

SUBMISSION FROM PEACE DIRECT

House of Commons International Development Committee Inquiry: the philosophy and culture of aid

About Peace Direct

1. This submission has been prepared by Peace Direct, a UK based international NGO dedicated to supporting locally led efforts to stop violent conflict and build sustainable peace.
2. Peace Direct defines 'locally led efforts' in terms of the relationships, agency and power structures of the participants, not in terms of geographic location. Locally led efforts are efforts by conflict-affected individuals, organizations and communities that:
 - a. Have high levels of trust, accountability and legitimacy among their constituencies;
 - b. Set their own strategic direction, priorities and programmatic focus;
 - c. Determine their own leadership and governance structures.¹
3. Peace Direct works with local organisations in 13 conflict-affected countries and maintains a network of over 30 local peacebuilding experts around the world who provide Peace Direct with regular insight and coverage of trends, initiatives and organisations working on peacebuilding, including atrocity prevention. Some of this information is published on Peace Direct's website www.peaceinsight.org. Peace Direct is a registered charity in England and Wales, charity number 1123241. For more information please see www.peacedirect.org
4. This submission summarizes and signposts research based on Peace Direct's own experience of working with local organizations who are recipients of aid, the experience of Peace Direct's partners, and in particular on the outcomes of a three day online consultation with 158 practitioners and academics across the globe. This consultation took place in November 2020, and was co-organized by Peace Direct, Adeso, the Alliance for Peacebuilding, and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security. The outcomes of this consultation will be published in an upcoming report: *Time to Decolonise Aid: insights and lessons from a global online consultation*. It is also informed by the work of others in our field, such as Bond's Sector Catalyst Programme² and the RINGO (Re-imagining INGOs) project.³ Peace Direct's research,

¹ *Towards locally-led peacebuilding: Defining 'local'*, Peace Direct policy position paper, 2020, available online at <https://www.peacedirect.org/publications/towards-locally-led-peacebuilding-defining-local/>

² See <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2021/01/trust-for-local-communities-must-be-at-the-heart-of-transformation>

³ See <https://rightscolab.org/ringo/>

consultations and policy position papers are available online at www.peacedirect.org/publications. *Time to Decolonise Aid* will be published here in due course.

The need to clearly articulate a philosophy of aid

5. The UK has no clearly articulated philosophy of aid. The 2002 International Development Act provides no conceptual or philosophical basis for the provision of aid, merely stating that development assistance should contribute to a reduction in poverty. Various rationales for aid have been articulated at various points, including in the UK's strategic documents⁴, often with particular audiences and constituencies in mind, but there has been an absence of clarity as to what the UK considers the fundamental purpose of aid, and what the UK considers to be the additional and synergistic benefits of operating an aid programme.
6. The 2021 Integrated Review *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, published as this submission was being finalized, did not present a philosophy of aid either; presenting aid instead in instrumental terms as "increasing our impact as a force for good", while promising a future strategy to "ensure close alignment of UK aid from 2022 onwards with the objectives in this Strategic Framework".
7. This absence of clarity damages UK aid in at least three ways. It engenders harmful perceptions of the UK's agenda, which both stymies aid effectiveness and perpetuates many of the problems aid would seek to address. It further leads to mistakes in aid programming, where both the choice and manner of aid provision are limited in their efficacy due to the lack of a clear and correct philosophical focus for aid. Finally, while outside the scope of our research, we should note that the popularity of aid among key stakeholders has also faltered during this period. Advancing a number of ad-hoc rationales for aid in the absence of a clear philosophy has failed to prevent the recent fragmentation of the cross-party political consensus on support for the UK's 0.7% ODA target, for example.
8. The UK's history and present, as a former imperial power, as a wealthy nation of the global north, and as a nation that played a formative role in and continues to benefit from our systems and structures of power, increases the need to understand and acknowledge those systems and that position, particularly in how it shapes current aid policy and practice. A philosophy of aid must take this into account, and could be a useful tool for reconciling the UK's objectives with

⁴ For example, the 2015 National Security Strategy states "Our substantial aid budget means that Britain not only meets our obligations to the poorest in the world, but can now respond rapidly and decisively to emerging crises overseas which impinge on our security at home – and with this speed and agility of response comes greater influence in the world."

its global position. Most importantly the UK must acknowledge that structural racism is an integral part of those systems, and must commit to addressing structural racism in all its policies, particularly its aid policy.

