entire narrative is transformed: we move from 'localisation' to 'contextualisation'; we prefer 'fellow actors" to 'beneficiaries'; and we evolve from 'partnership' towards 'alliance'; and we aim to turn 'decolonisation' into 'shared struggles for emancipation'.*

The situations and places where we work vary and have not all had the same historical colonial experience or known the same forms of racism. They may be vulnerable to abusive domination within their own boundaries. The political instrumentalisation of postcolonial resentment requires us to be extremely prudent.

Further, the battle against climate change calls, unquestionably, for unprecedented solidarity amongst us all, and explicit recognition of inequality and its causes. We can sum up the latter briefly as: the colonial legacy, capitalism and the mechanics of power. In the light of their policy stance on these issues, NGOs will be able to make a genuine difference in the response to the climate emergency and to humanitarian emergencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our first recommendation is to recall explicitly that while our organisations are based in the North, we are dealing with a globalised system of responsibility for humanitarian situations. We must adopt a clear, strong mode of discourse on the causes of structural inequalities and signal our determination to free the humanitarian aid sector of its colonial origins, challenging the forces which perpetuate current injustices, at micro and macro levels.

To succeed, we must promote community between different peoples or population groupings. We must respect all forms of knowledge that contribute to meeting our objective, with no form predominating. We must draw openly on science and epistemological justice. Thus, our second recommendation is that we must promote the cross-fertilisation of knowledge, investing in research and dialogue with those who have local skills and expertise, and giving a voice to lived knowledge and skills, as ACF has

been able to try doing in the community research project R2G.[12]

Our final recommendation entails the amendment of both policy stances and practical interventions. Our interventions are made in a complex world where historical domination is no longer the only factor influencing the challenges we face today. We must contextualise our approach, identifying all the forms of domination which hold us back from responding adequately to current challenges. The rise of authoritarian regimes; unbridled capitalism; unchecked extractivism; and the growing social oppression of women, minorities facing discrimination and poor people: all these mitigate against the right to a dignified life in a properly safeguarded environment.

We must better understand the contexts in which we intervene, and work with local partners such as NGOs, activists, affected communities and local experts, aiming above all for a 'complex universalism' instead of cultural relativism or a western viewpoint. It is essential to give due consideration to native, lived knowledge and skills,

12 *Recherche locale pour le plaidoyer/ Accueil. (https://right2grow.org/fr/nos-activites/news/recherche-locale-pour-le-plaidoyer/).*

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and work together with those directly concerned to find solutions.

Social justice and the safeguarding of the environment cannot be achieved unless local people are involved. This necessitates recourse to the social sciences, to solutions based on nature and culture, and to participative initiatives which take into account the voices of people who are otherwise marginalised. As a result, the entire narrative is transformed: we move from 'localisation' to 'contextualisation'; we prefer 'fellow actors" to 'beneficiaries'; and we evolve from 'partnership' towards 'alliance'; and we aim to turn 'decolonisation' into 'shared struggles for emancipation'.

To sum up: let us set our work in context so that we can avoid the traps of dogma. Let us use our financial resources to build together with the people most affected a world which is both more egalitarian and more liveable. Let us proclaim aloud together our determination to break down all the different harmful powers that be: those that are a legacy of colonial history, and those that are the result of structural and economic inequalities today.

Maximising the commitment and participation of affected communities and individuals is a theoretical, moral and operational solution to decolonising and localising solidarity.

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interview
with Maïka Sondarjee

Maïka Sondarjee is associate professor of international development and globalisation at the University of Ottawa. Her most recent book *'Tu viens d'où? Réflexions sur le métissage et les frontières'* ('Where are you from? Reflections on mixed race and boundaries', Lux Éditeur) was published on 7 November 2024. She is also the author of *'Perdre le Sud. Décoloniser les relations internationales'* ('Losing Sight of the South. Decolonising international relations', Éditions Écosociété, 2020). She edited a collection of essays entitled *'Perspectives féministes en relations internationales'* (Feminist perspectives in international relations', *Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal*, 2022).

In your book 'Losing Sight of the South' – as well as in your intervention at the 2024 Autumn School on Humanitarian Aid – you speak of the links between colonisation and capitalism, caused by the dynamics of power and exploitation inherent in both systems. Could you tell us a little more about this, and explain what the links are with international aid?

Maïka Sondarjee: International inequalities weren't born with capitalism but have their origin in the beginning of colonial conquests. What's more, the capitalist system (based on the commodification of work, private property and profit) didn't appear in Europe because that continent had special intrinsic capacities. Along with the industrial revolution and large-scale factories, the capitalist system developed in Europe because the large-scale factory-owners had accumulated capital through colonisation and slavery.

For example, the conquest of the Aztec and Inca empires in Latin America made it possible for Europeans to accumulate and stock gold and other primary materials. Europe's industrial revolution was therefore made possible thanks to the extraction of a major part of the natural wealth of colonised countries. At the same time, trade in people from Sub-Saharan Africa began. The profitability of plantations in the southern United States, based on the work of people reduced into slavery, made possible the accumulation of capital in the hands of a minority of owners of European origin, at the cost of destabilising African countries. According to estimates, the total volume of transatlantic trade in slaves reached between 9.5 and 15.4 million free women and men sold into slavery in America. Beyond the gains accrued to the Europeans, the transatlantic slave trade caused an incredible demographic shock to African countries and kingdoms, because of the sheer number of people displaced from one region of the world to another.

With the industrial revolution and the international division of labour, the North-South gap was created. The globalisation and liberalisation

realised over the last fifty years made this phenomenon worse and made it possible for non-state actors such as multinationals to make more money than some small countries. In 2017, Walmart's revenues were higher than Belgium's GDP and Volkswagen's turnover was higher than Chile's GDP.

Adopting a decolonial conception of the institutionalised global order entails understanding the relationship between capitalism and colonialism (as well as the patriarchate), in their material, cultural and epistemological dimensions. For example, women subjected to racism in the North and the South experience differently the social and *material consequences* of globalisation, and they are in addition *socially constructed* as inferior beings. The global order marginalised the people of the South via a relationship of material exploitation, but also of dispossession and oppression. Capitalism, based on continuous, limitless growth, is untenable.

More concretely, what, in your view, are the structural brakes on a genuine decolonisation of humanitarian aid?

M.S.**:** During the last ten years, we've witnessed a new 'colonial turn'. The term 'decolonising' is now associated with an often poorly defined, less tangible notion than the independence of countries that were colonised by metropolitan authorities. But essentially, decoloniality is a political project of human emancipation through collective struggle, entailing at least the following elements: (1) the abolition of racial hierarchies at the heart of the hetero-patriarchal, capitalist world order, (2) the dismantling of the geopolitics of knowledge production and (3) the re-humanisation of our relationships with others, and with nature.

It seems to me impossible for the field of humanitarian aid (still often based on North-South lines) to be completely 'decolonised'. That would imply an end to capitalism, a complete abolition of racial hierarchies and purely horizontal ties of solidarity. Given the structure of funding, and the origin of major global issues such as climate change (caused by overproduction and incorrect usage of resources in the North), it scarcely seems likely that colonial power relationships will change totally.

Do you think the international donors are ready to embrace this idea of decolonisation? What types of action or what changes should they be considering in order to support a more equitable and more local approach to aid?

M.S.**:** In recent years, decolonisation has been broadly (and very vaguely) associated with the struggle against racism or with the defence of everything to do with equity, diversity and inclusivity (EDI). It's become very fashionable to adopt the term 'decolonisation', even among the donors. The term has become popular in western universities and civil society, as professors and administrators realise (very slowly) how their institutions maintain systemic racism, colonial epistemologies and

ethnocentric practices. By organising so many events around the idea of decolonisation, universities, non-governmental organisations, public institutions and private foundations are coopting the term from activist groups and from civil society.

At the same time, apart from depoliticising the term, several actions are possible to make humanitarian aid more 'equitable'. First, we must recognise

> *We must recognise the existence of systemic racism and champion the rights of peoples who are still colonised around the world, whether in Palestine, Tibet or elsewhere. Even if that runs counter to the interests of our donors.*

the existence of systemic racism and champion the rights of peoples who are still colonised around the world, whether in Palestine, Tibet or elsewhere. Even if that runs counter to the interests of our donors. Then, we must make our organisational practices more anti-racist. In particular, we must allow employees within our organisations who are either subject to racism or who come from the global South to feel free to tell us how to be better colleagues and employers. This entails encouraging 'call-ins', or encouraging transparent, open conversations about racism within our organisations. Then, we must modify project development processes, allowing ourselves to be challenged at every stage by our partners from the global South. That implies having the humility to be ready to change the direction of a project or a policy. Easier to achieve, we must modify our ways of communicating and the imagery we use in promoting our work and in fund-raising campaigns. Finally, we must be courageous about funding, ending the imposition of conditions and evaluations written in our offices in the North for the communities of the South.

The debate about the decolonisation of aid is sometimes seen as far removed from the realities on the ground. How, in your view, may we reconcile this imperative with the daily constraints encountered by humanitarian actors?

M.S.: In one sense, it's true: the decolonisation debate is a mandate on too large a scale to be addressed at a pragmatic level. The advantage of the term is that it stimulates interesting conversations. But at a practical level, we must 'slice the cake' in smaller pieces. What can we do, *now*, to address colonial and racial inequalities in the world and in our work? We must, for example, change the narrative, modify our vocabulary, localise aid, and so on. In other words, it's not a matter of being more 'inclusive', but of redistributing power.

Decolonising anything, therefore, is an ambitious political project. Although the many (mistaken) uses of the word have made new conversations possible, there's a major risk of creating a new fashionable term which will lose its potential power for social change. Freeing ourselves from imperialism and from racial hierarchies, that's to say the fulfilment, in dignity, of all humans and all non-humans, through a process conducted not by us but by the people who were historically colonised, will not be easily accomplished. It's not just a matter of attacking the capitalist system, but of attacking too all its supporting structures, based on race, gender, sexuality, abilities and epistemic devaluation, to name just a few of the most important. 'Decolonising' signifies something specific to researchers who are autochthonous and come from the global South, and we must not depoliticise the concept. That doesn't mean that the voices of researchers and autochthonous activists should be the only voices to represent the 'decolonial turn', but that the project of decolonisation will be tough, and long-term.

> ***Whiteness (in the 'white saviour complex') doesn't refer simply to white people, but to a power structure that upraises some people in respect to others.***

You make particular reference to the white saviour industrial complex, or 'white saviourism'. Could you explain to us the role of this concept in the (de)colonisation of aid?

M.S.**:** The industrial complex of the white saviour (or *white* saviourism) is founded on the benevolence attributed to the people of the global North, despite their role in exploiting and dispossessing the people of the South. Whiteness (in the 'white saviour complex') doesn't refer simply to white people, but to a power structure that upraises some people in respect to others. White people and people who have been racialised may therefore both equally be apologists for the superiority of whiteness.

The concept of the 'white saviour industrial complex' or of 'white saviour syndrome' has often been unconsciously associated with individual psychological traits. The concept has become a way of referring to some white *individuals* who are subtly racist but well meaning, who aim to help the people of the global South. Differently expressed, there are some 'bad apples' in the field of humanitarianism, while the majority can sleep soundly at night. However, that's wrong. *White saviourism* isn't limited to the mindset of some individuals: it's a more widespread system. It refers to the irony that on one hand we're subject to an imperative to help the people of the global South, while on the other hand, we support (often despite ourselves) a system of exploitation and dispossession by the people of the global North. In other words, it refers to the dissonance created

by on the one hand the imperative to help the people of the global South and on the other hand the support we in practice give (but not intentionally) to a system [of exploitation and dispossession, as described in the previous sentence]. The Kenyan writer Teju Cole therefore speaks of the 'white saviour industrial complex' to designate what he prefers to describe as a system of plunder, exploitation and militarisation based on western interests, associated with what people like to call well-intentioned development. Cole compares the white saviour industrial complex to 'a valve making it possible to release the unbearable pressures built up within a system founded on plunder'.

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Coloniality or pluriversality: what do we learn from the ecological transition of NGOs?

by Vincent Pradier

The sixth IPCC evaluation report indicates that 'the vulnerability of ecosystems and populations to climate change varies considerably from one region to another [...], because of [...] historical and permanent frameworks of inequality such as colonialism'; and that there are more and more calls for international aid to be localised, indeed to be decolonised. What are the challenges that ensue for the management of western NGOs? By providing a rapid overview of 'decolonial approaches', especially decolonial ecology, we shall attempt to show how such approaches may prove useful to NGOs as a means of responding to the twin imperatives, colonial and environmental, that need to be addressed.

Post-colonialism, decolonial approaches and neocolonialism: when we consider the legacy of the *fact of colonialism* in history, and in the modern world order and its organisational structures, we cannot fail to conclude that a plurality of approaches and concepts occupy a common space, related to each other but often poorly understood, or even categorically rejected by parts of the academic and political community, especially in France.[1] This semantic plurality discloses an abundance of different perspectives, which have both left their mark within academia – in different regions of the world – and also fostered associative movements, activism, social trends, etc.

Some trends, such as decolonial approaches, were created within institutions with both more and less formal structures. Other approaches – such as those described as postcolonial – are really an attempt to rationalise, after the fact, work and ideas that have attracted criticisms like those that are made of western colonialism. Interventions differ too in the type of contribution they make, with some simply feeding into academic debate, and others trying to diversify, by learning lessons from art, or from what are known as endogenous practices, etc. Some terms or expressions are more expressive of social dynamics and social processes, such as neocolonialism, than they are of analytical concepts.

All these approaches basically have as their analytical starting point a criticism of *Eurocentrism*, and its epistemic and ontological hegemony: the way in which the *West* produces and

1 *Readers looking for proof of this point are invited to explore the publications of the 'Observatoire d'éthique universitaire', a small research body which is relatively 'allergic' to the concepts presented in this article.*

legitimises knowledge, and shapes the connection with the world, both human and non-human, which surrounds us. Such approaches illustrate on the one hand the way the *West* was, and continues to be, inclined to depict itself as the sole driving force behind world history, to the detriment of the historical

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processes specific to each geographical era. On the other hand, they challenge the western model (political, social, economic and cultural) as the only possible way forward for *non-western* countries, at the expense of each of those countries' social and cultural heterogeneity. This criticism is currently particularly lively, especially within the sector of international solidarity. Where does it come from, and what are the challenges?

BETWEEN COLONIALISM AND PLURALISM, THE NGOS AS AVATARS OF THE MODERN WORLD

Several noted authors writing on decolonisation, such as the anthropologists Arturo Escobar and Eduardo Restrepo, who belong to the South American collective *Modernidad/Colonialidad/Decolonialidad* (M/C/D),[2] became interested in the different development policies within the multilateral community that emerged at the end of the second world war. They tried – by analysing political history, and its organisational and management characteristics, which are deeply imbued with the *fact of colonialism* – to reposition, on several different levels, its multidimensional (cultural, social, economic, etc.,) legacy.

International aid provides a model of social engineering that illustrates both western influence on the overall conception of the world and the criticisms that are made of it. If we consider a social intervention as 'a mechanism of planned intervention, developed by experts, aiming to set up or to modify institutions and behaviours in different

2 *M/C/D is a multidisciplinary and intergenerational research network of South American intellectuals. It was set up at the end of the 1990s, linking Escobar and Restrepo and others such as the philosopher Enrique Dussel and the semiologist Walter Mignolo (both from Argentina) and the Peruvian sociologists Aníbal Quijano and Catherine Walsh.*

contexts',[3] we are constrained to conclude that international aid since the 1950s has taken the form of a plethora of standardised programmes and projects – full of management processes and

> ***Decolonial approaches offer a positive agenda: they assert that there is no single western form of reasoning, but several different forms, bound up with differences in historical experiences or in social and cultural dynamics.***

'travelling models'[4] – which have enjoyed some success, especially in the countries known as the *Global South*.

In parallel, there has been much criticism of the various public policies that have been adopted. Relatively speaking, we have failed to meet certain fixed objectives (a world without poverty or a world which 'leaves no one behind'[5]). Policies adopted have – to say the least – frequently experienced gaps between expected and actual outcomes (Olivier de Sardan calls this the *implementation gap*). Arturo Escobar takes the view that *development*, and policies associated with it, is nothing more than a cultural invention on the part of the western world, which originated in *coloniality* and shaped (and continues to shape) the modern world. It aims, by setting up specific economic, social and political mechanisms in poor countries, to perpetuate an ethnocentric and imperialistic concept of the world.[6] By extension, western NGOs – whether their focus is humanitarian or developmental – born in a contemporary world coloured by the *fact of colonisation*, may themselves be purveyors of *coloniality*.

Semantic influences on NGOs' management practices – their *management language*[7] – are remarkably normative (to 'support' countries that were formerly colonies in trying to achieve a certain type of *western modernity*). Decolonial approaches help us understand how this type of language can sometimes sustain certain types of *coloniality*,

3 *Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan. 2021. La revanche des contextes. Des mésaventures en ingénierie sociale en Afrique et au-delà. No. 7 Paris : Karthala. https://www.cairn.info/la-revanche-des-contextes-9782811123628.htm*

4 *The anthropologist Olivier Sardan describes 'travelling models' as follows: 'any standardised institutional intervention [...] aiming to produce some kind of social change, based on 'mechanisms' that are considered to embody intrinsic qualities that will enable changes to be introduced in different implementation contexts'.*

5 *This is the objective of Agenda 2030, a programme of goals for sustainable development, to be achieved by 2030, which was adopted in September 2015 by the UN's 193 member-states. The programme consists of seventeen sustainable development goals.*

6 *Arturo Escobar. 1995. Encountering Development. STU-Student Edition. Princeton University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.cct7rtqw*

7 *For example, management tools such as the 'project cycle' or the 'logical framework', etc.*

consisting of 'a planet-wide expression of a system of 'western' power [...], assuming what is claimed to be the natural inferiority of non-western places, population groups, types of knowledge, or subjectivities'.[8] This *coloniality* allows the West – and, by extension, western organisations, such as NGOs – to be thought of not as a geographical zone but as a spatial articulation of power, which cannot be distinguished from the *fact of colonialism*, constituting *western modernity. Coloniality* is a plural concept, covering knowledge, power, being, gender and nature; it is the 'the most widespread mode of domination in the world today',[9] recognisable in the various inequalities and processes of domination of which the international architecture is constructed: inequality of access to resources, inequality in the sharing of political and economic power, inequality in terms of access to rights, etc.