9. The merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development raises fresh risks of confusion in approach, and increases the need to clearly articulate a philosophy of aid. Development objectives and diplomatic objectives are not one and the same, and while there are and should be synergies between them, there will also be important points of difference. These points must be clearly mapped out, otherwise the UK's approach to development could be subsumed entirely into its approach to diplomacy. That the Integrated Review envisages aid being aligned with diplomatic strategic objectives increases cause for concern.

The philosophical purpose of UK aid

10. The philosophical purpose of UK aid should be to promote a shared global societal uplift: to “promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” in the words of the UN Charter, or “shared prosperity” (to which we would add shared security), in the words of the objectives of the World Bank.⁵
11. It is vitally important that aid is understood as a shared project, and as a reflection of the interconnectivity and mutual dependence of our modern world, where there is no distinction between national self-interest and global interests because it is not possible, ethical, or desirable to attempt to forge a future that is not intertwined with our shared global future.
12. Furthermore, alternative rationales for aid are deeply damaging. If aid is seen as something developed countries like the UK bestow altruistically upon developing countries then this reinforces colonial and paternal mindsets. While some argument can be made for aid of this sort as a form of reparations, ultimately the lack of local agency that is integral to this approach means that such attitudes reinforce, rather than challenge, systemic racism. Furthermore, thinking about aid in this way no longer fits with the manner in which poverty and inequality manifest in the modern world. Wealth, power and opportunity are present and absent in all nations and access being limited as a consequence of multiple intersectional forms of oppression. It is simplistic and inaccurate to

⁵ The World Bank describes its objectives as follows: “the institution will strive to: (i) end extreme poverty at the global level within a generation, and (ii) promote what may be called shared prosperity: a sustainable increase in the well-being of the poorer segments of society.” “World Bank Group. 2014. The World Bank Group Goals : End Extreme Poverty and Promote Shared Prosperity. Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/20138> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.”

think about development exclusively in terms of aid donor countries and aid recipient countries.⁶

13. On the other hand it is equally damaging to present aid purely in terms of enlightened self-interest. This risk a dangerous instrumentalization of the aid agenda. This can have a number of negative consequences including:
- a. Strategic errors and potential scandals caused by the stretching of the logic of self-interest to the point where it attempts to reconcile diametrically opposing aims, such as in the case of the Peragu Dam affair, or attempts to open up the economy in Myanmar to trade and investment opportunities in the run up to the Rohingya genocide in 2017
 - b. Reduction in the efficacy of programming. The OECD for example, estimates that tying aid to trade makes aid 30% less effective⁷. Tying aid to diplomatic objectives is likely to have a similar impact on efficacy
 - c. An undermining of the coherence of aid programming due to a “pick-n-mix” mentality whereby some aid projects are selected for their development impact and others for national security or national prosperity reasons. We already see the consequences of this approach in the administration of the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). The CSSF has been strongly criticized for its lack of coherence⁸, which stems in large part from the fact that as much of it is deemed Official Development Assistance it has to meet the UK’s development objectives while at the same time meeting UK national security objectives, including the ambition to 'Protect Our People' and to 'Project Our Global Influence'.
 - d. While the pursuit of a development agenda will undoubtedly have many positive impacts for other elements of the UK’s agenda, and while these impacts may help generate domestic political backing for aid, if these welcome side-effects are presented as the primary purpose of aid it will engender cynicism. This will damage trust in aid and lessen aid’s soft power impact

14. Peace Direct therefore recommends that aid be understood and presented as an act neither of altruism nor self-interest but of solidarity, and an investment in our shared global future. This philosophy of aid need not contradict, but must be distinct from, the vision of the Integrated Review. Aid can support the objectives of the Integrated Review, but the objective of aid must not be solely to support the implementation of the Integrated Review.

⁶ Of relevance here is Jonathan Glennie’s work reimagining aid as a process of multidirectional global public investment rather than unilateral donations, see Glennie, J. (2020). *The Future of Aid: Global Public Investment (1st ed.)*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429356384>

⁷ http://www.oecd.org/LongAbstract/0,2546,en_2649_18108886_29412506_119699_1_1_1,00.html

⁸ See <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/report/cssf/>

Peace Direct's research on the culture of aid

15. In addition to supporting the need for such an approach Peace Direct's research sheds further light on a number of issues the committee may wish to explore in their investigation into the culture of aid in particular. While we await the second stage of your inquiry before submitting further analysis we did briefly wish to highlight our research in two interlinked areas of the culture of and approach to aid.

Systemic Racism

16. There is a prevalent belief in the aid sector that professionalization and the establishment of strong values and principles has severed aid from its colonial roots. The same dynamic is credited with depoliticizing aid. Aid is presented as post-racial, and free from ideology. This perception is entirely inaccurate. The attitude is itself ideological and a byproduct of "white gaze"⁹. It reinforces our current hierarchies of knowledge, control, and racialized power relations . Eurocentric interpretations of modernity impose certain values on recipients of aid, placing Western standards at the centre of what is considered 'progress'. This further perpetuates colonial ideologies rooted in the perceived superiority and privileging of Western thought and approaches.¹⁰
17. Donors and funders often view local capacity as lacking. This attitude itself stymies the development of local capacity by failing to acknowledge existing skills and closing down opportunities for that capacity to develop or emerge. This perpetuates unequal power relations between donors and local communities who are deemed 'beneficiaries' and 'objects of development' – not equal partners.
18. Aid flows predominantly move from the Global North to the Global South, reinforcing economic dependency on the North, while primary resources flow the other way around, enriching the Global North. The consequence of this is the conversation about local capacity and donor/"beneficiary" relationships

⁹ The 'White gaze,' also sometimes known as 'the imperial gaze,' is the term for the process where people and societies are viewed under the scope of White ethnocentrism, which assumes that Whiteness is the only referent of progress. This 'gaze' can be the lens through which institutions, White people, and also other people of colour engage with non-White people, practices, and institutions as inferior to White institutions and norms.

¹⁰ The idea of linear progress towards a singular, 'modern' future is a fundamentally colonial concept where alternative futures and possibilities are negated by the presence of a single, assumed correct, vision gestated in the Global North and imposed upon the rest of the world. This is not to say that humanity does not have a common future - interconnectivity and mutual dependence mean that our global futures are inexorably linked – but connectivity does not have to mean homogeneity, and more importantly defining the form of those futures most not be the exclusive preserve of the historic traditions of the Global North

becomes a conversation about systemic racism. Further power imbalances disproportionately affect practitioners with intersectional identities.

- 19. Peace Direct therefore recommends that all stakeholders in the aid industry acknowledge that structural racism exists. Doing so does not erase the good that the sector does or signify a rejection of international assistance altogether. Nor does acknowledgement imply personal guilt. However, it does signal a collective responsibility to tackle the problem, starting by auditing one's own assumptions and practices and looking at the ways in which structural racism might be showing up in their own work. To assist in shifting power and creating accessways for communities often excluded, Western practitioners can practice declining and redirecting opportunities towards marginalised practitioners who would otherwise be overlooked. At the organizational level a public statement acknowledging privilege and the problems in the system would be an important first step.**
- 20. Peace Direct further recommends INGOs abolish "white gaze" in fundraising by ending the practice of using imagery and language that diminishes the agency and dignity of communities, and conducting an audit of their external and internal communications to provide a benchmark for future improvements. INGOs should also avoid "spinning" its work on localisation and decolonisation to justify the status quo.**
- 21. Reassessing existing language and creating new language and terminologies can help shift from frameworks rooted in colonial histories to new inclusive and creative approaches. Donors and INGOs should stop using terms that are no longer appropriate such as 'beneficiaries' and 'capacity building'.**

Localisation and agency

- 22. The localisation agenda is a core part of the "Grand Bargain", one of the primary outputs of the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit. Thus far it has been limited in its implementation because INGOs have focused more on technocratic fixes rather than more fundamental structural changes. Localisation is still centred around the perspectives and understandings of the Global North. The most recent 2020 Annual Independent Report for the Grand Bargain acknowledges that substantive shifts in practice have largely failed to materialize.¹¹**
- 23. Peace Direct find it helpful to break down localisation into a number of subcategories:**

¹¹ See <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-07/Grand%20Bargain%20Annual%20Independent%20Report%202020%20-%20Executive%20summary.pdf>