Decolonial approaches offer a positive agenda: they assert that there is no single *western* form of reasoning, but several different forms, bound up with differences in historical experiences or in social and cultural dynamics. Without attempting to insist on the separate identities of cultures or of groups of individuals, these approaches propound the theory of *pluriversality*, by which different worlds are not 'completely separate, [...] (but) are, on the contrary, fully interconnected, despite their inequalities of power'.[10] *Pluriversality* is interesting and relevant because it questions the way *western* universality shapes the way organisations work, and raises questions about the norms this dominance constructs and applies. The concept assists us in better understanding different ethical standpoints and different ways of thinking; and enables us to analyse social dynamics through the prism of *non-western* epistemologies: 'an epistemology of the south (which entails) producing and evaluating new knowledge and understanding, valid in their own right, whether scientific or not'.[11]

This *ecology of knowledge*, whether scientific or non-scientific, 'based on the idea that there is no such thing as either absolute knowledge or absolute ignorance',[12] suggests that different types of knowledge and skill are interdependent, and often complementary. Becoming aware of this pluriversality as seen in management practice is to understand how 'knowledge imposed by the west is combined with diverse indigenous knowledge, leading to the creation of a hybrid version which demonstrates simultaneously the force of the dominant

8 *Arturo Escobar and Eduardo Restrepo. 2009. 'Anthropologies hégémoniques et colonialité'. In Cahiers des Amériques Latines. No. 62,8.* https://doi.org/10.4000/cal.1550

9 *Aníbal Quijano. 1992. 'Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad'. In Peru Indigena, 13, no. 29. (Author's translation.)*

10 *Arturo Escobar. 2020. Arturo Escobar. 2018. Designs for the Pluriverse. Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds. Duke University Press.* https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822371816

11 *Boaventura de Sousa Santos. 2011. 'Epistémologies du Sud'. In Etudes Rurales. No. 187:38.* https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesrurales.9351

12 *Ibid, p.39.*

power and resistance to it'.[13] To put it another way, this is how NGOs can be at one and the same time purveyors of *colonialities* and of *pluriversality*.

There are several fascinating examples from South America. Some writers show[14] how movements such as the Processus of Black Communities (PCN) in Colombia, by drawing on the philosophy of *buen vivir*,[15] have successfully constructed *pluriversal* organisations and communities in lands historically marked by colonial violence. These organisations and communities do not operate in reductive fashion via a simple exploitative relationship with people or with the natural world. By means of a long dialogue with developmental actors,[16] PCN's activists, during the 1990s, achieved formal recognition of their land rights and cultural rights within their own territories. This recognition, by protecting their way of life and their resources, enables them to construct a geographical entity,[17] with a narrative – *el proyecto de vida* – that 'allows them to promote development that is compatible with the surrounding environment'.[18]

PROGRESS TOWARDS A PLURIVERSAL MANAGEMENT BY NGOS OF THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION?

It seems to us especially relevant to invoke decolonial approaches, and the different concepts associated with them, when attempting to figure out the management of ecological and social transitions needed as a response to what is known as anthropic *climate change* – caused by humans – and its consequences. The countries most acutely affected are, and will be, those that were formerly colonised,[19] and hence those which have the most to do with international aid. That being the case, and recalling that international NGOs originate for the most part in countries which historically have the greatest responsibility for climate change, it might be helpful to imagine a *decolonial ecology* which makes 'the colonial gap into the central challenge of the ecological crisis, [...], noting that pollution of various kinds, the loss of biodiversity and even global heating are the material traces left by the

13 *Héla Yousfi. « International Management, Should We Abandon the Myth of Cultural Hybridity? A Re-examination of the Contribution of Postcolonial and Decolonial Approaches ». M@n@gement, 2021/1 Vol. 24, 2021. p.80-89. CAIRN.INFO, shs.cairn.info/revue-management-2021-1-page-80?lang=fr.*

14 *Philippe Colin and Lissel Quiroz. 2023. Pensées décoloniales. Une introduction aux théories critiques d'Amérique latine. Zones. La Découverte, https://www.editionsladecouverte.fr/pensees_decoloniales-9782355221538*

15 *Alberto Acosta. 2018. Le Buen Vivir: Pour imaginer d'autres mondes. Les Editions Utopia.*

16 *NGOs, public authorities, international organisations, etc.*

17 *The Pacific region.*

18 *Proceso de Comunidades Negras. 'Territorio y conflicto desde la perspectiva del Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN)'. In Cali: Otros Saberes, February 2008 :11. https://otrossaberes.lasaweb.org/uploads/colombia-report_001.pdf (Author's translation.)*

19 *IPPC. 'Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group 1 to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change'. Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009157896*

colonial occupation of Earth, which also comprises global social inequalities'.[20]

Decolonial ecology treats Earth as 'the basis of a world where physical and chemical systems, [...], are inherent in the colonial, racist and misogynist domination of humans and non-humans, as well as in the different struggles to overcome it'.[21] By linking analysis of environmental change to the inequalities bequeathed by the colonial constitution of *western modernity*, we arrive at a better understanding of the way forms of resistance to the latter are constructed outside of the *West*, including alternative ways of managing ecological challenges. It is helpful to analyse organisational models used in contexts which particularly reveal the 'two-fold gap, colonial and environmental, of our times',[22] such as those used by NGOs who are marked by their colonial history and very much impacted by *anthropic climate change*. This makes it possible to identify potentially *pluriversal* management practices, which can integrate *non-western* ontologies: practices not characterised simply by exploitative, life-destroying relations with humans and non-humans, and thus more sustainable.

> ***By linking analysis of environmental change to the inequalities bequeathed by the colonial constitution of western modernity, we arrive at a better understanding of the way forms of resistance to the latter are constructed outside of the West, including alternative ways of managing ecological challenges.***

To illustrate the relevance of these decolonial approaches in transition management, we offer here some results of research on NGO capacity to reconcile the human imperative with the ecological transition.[23] Aware that they needed to transform their organisational models, in December 2020 several large French NGOs made a commitment to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by 50 % by 2030, arguing that 'the actions of organisations in the sector of solidarity, crucial though these actions may be, can have environmental and climatic consequences'.[24] From our study of

20 *Malcolm Ferdinand. 2019. Une écologie décoloniale: penser l'écologie depuis le monde caribéen. Anthropocène. Paris : Editions du Seuil. p.298.*
21 *Ibid, p.305.*
22 *Ibid, p.14.*
23 *More information on this doctoral thesis work is available at https://cv.hal.science/vincent-pradier*
24 *Statement of Commitment on Climate by Humanitarian Organisations, December 2020. https://www.environnementhumanitaire.org/en/ressource/statement-of-commitment-on-climate-by-humanitarian-organisations-december-2020/*

specific management practices of several NGOs working in Burkina Faso and Senegal (both former French colonies), we shall show how decolonial approaches reveal their *coloniality*, and reveal in turn the *twofold gap of modernity, colonial* and *environmental*, and at the same time their *pluriversal* character.

On the one hand, the different tools and modalities of these NGOs are, some would say, purveyors of strong *colonialities*. They are deeply rooted in a *western* concept of management, expressed, for example, in the quantitative indicators applied to *processes* and to norms, devised in western headquarters and applied in both the countries studied. They are problematic to apply in practice, because of the difficulty of getting the non-western staff of the NGOs to accept them, and because the data required may not be easily available; or, if available, not necessarily reliable. On the other hand, we find *coloniality* in certain attitudes adopted by the NGOs, particularly the disparagement – invoking *western* scientific rationalism – of comments, observations, or attitudes expressed by non-western employees. The NGOs actively disqualify types of knowledge which they judge a *priori* to be invalid. The research we did nevertheless showed that the new approaches we are proposing here – decolonial approaches – are relevant, being used whenever local teams are given the possibility of developing their own organisational tools based on pre-existing endogenous practice and knowledge.[25] These tools may be described as *pluriversal templates* for management. *Non-western* local practices are used, for example, in the adaptation of some resource management projects to improve their sustainability. Management regulations may be drafted to distinguish the responsibilities of westerners from those of non-westerners in certain areas, for example, aeroplane use. Most radically, organisational modalities may be developed to actively resist the normative demands of aid: for example, the establishment of 'paper services', to deal with the excessive administration typical of the [aid] sector, out of all proportion to the scale of the organisation. The *western* management modality is thereby reduced to a simple, unique tool for dealing with donors (which does not say much about what the NGOs actually do).

Numerous calls to 'decolonise international aid'[26] are emerging across the sector. Decolonial approaches may help us understand how NGO management is both a purveyor of *eurocentrism* and its *related colonialities*, and a source of practical alternatives. They enable us to contextualise management theories

25 *Op.cit.*
26 *Peace Direct et al. 2021. Time to Decolonise Aid. Insights and Lessons from a Global Consultation.* https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/PD-Decolonising-Aid_Second-Edition.pdf

– which tend to put forward concepts (competition, profitability, efficiency) as though they were obvious – by bringing to the table cultural values with specific historical and geographical provenance; and they often simplify 'socio-economic realities that are not western'.[27] They also encourage us to imagine, as the Zapatist slogan has it, *un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*,[28] that is, a world that, faced as it is with multiple crises, '(entails) collaboration between divergent voices about the alternative types of world that we want to create'.[29] This is particularly true of western NGO practice in ecological transition, which reveals a twofold *colonial* and *environmental* imperative that needs to be overcome. From experience of these organisations' capacity to reinvent themselves, there seems to us little doubt that they will respond.

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27 *Alexandre Wong. 2020. 'Chapitre 5. Singularisation et universalisation des pratiques de RSE et de développement durable en Afrique.' In La recherche enracinée en management. EMS Editions. P.87. https://doi.org/10.3917/ems.kamde.2020.01.0083.*

28 *While several translations exist, this phrase is most often translated in French as 'un monde où cohabitent plusieurs mondes' ('a world in which several worlds live together, or co-habit').*

29 *Ashish Kotari et al. 2019. Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary. Tulika Books and Authorsupfront.*

Decolonising data: is this a prerequisite for true localisation?

by Martin Noblecourt

Removing the barriers to the localisation of humanitarian aid entails transforming project management, including the way in which the humanitarian aid sector collects and manages data, setting communities and their humanitarian actors at the centre. This article questions whether such a transformation is possible without more extensive reflection on 'the colonialism of data', engendered by our world-wide digital system. This article also suggests prior conditions required, possible avenues for action and success stories that illustrate a responsible approach to data which would be of real benefit to everyone.