- a. 'Locally-led' means that local people, groups and civil society organisations design their own approaches and set priorities, whilst outsiders may assist with resources, by playing a supportive, accompaniment role and acting as a critical friend.
 - b. 'Locally-managed' means the approach and strategic direction comes from the outside but is 'transplanted' to local management;
 - c. 'Locally-implemented' is primarily an outside approach, including external priorities that local people or organisations are supposed to implement.
24. INGOs increasingly highlight how they have localized programming, yet decision-making structures are concentrated in the Global North. Local actors are rarely invited to input in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a project. They are often forced to follow implementation strategies determined in the North, while not deciding how funds are spent. Such work therefore may be locally implemented but it is not locally led.
25. INGOs often cite statistics for the number of national staff they have hired as proof of their implementation of localisation. While such hiring practices are welcome it does not constitute locally led development. It is – at best – an example of locally managed programming, and more often of work which is merely locally implemented.
26. Civil society in the Global South have been forced to adopt the 'NGO model' to be considered a legitimate actor, even if it is not context-appropriate. Many donor practices impose limitations on eligibility for funds and prevent 'non-recognised' organisations from applying. Even within recognized organisations such an approach means having to adopt international norms and accountability systems designed in the Global North, with pre-defined formats and mandated frameworks they have no ability to adapt. When national staff attempt to localize these approaches or circumvent inappropriate or redundant systems they are often suspected of corruption, incompetence or impropriety.
27. These dynamics are further cemented by the language used in the aid, sector. In addition to practitioners needing to speak English, as the language dominates the system to the near exclusion of any other, there is also the expectation that practitioners be familiar with an ever-expanding list of sector-specific jargon in order to successfully secure funding.
28. COVID-19 has exacerbated inequalities, but it also presents an opportunity to even the playing field as international actors become more dependent on Global South practitioners. Digital technologies further present an opportunity to democratise the aid and peacebuilding space.

- 29. Peace Direct recommends that all stakeholders in the aid industry invest time and effort in understanding and challenging power imbalances and power dynamics. Donors, policymakers and INGOs need to spend as much time listening to the concerns of local groups and communities about the imbalances of power in the system as they do about their material, economic and skills needs. Sometimes this may lead to groups challenging power and stakeholders must be prepared to accept this, however uncomfortable. In fact, if conversations about power are not uncomfortable, they are probably not honest. . Creating a culture of openness to critique, and making clear an active opposition to racist, discriminatory, and prejudiced language and practices can help create the preconditions for such a conversation.**
- 30. Peace Direct recommends that donors create funding pathways that are more accessible and inclusive which requires accepting greater levels of uncertainty and possible failure. Funding courageously allows for more innovative and flexible funding approaches, including funders taking on the brunt of bureaucratic work, adopting context-specific measures of success, setting targets for the provision of unrestricted funding for local organisations, reducing the due diligence requirements for local organisations, and modifying eligibility criteria which gives preferential treatment to Western INGOs and national NGOs that have close relationships with, and emulate the approaches (and often power hierarchies) of Western INGOs.¹²**
- 31. INGOs should also aim to recruit differently, so as to recruit a more diverse pool of staff. They should invest in the currently undervalued and overlooked asset of indigenous knowledge and skills and who is considered a researcher with useful skills. This should be linked to broader efforts to reconsider what is considered legitimate data. International practitioners need to approach their work with greater humility and with greater openness to the possibility that local approaches, knowledge, and context-specific understandings of development, humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding are likely to hold better answers than established Western thought on these issues.**
- 32. INGOs should adopt a transition mindset which places clear milestones for the transfer of power and resources to local organisations from the start. Such a transition mindset should be enshrined in clear organisational strategies which**

¹² See for example Peace Direct's report on Radical Flexibility (<https://www.peacedirect.org/us/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/02/PD-Radical-Flexibility-Report-v2.pdf>) and other examples such as organisations pooling funds to mitigate risks (<https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/2014-10-30%20Approaches%20to%20Risk%20FINAL.pdf>), direct funding (<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/521b8763e4b03dae28cd3e72/t/5eb02648838a9a2168d3cf43/1588602452826/Guiding+Principles+for+Funding+Locally+Led+PB.pdf>), PEER funding (<https://sites.nationalacademies.org/pga/peer/index.htm>) and the Trust-based Philanthropy Project (<https://thewhitmaninstitute.org/about/trust-based-philanthropy>)

measure success through the extent to which INGOs are reducing, not expanding, their traditional organisational footprint. Direct implementation should be phased out in line with a shift of resources to local organisations and country offices should have clear targets for supporting indigenous civil society organisations. Country offices should be given greater freedom and autonomy from their Headquartered Office, and INGOS should consider different organisational structures such as federated models. INGOs should end the practice of seeking short term 'implementing partners' and instead establish long term strategic partnerships which aren't determined by project cycles.

Recommendations in summary

- That aid be understood and presented as an act neither of altruism nor self-interest but of solidarity, and an investment in our shared global future (para 14)
- That all stakeholders in the aid industry acknowledge that structural racism exists (para 19)
- That INGOs abolish "white gaze" fundraising (para 20)
- That all stakeholders reassess their use of language (para 21)
- That all stakeholders in the aid industry invest time and effort in understanding and challenging power imbalances and power dynamics (para 29)
- That donors fund courageously (para 30)
- That INGOs recruit differently (para 31)
- That INGOs adopt a transition mindset (para 32)