The concept of localisation has been officially the lead item on the humanitarian agenda since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. The concept is, however, increasingly called into question by the idea of the 'decolonisation of aid', which takes a different approach as its starting point: 'two different conversations [are taking place] simultaneously: a technical exchange on ways to improve humanitarian aid, and a moral debate on how to deal with the broader dynamics of geopolitical power which are the reason a country may need humanitarian aid in the first place'.[1]

Despite the growing importance in recent years of data management programmes,[2] the challenges they present seem at first sight somewhat removed from questions of governance or power relationships within the international solidarity movement. In a 2023 study of the topic (*Changing the outlook: for a local approach to data*),[3] CartONG demonstrated the crucial role of data in putting localisation into practice and more generally in changing power relationships within the humanitarian aid sector.

BIAS AND ACCOUNTABILITY RUN COUNTER TO ATTEMPTS AT LOCALISATION

Our basic vision of the sector is biased by our thinking about why and how we collect data. By way of example, a case study[4] showed that while '3W' (*Who/What/Where*) operational reports produced by OCHA (the UN's

1 *Heba Aly. 'Policymakers and racial justice activists came together to discuss decolonising aid.' The New Humanitarian. August 2022.*
2 *CartONG. 'Program Data: The silver bullet of the humanitarian and development sectors? Panorama of the practices and needs of francophone CSOs.' September 2020.*
3 *CartONG, 'Changing the outlook: for a local approach to data'. January 2024.*
4 *Development initiatives. 'Improving the visibility of local and national actors in humanitarian aid data.' 2021.*

humanitarian affairs coordination body) already minimised the importance of local actors in humanitarian interventions, these local actors disappeared entirely from key reports produced by the IATI (International Aid Transparency Initiative), because in the absence of financial indicators their presence was undetectable.

In the same way, the fact that local languages are not taken into account – especially when devising and carrying out surveys and evaluations – introduces a fundamental bias into data used as the basis for taking decisions on humanitarian interventions. The organisation Translators without Borders/Clear Global has supplied several examples of humanitarian projects where accountability, relevance or basic feasibility have been called into question because of a lack of accurate translation in languages that beneficiaries understand.[5] There is an all-too-prevalent practice today of relying on third parties who happen to be on hand to translate questionnaires that may often be quite complex. There is no way of checking the quality of the translation. People may even be simply left out of surveys because there is no way of providing a translation. This results in bias in the data produced and leads to systematic under-representation of certain population groups (women, people with a lower level of education, minorities ...). A similar observation might be made about taking gender into account in surveys, although progress is being made on this.

> ***International agencies (donors, the UN, major international CSOs) continue to take the lead in determining research projects and their objectives, associated indicators and often methods for collecting and managing data.***

These problems of bias are part of a humanitarian system where upwards accountability is considered increasingly important. In the view of civil society organisations (CSOs) (73% of the CSOs surveyed by CartONG),[6] and national statistical institutes (from a survey of 140 national statistical institutes in low- and middle-income countries),[7] data collected is intended primarily for donors and international humanitarian actors, far more than for local government actors or civil society, or those actively using data within these organisations.

5 *Translators Without Borders. 'Listen and learn: The link between language and accountability for the future of the Grand Bargain.' June 2021.*
6 *CartONG. 'Beyond the Numbers: Balancing Innovation, Ethics, and Impact.' October 2024.*
7 *Mihir Prakash, Tanya Sethi. 'Measuring and responding to demand for official statistics.' AidData. December 2018.*

International agencies (donors, the UN, major international CSOs) continue to take the lead in determining research projects and their objectives, associated indicators and often methods for collecting and managing data. Local actors (CSOs, research units, individual researchers, and communities who are ultimately the most concerned) are limited to an implementation role, considered no more than sources of data.[8] This situation has an impact on all the CSOs in the international solidarity sector. They are obliged to adopt measures that run counter to humanitarian principles, on the pretext of the need for compliance. The best example is the process of screening, which some donors try to insist on: verification that humanitarian workers and suppliers, as well as the intended beneficiaries of CSOs' interventions, are not on international sanctions lists. This type of screening does not conform to the humanitarian values of impartiality and non-discrimination. It creates a new set of challenges related to reliability, security and (mis)trust of people.[9] The most significant altercation between French CSOs and their government, including the Agence Française de Développement (France's Overseas Development Agency), went as far as a flat refusal, in some cases, to talk to each other. It ended up with the Conseil d'État (France's final court of appeal) eventually asked to pronounce - which it did in favour of the CSOs – precisely on this issue of screening, in other words on a challenge over the responsible handling of data...[10]

This type of bias can have serious consequences, by failing to reach oppressed people in the management of funds intended to help them,[11] but tending more generally towards the creation of a vicious circle: problems of access/fewer data collected/failure to properly identify needs/under-allocation of funds.

NEO-COLONIALISM OF DATA?

The international solidarity sector cannot ignore today's global digital systems, dominated by a few major companies (American, for the most part). The transformation of our economic system by digitalisation and data (cf. debates on 'surveillance capitalism'[12] or the claim that 'data are the new oil')[13] might be considered on the same sort of scale as the emergence of colonialism in terms of the capture of resources. Extracting personal data for private

8 *Mahad Wasuge, Ahmed M. Musa, Tobias Hagmann, 'Who owns data in Somalia? Ending the country's privatised knowledge economy', Somali Public Agenda, Juillet 2021*
9 *CartONG. 'Screening and accountability. Responsible data management toolbox.' June 2023.*
10 *Coordination SUD. 'Annulation des lignes directrices en matière de criblage par le Conseil d'État.' (The annulment by the Council of State of guidelines relating to screening.) February 2023.*
11 *Mariam Ibrahim, Fionna Smyth, Claudia Wells, Euan Ritchie. 'When the data doesn't tell the full story: improving gender-responsive climate finance.' Development Initiatives Blog. November 2023.*
12 *Shoshana Zuboff. 'L'âge du capitalisme de surveillance.' (The age of surveillance capitalism.) Editions Zulma: October 2020.*
13 *The Economist. 'The world's most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data.' May 2017.*

interests (and the way this process has become invisible, and normalised) follows the same logic as colonial extractivism.[14]

Experts therefore speak of 'algorithmic colonisation', which reproduces the methods of colonialism. The issue

> ***Experts therefore speak of 'algorithmic colonisation', which reproduces the methods of colonialism.***

is essentially 'the way technologies imported [sc. into African countries] by the West not only encode western values, objectives and interests, but are a positive hindrance to Africa's own technologies, which better suit its needs'.[15] This is reflected in failure to adapt solutions to local contexts, contempt for the people behind the data and blind trust in technology. Among the most striking evidence of these new inequalities: exploitation of 'clickworkers' who keep artificial intelligence (AI) platforms going, risking their own mental health in doing so;[16] 'plundering' of biometric data from vulnerable people in crisis-torn countries like Argentina by the Californian start-up WorldCoin;[17] concentration of the environmental externalities of digitalisation (pollution from mineral extraction, toxic waste, etc.) in countries of the South.

Behind the grand international declarations about achieving global consensus on technology in the service of development (such as the recent *Global Digital Compact*) lie several opposing interests on the part of the huge American companies on the one hand and states and civil society on the other (the latter not only in the Global South): the former openly assert their opposition to the ambitions of the latter for digital sovereignty.[18] It is worth noting that the imposition of western norms is also open to challenge over its most apparently uncontroversial features, such as the adoption of norms compatible with the European GDPR, whose vision of rights as essentially individual is not matched in every culture.[19]

Artificial intelligence (AI), currently considered by many people as revolutionary for the humanitarian

14 *Nick Couldry, Ulises A. Mejias. 'Making data colonialism liveable: how might data's social order be regulated?' Internet Policy Review, 8(2). May 2018.*
15 *Abeba Birhane. 'Algorithmic Colonization of Africa.' Imagining AI: How the World Sees Intelligent Machines. Oxford Academic: 2023.*
16 *Marion Douet. 'Au Kenya, des « entraîneurs » de ChatGPT s'élèvent contre leurs conditions de travail.' (In Kenya, ChatGPT "trainers" protest their working conditions.) Le Monde. October 2023.*
17 *Louise André-Williams. 'De l'argent contre des données biométriques : la start-up américaine qui profite de la misère.' (Money in exchange for biometric data: the American start-up that profits from extreme poverty.) Médiapart. March 2024.*
18 *Stephen Chacha & Bill Anderson. Digital Compacts: Global ideals, regional realities.' Development Initiatives. September 2024.*
19 *Siddharth Peter de Souza, Hellen Mukiri Smith & Linnet Taylor. 'Decolonial Data Law andGovernance.' Technology and Regulation. 2024 pp.1-11.*

sector, really does no more than shine a spotlight on the challenges data present. In fact, AI will automatically reproduce bias in data and may even amplify it (an unintended consequence), reducing transparency and thus the scope for correcting errors – and it will, obviously, make it even more difficult for communities to be involved in the use of their own data.[20] If we are not vigilant, AI will simply reinforce existing power dynamics, and encourage techno-solutionism (e.g., the temptation to extrapolate data for a given country, where in-country collection is complicated by difficulties of access, by means of data from neighbouring countries: a lack of methodological rigour is inevitable).

> *By listening and paying more attention to local communities when developing projects; by being more inclusive and thus enhancing the quality of data used for needs assessments; by making more use of qualitative, introspective approaches; by transforming our ways of collaborating and learning – by taking these steps, our sector would have far greater impact.*

Equality between women and men is already proven to exhibit bias in AI: most tools and methods have been devised by professions where women are structurally under-represented; and the data which sustain major AI learning systems like ChatGPT are based on a corpus of knowledge that reflects the inequalities of western society, including gender inequality.[21]

A GENUINELY RESPONSIBLE APPROACH TO DATA

Dealing with bias and inequality calls for several structural changes in the organisation of international solidarity: first, we need to support the growing capacity of local actors to handle the challenges related to data, with their needs – rather than the demand for more and more accountability – taken as the starting point. This requires funding and training. Several organisations recommend investing as a priority in local data infrastructure (local administrations, civil status and census returns, schools, hospitals ...), thereby building a 'spinal column' to support a wider system of data, including on humanitarian aid.[22]

20 *Op. cit. See note 6 above.*
21 *Linda Raftree. 'How can we apply feminist frameworks to AI governance?' MERL Tech. September 2023.*
22 *Bernard Sabiti, Bill Anderson & Sam Wozniak. 'The data side of leaving no one behind.' Development Initiatives. September 2021.*

They recommend also recognising the legitimacy of a sovereign statistical system developed by national actors, rather than trying to set up a parallel system, as the humanitarian aid sector too often does. We should also reverse the process of 'more and more accountability', as already discussed. The need for change also affects project management, which requires a less narrow concept of indicators, with communities and local actors heard and paid attention to in project development (which entails a change of approach to project financing, too).

There are frameworks available today to guide the work that needs to be done on data inclusivity: they include *Principles for Digital Development* (principles which include the issue of data, while additionally going further), the *Inclusive Data Charter*[23] and the *Data Values Project*.[24] They all assume more involvement by communities in devising data requirements and making use of data, as well as greater transparency, open data, and the provision of more opportunities to acquire data literacy. There are examples of decentralised international networks, structured to promote working within egalitarian ecosystems – e.g., the OpenStreetMap platform, or Flying Labs – whose objective is to reduce the 'power footprint' (taking the concept of 'carbon footprint' as a model) of actors from the global North among their users.[25] Alongside initiatives like these, we also need to be willing to find ways of drawing on the potential of tomorrow's humanitarian leaders and experts, from the global South.

CartONG's new overview study on the challenges that data poses for the international solidarity movement ('Beyond the Numbers: Balancing Innovation, Ethics, and Impact'),[26] shows that the structural transformations described above would benefit everyone. By listening and paying more attention to local communities when developing projects; by being more inclusive and thus enhancing the quality of data used for needs assessments; by making more use of qualitative, introspective approaches; by transforming our ways of collaborating and learning – by taking these steps, our sector would have far greater impact. The point is equally valid for mid-sized NGOs, particularly French ones, who are at risk of being left behind in the present context of rapidly evolving technology and increasingly complex demands for accountability.

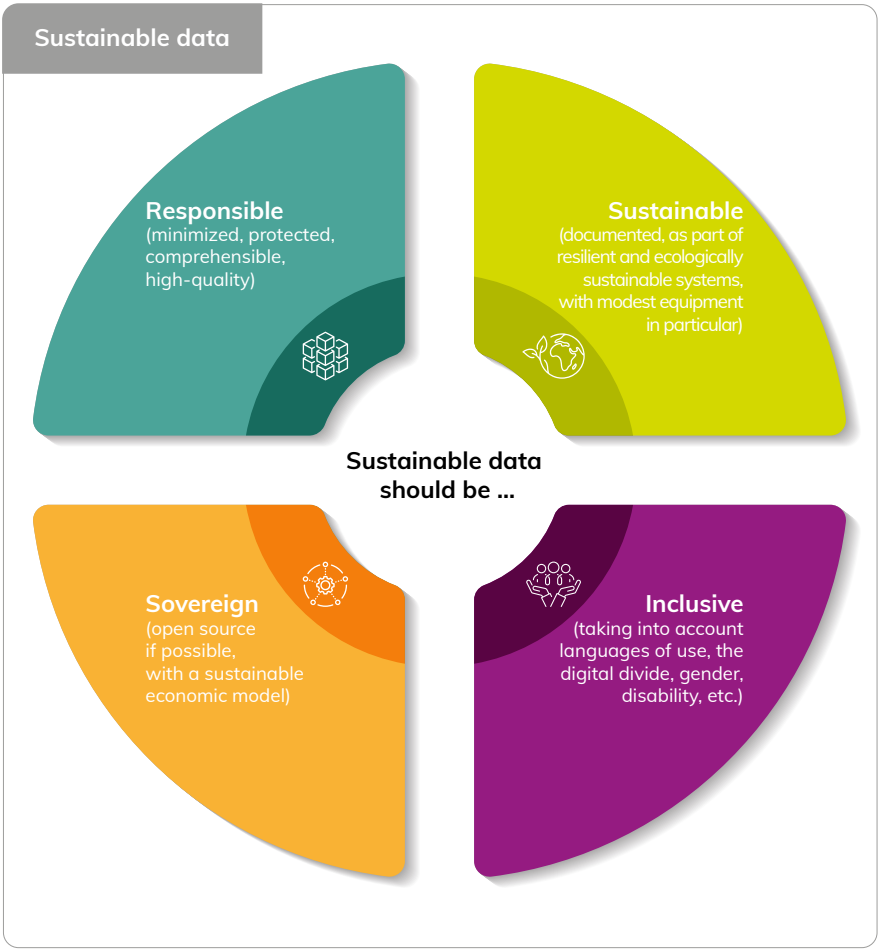
A sustainable approach to data must therefore find ways to address the following challenges: responsible data use (protection of personal data); cybersecurity; sustainability in the sense of promoting affordable, resilient systems that are compatible with ecologically sound policies; inclusivity (accessibility, gender-awareness, sensitivity to local language requirements and to data literacy; and the wider issue of digital

23 *Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data. 'Inclusive Data Charter.' 2018.*
24 *Data Values project. 'The #DataValues Manifesto: Demanding a fair data future.' 2021.*
25 *WeRobotics. 'Here's How We Expanded Locally Led Action to Shift the Power.' March 2024.*
26 *Op.cit. See notes 6 and 20 above.*

sovereignty. This approach should resonate with humanitarian actors wishing to apply the principle of 'do no harm' to data management, as well as with national and governmental actors in the Global South and a range of humanitarian actors in the public sector in the Global North (especially Europe), who are all confronted today with similar digitalised systems. A 'decolonisation of data', or of digitalisation more widely, is needed if responsible, sustainable data are to materialise.

It is essential that discussions on the future of data, and the use of digitalisation within the sector of international solidarity, should not be limited to specialists, and that our sector joins in the wider process of reflection on how to achieve responsible digitalisation. If not, CSOs could find themselves at odds with humanitarian principles, perhaps without even realising it.

Martin Noblecourt, Senior Fundraising & Research Officer, CartONG



Definition of sustainable data (CartONG visual)

point of view

Decolonising aid: a complex process of renewing international solidarity

This opinion piece by Martine Gwana Passa, Support Officer in Gret's Scientific Department, describes a process of reflection undertaken within Gret on the subject of decolonisation.

The aid sector is at a milestone in its history. Enlisting aid actors and participants, it is striving to remove persistent traces of colonialism, by promoting humanitarian and development approaches that are fairer and more equitable. The process called 'decolonising aid' includes several initiatives on the part of aid actors, such as heightening sensitivity to systemic, structural and institutional racism, or to inequalities of power within organisations. Decolonisation entails calling out and changing power imbalances deeply embedded in the structures that have long defined the aid system. The process relates to policies and intervention methods as well as to the way aid professionals tend to behave.

Several approaches for thinking anew about aid and international solidarity, so that 'our actions' match 'our values'.

The debate on decolonisation sheds light on the long-term effects of colonialism and western dominance that pervade various domains, including the international solidarity movement. Colonialism is defined as a system of power based on economic exploitation, political and cultural domination and the repression by the colonisers of the colonised. Arising from concepts of 'advancement' and 'the civilising mission' that belong to the colonial era, aid has been designed since the Second World War around political interests (post-Cold War alignment, structural adjustment, the fight against terrorism, etc.) and on the principle of efficiency (making use of experts, professionalisation, etc.). Post-colonial and decolonial critiques tend to see aid as paternalistic, motivated by donors' self-interest, used by western countries as a means of maintaining their economic, political and cultural influence over recipient countries. Those working in NGOs today find themselves faced with a paradox, being both '*victims and instigators*' of excessive bureaucracy because of their tools and methods which mirror the asymmetries of power. This is seen in the centralised decision-making of international NGOs, and in the lack of balance in partnerships between international and national organisations.

Thus, the verticality of international cooperation is an illustration of the principle of hegemony, which brings to bear on local situations technocratic approaches and interpretations. This leads to a gap between the initial objectives of projects and the outcomes that are (not) achieved. This verticality takes the form of cascading subcontracts: donors > international NGOs > national NGOs > civil society organisations > local development committees, etc., meaning that power inequalities multiply along the way, and there is an increasing gap between operations and the contexts in which they are implemented.

> ***We need to rebuild international aid based on solidarity and equality as part of a wider vision of historical justice and recognition of cultural diversity. Decolonisation thus has a determining role in the redesign of international cooperation and is a driving force towards achieving it.***

The issue of coloniality in development cooperation was initially addressed via concepts such as neocolonialism, the racial divide in labour, North-South imperialism, and conditionality. Discussion of the concept of 'the decolonial' in academic and activist circles later introduced broader, more radical theoretical and political perspectives, which need to be carefully nuanced in the context of official development assistance. The subjectivity of historical narratives and epistemological choices in discussion of 'the decolonial' may sometimes lead to clashes between different analytical trends, which taken to their logical conclusion entail a drift towards ideological, even reactionary, incoherences, and to binary or essentialist interpretations. An approach that allows for complementarity between historical sociology,[1] anti-colonialism, postcolonialism and decolonialism would enable a more nuanced and inclusive understanding, based on analysis that is both contextualised and relevant.

Rethinking the international solidarity movement requires a change of paradigm, going beyond assistance in building reciprocal partnerships between international and national actors. It requires our liberation from project mode, and from bureaucratic or management imperatives, and the transformation of 'recipients' into 'active agents' regarding public policy choices and modalities. We need to rebuild international aid based on solidarity and equality as part of a wider vision of historical justice and recognition of cultural diversity. Decolonisation thus

1 *Integrating a historical perspective into cooperation would seem essential to lift the veil on the colonial past and better understand the dynamics of the aid system as they are now.*

has a determining role in the redesign of international cooperation and is a driving force towards achieving it. The call to decolonise official development assistance is more urgent than ever, so that the aid system ceases to reproduce and perpetuate the inequalities and the relationships of domination that it is trying to overcome.

A collective process, to be pursued with care!

In 2023, Gret launched a collective process of reflection on 'Decolonising Official Development Assistance', at the initiative of its Senegal team. Aware that attempts at decolonisation can be confused with inclusivity initiatives, or descend into '*decolonisation washing*', Gret's teams focused on a critical analysis of the dynamics of power, history and social and political contexts.

> ***Gret's aim is to re-examine itself through the prism of its colonial legacy, in its less well-known aspects, in order to reassess its values, its methods of action and organisation, as well as its relationship with public actors, local partners and donors.***

The aim is to distinguish between '*what falls within the provinces of coloniality, neoliberal organisational principles and societal development*'.

In view of the different analytical trends in the study of colonialism – historical sociology, anticolonialism, postcolonialism, decolonialism – and the variety of views, directions of enquiry and sensitivities of its teams, Gret soon found itself asking some key questions: *How can we set up a common framework of analysis? How can we approach subjects that are so sensitive and complex? How can the teams engage with different – sometimes opposing – positions on the decolonial issue?* Gret's aim is to re-examine itself through the prism of its colonial legacy, in its less well-known aspects, in order to reassess its values, its methods of action and organisation, as well as its relationship with public actors, local partners and donors.

This interdisciplinary process is enriching and exciting, combining professional and personal experiences, acts of memory, empirical approaches and popular educational methods, as well as expressions of frustration or resentment. The decolonisation of aid is a prism of possibilities, with ethical, activist, political, intellectual, scientific and personal dimensions. Our initiative has illustrated the importance of organising critical, constructive exchanges of view, clearly identifying points of disagreement, determining points of consensus and facilitating productive discussion. Every participant in this collective effort finds his or her legitimate place since – as Albert Memmi emphasised

– colonisation created 'colonisers and colonised'. The task is only just beginning. We are at the stage of identifying the many objectives that need to be given priority: studying links between colonial legacy – neoliberal principles – current organisational models and the broad geopolitical context; decode prevailing accounts of 'the decolonial' and their political instrumentalisation; explore continuing patterns of inequality of power, internally and between partners; set up a dialogue between what is described as 'local' knowledge and 'expert' knowledge; show respect for cultural identity; redefine the roles of the State and local actors; transform the professional tools and practices of development aid actors, etc.

A key take-away from this process within Gret is the importance of creating a safe environment for the exchange of views, since decolonisation is a divisive, even contentious, subject. It requires agreement on the rules of the game, such as active listening, acknowledging different realities and experiences, respecting confidentiality, mutual support and willingness to accept disagreement without interpreting it as a personal attack, etc. It is vital to define boundaries, too, excluding discriminatory comments and thus avoiding exclusion and isolation. Mechanisms for repair and atonement are needed in case participants feel prejudice or discomfort: collective debriefings are one such mechanism.

The main challenge of the process is to avoid interpretations tending towards conspiracy theory, with the missions or values of NGOs in danger of being reduced to neoliberal ideologies that perpetuate western dominance of the world economy, while humanitarian actors work from a humanist perspective. We must also beware of simplistic analysis setting the North against the South, or the dominators against the dominated. While NGOs and donors do tend to reproduce – often unconsciously, and despite their efforts at inclusivity – colonial frames of reference, it is very important to take a nuanced approach to analysis of the fact of colonialism, and to propose dynamic, empirical, hybrid approaches to institutional practices, ideas and principles. Coloniality does not explain all the inequalities in development aid: globalisation, often associated with neoliberalism, has also created divisions between and within countries. If the decolonial prism helps reveal aid's malfunctioning, the complicated entanglement of past and present requires methodological care, to avoid anachronism and overinterpretation based on personal opinions.

Reflection, and the decolonisation process, are long-term undertakings, with work by teams at local level before it can be shared collectively. The process is iterative, responsive and flexible. It is facilitated by rigorous methods of implementation and concertation.

Is it possible to communicate differently? (De)colonisation of visual humanitarian communication

by Cristina García Martínez

Humanitarian aid uses photographs to reach the public. These photographic representations or images are ambivalent: while the primary objective of humanitarian aid is to relieve people's suffering and to ensure 'respect for life and for people's physical and moral integrity', photographs are taken of moments of extreme suffering.

International humanitarian aid aims to help vulnerable groups or populations. To ensure the success of their work, international organisations draw on private sources of funds, thereby avoiding financial dependence on the State, preserving their own identities and maintaining their capacity for rapid response to emergency situations.[1]

The most direct way for them to raise money – from individuals or from businesses, among other funding sources – is via communication, essentially via the 'humanitarian photograph'.

In the nineteen-seventies, humanitarian aid made use of visual communication, primarily still photography, to reach out to the public, inform them about their activities and alert them to political and social injustice. Conflicts such as the war in Biafra, the famine in the Sahel[2] or the Vietnam War were the origin of humanitarianism *without borders*.[3] The French organisation *Médecins sans Frontières* (Doctors without Borders) became the paradigm for humanitarian aid, putting into practice its own mission statement: 'take action and speak out, provide treatment and bear witness'.[4] The denunciatory power of an image or photograph makes it a key element in communication. Pictures of starving children and weeping mothers embody 'ideal victims',[5] moving

1 *Marie-Laure Le Coconnier & Bruno Pommier. L'action humanitaire, Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 2012.*

2 *An example of such an image is 'Weighing a child for a food aid programme', taken by the Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado. He worked in a number of countries, and during several conflicts. His photographs of the Sahelian drought (Amar, 2000) were published as 'Sahel:the end of the road', a cooperative venture with Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), with revenues from the book benefitting MSF. The image is at https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/ressources/oeuvre/cR5d7ob.*

3 *Rony Brauman. L'Action Humanitaire, Paris : Dominos Flammarion, 2000 ; Philippe Ryfman. Une histoire de l'humanitaire. Paris : La Découverte, 2016.*

4 *Rony Brauman. Op. cit.*

5 *Ofra Koffman, Shani Orgad & Rosalind Gill. «Girl power and 'selfie humanitarianism». Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies, 29(2), 2015: pp.157–168. https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2015.1022948*

spectators – the public - to compassion,[6] an emotion already aroused in the past by photographs taken by missionaries during the colonial process. These

> ***Pictures of starving children and weeping mothers embody 'ideal victims', moving spectators – the public - to compassion, an emotion already aroused in the past by photographs taken by missionaries during the colonial process.***

photographic images are, at best, ambivalent: while the primary objective of humanitarian aid is to relieve people's suffering and to ensure 'respect for life and for people's physical and moral integrity',[7] photographs are taken of moments of extreme suffering.[8]

There are two issues: we need to know if photographic images of 'ideal victims' have changed in our own time, and, if they have, how this change has come about.

HUMANITARIAN COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE NINETEEN-SEVENTIES

From the earliest days of humanitarian aid, photographs have been the key element in the communication process. Rapid advances in photography made it possible for Europe and the West to record their humanitarian interventions as visual triumphs.[9] The camera became a witness, accompanying different organisations, becoming their most valuable tool. The outcome is 'social photography' which aims to show reality in the field, from a western viewpoint, despite the fact that the images raise doubts or questions.[10]

Since the nineteen-seventies, with the development of aid *without borders*, the social engagement angle has become increasingly significant. It is the main axis of media coverage: it is the means of communication that most effectively draws attention to forgotten causes. Relying on social engagement and denunciation, it is '... the enemy of indifference and arbitrariness,

6 *Susan Sontag. Regarding the pain of others. New York: Picador, 2003.*
7 *CICR. « ¿Qué es el derecho internacional humanitario? ». Servicio de asesoramiento en derecho internacional humanitario, 2004. https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/dih.es_.pdf*
8 *Luc Boltanski. La Souffrance à distance. Morale humanitaire, médias et politique. Paris: Éditions Métailié, 1933*
9 *Lilie Chouliaraki & Anne Vestergaard, Routledge Handbook of Humanitarian Communication. London: Routledge, 2022; André Rouillé. La photo numérique : une force néolibérale. Paris : Éditions l'échappée, 2020.*
10 *In 1985, Sebastiao Salgado created a photographic essay for Médecins sans frontières. This led to the collection published as Une certaine grâce (A Certain Grace), 2002. One of the photographs in this collection may be seen at: https://www.centrepompidou.fr/fr/ressources/oeuvre/cR5d7ob. See also Susan Sontag, Op. cit.*

the instrument of a global conscience',[11] giving birth to a whole new genre: humanitarian photography.[12]

The display of images of suffering, despite its origins in social engagement, becomes *de facto* the preferred communication mode of organisations aiming to arouse public compassion and thereby to mobilise donations of aid for the global South. Such images have a catalysing effect on international solidarity, while also creating a specific regime of representation.[13] The continual broadcasting of images with inherent dichotomies and hierarchies engenders a way of seeing and imagining derived from the modern colonial system. Suffering human bodies are seen alongside pictures of health-care professionals in action, contributing to the notorious construct of the imaginary ideal of the western saviour – or 'white saviour'[14]– committed to science-based action, asserting neutrality in aid interventions.

These images are responsible for a deterministic representation of the humanitarian victim, calling for a kind of universal morality by way of response, illustrated by one-way aid from North to South, which in its turn legitimises the dehumanisation of 'the other', making their suffering seem inevitable.

The literature on humanitarian communication states that the principle of social engagement inherent in the process just described is being gradually transformed. This is partly because of an increasingly generalised assumption that social equity has been achieved, and partly because of an advertising model which integrates new, neoliberal communication methods. All this in combination has yielded what we call *post-humanitarianism*.[15]

NEW PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION IN HUMANITARIAN AID

The increase since the nineteen-nineties in the sheer number of NGOs, and acceptance at policy level that their activities needed regulating, led to the international solidarity movement's becoming highly professional. This was particularly true of its communication strategies. Many organisations began to compete with one another, prompting state involvement in a humanitarian

11 *Rony Brauman & René Backmann. Les médias et l'humanitaire : éthique de l'information ou charité-spectacle. Paris : Cfpj éditions, 1996, p. 20.*

12 *Heide Fehrenbach & Davide Rodogno (Eds.). Humanitarian Photography. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107587694.*

13 *Stuart Hall defines the regime of representation as the sociological structure arising from fixed stereotypical representations or images of a specific population group, in this case the recipients of humanitarian aid. See Stuart Hall. Representation. Cultural representations and signifying practices. London: Sage Publications, 1992.*

14 *In 2012, the activist and novelist Teju Cole used the expression 'white saviour' in his response to the short film Kony made by the US NGO Invisible Children Inc, produced by its founder Jason Russell, whose aim was to denounce Kony, the leader of the LRA in Uganda. See: https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843.*

15 *Lilie Chouliaraki. « Post-humanitarianism». International Journal of Cultural Studies, 13(2), 2010, p.107–126. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877909356720.*

communication code of ethics,[16] while the NGOs resorted to the regular use of advertising agencies: 'associations began to think in terms of strategy and of institutional communication [...] and thus turned to advertising agencies'[17] to help them raise money. In Rony Brauman's view, 'communication is being allowed to insidiously take the place of information [...].'[18] If we think of 'informing' as a social process and 'communicating' as an advertising process, we are witnessing a fundamental change in the basic principles of humanitarian communication.

NEOLIBERALISM IN HUMANITARIAN AID

In the past twenty years or so, humanitarian aid has changed significantly. The emergence of online networks and digital media made for widespread social movements, which influenced NGOs' communication methods, as well as what was communicated. Citizens, like institutions, began to take an interest in social and political questions, in the context of an evolving neoliberal model of society.[19] The international community expressed a concern to maintain world peace, and organised the first UN Security Council summit.[20] Concomitantly, an ideology based on minimal regulation, privatisation and the withdrawal of the State from the provision of social services obliged all social activity to acknowledge the sovereignty of the market.[21]

Humanitarian aid is therefore influenced by an ideological system that assumes the 'neoliberalisation' of humanitarian aid:[22] it is still characterised by its social denunciatory power but depends on the advertising principles of the market[23].

We are witnessing a process by which social issues are being depoliticised, instrumentalised and commercialised. The objective is now a style or regime of representation which will have the desired response in the public it reaches (the ordinary members of the public who donate money) but will do so by putting the humanitarians themselves at the centre of the debate. The revolution caused by the surge in digital communication methods is responsible for putting 'I' at the centre of the aid process, in a similar way to businesses developing projects. International NGOs are no longer simple associations,

16 *Pascal Dauvin. La communication des ONG humanitaires. Paris : L'Harmattan, 2010.*
17 *Amélie Gastaut. La publicité au secours des grandes causes. Paris : Les Arts Décoratifs, 2010, p. 8.*
18 *Rony Brauman. L'Action Humanitaire. Paris : Dominos Flammarion, 2000, p. 69.*
19 *Isis Giraldo, « Postfeminismo / Genealogía, geografía y contornos de un concepto ». Debate Feminista, 59,2020. https://doi.org/10.22201/cieg.2594066xe.2020.59.01.*
20 *On 31 January 1992, the first UN Security Council summit was held in New York, with the five permanent members represented: China, the US, France, the Russian Federation and the UK. See https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/UNDOC/GEN/N92/259/64/PDF/N9225964.pdf?OpenElement.*
21 *Jess Butler. «For White Girls Only? Postfeminism and the Politics of Inclusion». Feminist Formations, 25(1), 2013, pp. 35–58. https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2013.0009.*
22 *Lilie Chouliaraki. « Post-humanitarianism». International Journal of Cultural Studies. 13(2), 2010, pp.107–126. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877909356720.*
23 *An example is the campaign by Action contre la Faim (Action against Hunger): 'Leila, 100 francs later'. This image is at https://madparis.fr/IMG/pdf/livret.pdf.*

but multinational businesses[24] and as such they depend on neoliberal depoliticisation to increase financial giving by e.g., targeted advertising. They rely on the neoliberal *ethos*: in other words, NGOs, structured like businesses, approach their work in the same way as businesses. Advertising marketing techniques underlie their campaigns for donations: they continually parade and sell their own achievements. To put it differently, they put themselves out there by developing an image. They project themselves as 'I, the saviour'. This form of communication is closely linked to the colonial process of 'the civilising guiding hand'. This, too, is neoliberal: to put oneself at the centre and make this act of self-centring the mark of one's identity. This is the basis of today's post-humanitarianism, when we applaud the altruism of someone who works in the humanitarian aid sector, the 'I at the centre'; while allowing some space to the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid, especially women, but seen from a western perspective.

We are dealing, in fact, with a stereotype which either attempts to cross the divide by using language that revictimises 'the other' (in this case, the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid); or makes claims for an unrealistic notion of equality based on women's self-sufficiency and their efforts towards achieving greater autonomy, generally aiming at 'western freedom', which is assumed to be the paradigm. Humanitarian communication is thus undergoing a metamorphosis, a sort of plunge into neoliberal values. At the start, in the nineteen-seventies, humanitarian representation had 'the other' as its focal point, but in the twenty-first century the sensationalist exhibition of victims – that shock effect – has been abandoned, with our gaze now turned elsewhere. This process illustrates the instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid, a business model which persuades and encourages people to play their part in social change, despite the absolute impossibility of reconciling two diametrically opposed realities.

POST-HUMANITARIANISM AS A NEOCOLONIAL CONSTRUCT

This change in strategy influences wider perception, and indeed encourages the normalisation, of injustice or systemic exploitation. It hides the true complexity of the dynamics involved and reinforces the cursory nature of giving: 'click, donate and forget'.[25] As this neoliberalism-based communication model has developed, women and girls in the South have been increasingly used in humanitarian aid representation or imagery as the ultimate social group. Their visibility has been enhanced by – amongst other things – the growth of activism, political speeches, social networks and also by the institutionalisation of feminism. This enhanced visibility illustrates the way humanitarian communication is imbued with new principles. Lillie Chouliaraki suggests

24 *Peter Redfield. « Doctors, Borders, and Life in Crisis », Cultural Anthropology, 20(3), 2005, pp. 328– 361.*
25 *Koffman, Orgad & Gill. Op. cit.*

that post-humanitarianism conjures the image of women and girls in the South as the latest ideal victims, who will end up living better lives thanks to the North's allowing them to achieve greater autonomy. The concept of 'empowerment' developed in the West sets up white, middle-class women as the feminist hegemonic paradigm to aspire to. Taking a colonial perspective, post-humanitarian discourse presents the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid as victims of patriarchal cultural practices, discriminating between them because of racial or ethnic differences. They thus reconstruct and disseminate the imaginary figure of the 'poor' woman, from 'the third world', 'oppressed' – the opposite of western femininity – who needs aid from the global North to be saved, reproducing the neocolonial trope: 'if western femininity is construed as the chosen norm, southern femininity is depicted as profoundly shaped by the patriarchy, by poverty and by victimisation. This reinforces the sense of a barrier, or a dichotomy, between "us" and "them".'[26] This neocolonial construct is closely tied to neoliberal principles, since it relies on the processes of corporatisation and depoliticisation, creating a re-imagined concept of victimisation, while highlighting differences.

HOW MIGHT HUMANITARIAN COMMUNICATION BE DECOLONISED?

In the decolonial studies tradition, one can envisage other types of discourse which subvert today's regime of representation by breaking stereotypes at the centre of the matrix.[27] There are organisations, mainly at local level, that shape narratives of resistance. Humanitarian aid and the management of humanitarian representation are related to what Maldonado Torres calls the decolonial turn[28] in the construction of a different world. Some photographs act as insurrectional demonstrations of self-representation: they provide alternatives to those which depend on the framework of the dominant system. The organisation Cocomacia is an example: its photographs reflect the multidisciplinary character of its work and its interventions, but above all they reflect the way it operates by networking.[29] This is the opposite of the communication process adopted by international organisations. It is worth noting that the photographs taken by Cocomacia constitute a local 'circularity': photographs are taken by themselves, of themselves, for themselves, breaking out of the dominant system and constituting a collective hermetic space

26 *Ibid.*
27 *See note 13 above.*
28 *Nelson Maldonado Torres. «Sobre la colonialidad del ser: contribuciones al desarrollo de un concepto», In El giro decolonial. Reflexiones para una diversidad epidémica más allá del capitalismo global, pp. 127–169, 2007. Siglo del Hombre Editores.*
29 *This organisation was the subject of the author's doctoral research. It is based in the Chocó region of Colombia. It has a gender team, which works on the social, economic, political and territorial rights of women engaged in agricultural activities in the region. https://www.facebook.com/generococomacia/photos_by?locale=es_LA.*

which refuses the neoliberal principles of post-humanitarianism.[30] Cocomacia does not wish to be part of the dominant representational or imagistic framework, but instead to construct its own stories, keeping distinct from the use of representation or imagery as a tool of capital. This intra-community interlinking is championed by decolonial studies, which acknowledge the possibility of constructing an international relationship between North and South within the framework of today's critique of neoliberal practices in international cooperation. At a conference held by the Andalusian Agency for International Cooperation for Development,[31] the theorist Ochy Curiel maintained that for an international coalition between North and South to be possible, the North would need to examine its own approaches to humanitarian action, e.g., its approach to communication.

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30 *This organisation, like others in the Chocó region, is based on the principle of mutual aid among the women who make up its membership. It thus benefits from a sort of permanent horizontality, which is transmitted via the photographs described.*

31 *Ochy Curiel, « Crítica de los movimientos descoloniales a la cooperación para el desarrollo». Las Claves de Ochy Curiel. Feminismo Descolonial, 2017.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZSHqvKLANQ.

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Decolonizing aid

This is the work: Resources for practical anti-racism, *Bond, Peace Direct, Advocacy Team, 2024*

Bond, Peace Direct, and the Advocacy Team have created a new set of resources and findings focused on advancing anti-racist and decolonial approaches in international policy and advocacy with the aim to inspire transformative change across the sector.

https://www.bond.org.uk/what-we-do/anti-racism-equity-diversity-and-inclusion/this-is-the-work/

Where do we go from here? Navigating power inequalities between development NGOs in the aid system, *LSE, University of Ghana, KNUST, Wageningen University, Makerere University, Radboud University, University of Manchester, 2024*

This research examines the extent and nature of concrete actions undertaken by Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs to tackle power asymmetries, explicitly comparing their understandings, perspectives and initiatives.

https://www.partos.nl/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Where-do-we-go-from-here-2-2_new.pdf

Too Southern to Be Funded: The Funding Bias Against the Global South, *The Shift Power Movement, 2024*

This research shows systemic imbalances in the distribution of funding from the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Despite commitments to support Southern leadership and civil society, approaches to 'tied aid' are disproportionately benefiting organisations *within* DAC member countries, while marginalising those in the Global South.

https://www.peacedirect.org/too-southern-to-be-funded/

Envisioning an alternative ecosystem for global development and humanitarianism, *Themrise Khan, Centre for Humanitarian Leadership, Deakin University, 2023*

This concept paper challenges the terms 'decolonisation', 'localisation' and 'shift the power', which have been the stand-out keywords within the heightened discourse in global development and humanitarianism. It does so by taking a more radical view: firstly, by turning the focus on countries themselves, rather than on specific centres

of financial and political power as the key drivers of development and change; and secondly, by considering that it is not a 'reimagining' of aid that is necessary, but rather the end of the aid systems—at least as we know them.

https://www.centreforhumanitarianleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Alternative-ecosystem-paper_FINAL.pdf

Transforming partnerships in international cooperation, *Peace Direct*, *2023*

Despite ongoing reform processes emphasising improved and equitable partnerships, many approaches still reflect neo-colonial hierarchies, undermining the value and dignity of local partners. In the second half of 2022, Peace Direct convened a global online consultation to discuss the issue of inequitable partnerships and how to decolonise them. The findings presented in this paper build on the previous reports, Time to Decolonise Aid and Race, Power and Peacebuilding, which were published in 2021 and 2022, respectively. These reports highlighted the prevalence of systemic racism across the wider humanitarian, development and peacebuilding sectors. The aim for this report is to provide a series of accessible approaches to building and sustaining better partnerships between civil society actors in the Global South and Global North donors, INGOs and intermediaries.

https://www.peacedirect.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Peace-Direct-Transforming-Partnerships-Report-English.pdf

Understanding the role of narratives in humanitarian policy change, *Patrick Saez*, *John Bryant*, *HPG Working paper*, *ODI*, *2023*

Humanitarian policy narratives are stories constructed and disseminated to shape beliefs and attitudes relating to humanitarian crises and aid, and thereby influence the policies of governments and aid organisations in this area. This article seeks to understand the origins and sources of humanitarian policy narratives, and analyzes the interests, objectives and functions behind the construction of these narratives. The authors propose the construction of new shared humanitarian frameworks for more people-centered, locally-directed humanitarian action.

https://media.odi.org/documents/Understanding_the_role_of_narratives_WP_SaezBryant_final.pdf

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Decolonising Aid: Perspectives from Civil Society in Francophone Sub-saharan Africa, WACSI, 2023

The design of aid programmes is overwhelmingly rooted in Western values and knowledge systems, which means that many programmes inadvertently create a norm based on Western values and practices that communities in the Global South must adhere to. This research report aims to answer four interconnected and fundamental questions:

1. What is the decolonisation of aid in practice?
2. What are the experiences and perspectives of CSOs in Francophone Africa?
3. how do these CSOs plan to contribute to a decolonisation and restructuring of the development aid system, in order to make it more just, equitable and efficient?
4. Finally, what will be the role of donors, especially INGOs, in this process?

https://wacsi.org/decolonising-aid-perspectives-from-civil-society-in-francophone-sub-saharan-africa/

Development Co-operation Report 2023: Debating the Aid system, OCDE, 2023

In the last three years, multiple global crises and the growing urgency of containing climate change have put current models of development co-operation to, perhaps, their most radical test in decades. Critique of the roots, rationale and operations of the international aid system is resulting in calls for fundamental change, manifesting, for example, in the movements to address colonial legacies and racism in the sector. This *Development Co-operation Report* takes stock of these challenges and proposes ways forward along four lines of action: unlock progress to deliver existing commitments; support locally led transformation in partner countries; modernise business models and financial management practices; and rebalance power relations in international decision making and partnerships.

https://doi.org/10.1787/f6edc3c2-en

An open letter to international donors and NGOs who want to genuinely help Ukraine, 24 August 2022

https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/news/an-open-letter-to-international-donors-and-ngos-who-want-to-genuinely-help-ukraine/

Whose Aid? Findings of a dialogue series on the decolonization of aid, *International Institute of Social Studies, KUNO, Partos, 2022*

This report summarizes five seminars held on the theme of decolonizing aid. Each episode addressed a different aspect of aid: historical perspective; development cooperation; humanitarian aid; ethical perspective; the role of the donor. This dialogue series highlights the need for change in the sector, for responses guided by local actors, calls for reflection on ethical frameworks and principles to guide the decolonization process, and for a rethinking of funding and resource allocation mechanisms.

https://www.kuno-platform.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Whose-aid-Findings-of-a-dialogue-series-on-the-decolonisation-of-aid.pdf

Link to the five seminars:

https://www.iss.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanitarian-governance-accountability-advocacy-alternatives/decolonization-aid

See also these three short documents which continue the reflection of these seminars:

Future Brief: Decolonisation of the development sector, *KUNO, Partos, The Broker, 2022*

https://www.partos.nl/publicatie/tracing-the-colonial-roots-of-development-cooperation-a-brief-history/

Decolonize! What does it mean? *Sara Duvisac, Oxfam, 2022*

This document introduces the key concepts of decolonial theory that inform many current calls to decolonize. It provides examples from Latin America, Africa, and North America of how activists have envisioned or realized decolonial futures. These movements led by Indigenous Peoples, people of color, women, and queer people articulate and define the possibilities of decolonial futures.

https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/decolonize-what-does-it-mean-621456/

Decolonising Aid: A reading and resource list, *The New Humanitarian, 2022*

Links to resources, publications, podcasts and webinars on decolonizing aid, racism and diversity in the sector, as well as localization and visions for the future.

https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2022/08/12/Decolonising-aid-a-reading-and-resource-list

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Racism and Humanitarian Action, *Elba Rahmouni, Marc Le Pape, MSF Crash, 2022*

This Crash dossier gathers a selection of Crash publications published over the last twenty years: all of them, in different manners, tackle the themes of racism and humanitarian action. They also evoke the way discussions about racism have been addressed at Médecins sans Frontières.

https://msf-crash.org/en/dossiers/racism-and-humanitarian-action

La décolonisation, c'est maintenant ! Guide pratique d'inspiration pour une collaboration internationale équitable, *NGO Federatie, 11.11.11, 2021*

Reflection and discussion on what decolonization means, and why it is important, are the defining stages of decolonization in practice. The aim of this publication is to facilitate reflection and exchange, to encourage organizations that have not yet begun this exercise to do so, and to show those that have already started the process new paths to explore.

https://11.be/sites/default/files/2021-11/20210928-FR-guide-d-inspiration-decolonisation-inspiratiegids-dekoloniseren-nu.pdf

WEBINAR

Rethinking Aid Financing: How Locally Led Organizations are Funding Their Futures, *The New Humanitarian, 25 September 2023*

After years of inaction on the emergency aid sector's promises to shift power and funding, grassroots groups are finding their own workarounds. During a wide-ranging panel, aid leaders described how local organisations are taking matters into their own hands.

https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2023/09/25/rethinking-aid-financing-locally-led-organisations-funding

PODCAST

"***Is decolonized aid an oxymoron?***", *Rethinking Humanitarianism*, *The New Humanitarian, 19 october 2022*

This episode of the Rethinking Humanitarianism podcast interviews Degan Ali, Director of the Kenyan NGO ADESO. Focusing on the decolonization of aid, he argues for systemic change in global governance and international financial systems.

https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/podcast/2022/10/19/Degan-Ali-decolonising-aid

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