

IDC inquiry into the impact of racism in the aid sector

About us

This submission is written on behalf of STOPAIDS, 4MNet, and ~~XXX~~[Harm Reduction International](#).

- STOPAIDS a network of 70 UK agencies fighting to secure an effective response to HIV and AIDS since 1986.
- 4MNet is a unique peer-led programme led by Black migrant women. 4MNet train women living with HIV across the UK as Mentor Mothers to provide psycho-social support to peers in their pregnancy journey and beyond.
- Harm Reduction International is a leading NGO dedicated to reducing the negative health, social and legal impacts of drug use and drug policy.

Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to help shape this inquiry into the impact of racism in the aid sector. We felt it was necessary in this introduction to define what we interpret as the ‘aid sector’, as there may be an assumption that this term only includes INGOs and charities. INGOs and charities operating in the international development and global justice sphere should be included in this analysis, but it is vital that we are also scrutinising the work of governments, multilaterals, global health agencies, global banks and private development consultancies as well. Racism can exist within any institution and for the international aid sector that has emerged as a direct consequence of the colonial project, it is critical that we identify, challenge and subvert the contemporary manifestations of this colonial past.

Structure of the aid sector

What are the historical processes that have led to countries and organisations from the global north dominating the international aid sector?

Countries and organisations in the global north continue to dominate the international aid sector because of their histories as colonial powers. Mainstream approaches to International Development are, in many respects, a continuation of the oppressive power dynamics that established themselves during the colonial era between the colonisers and the colonised. Britain’s actions as a colonial power and leading player in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade led to a colossal level of human exploitation and suffering; decimation of land through land-grabs and resource draining; and cultural theft, legitimised by the English codification of race in Barbados in 1661.

The social, cultural and economic impact of colonialism and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is a direct source of the perceived problems within international development discourse - low per capita incomes, low tax bases and low social indicators. This was further exacerbated by the IMF

era of Structural Adjustment Programmes which set conditions on loans that forced previous colonised countries to introduce free-market policies and fiscal restraint which diverted resources from social development and exacerbated inequality. On the other side of the coin, countries in the global north built their wealth on industries that flourished due to the exploitation of people and resources during the colonial era. These countries continued to accumulate resources by exploiting new, larger and more open markets in previous colonial powers during the Structural Adjustment era.

International Development was framed as a series of interventions to solve these problems. Although grassroots community-led initiatives fighting for social justice have always existed, the sector has been dominated by those governments and organisations that held money and power. As a result, governments and organisations based in previous colonial powers - and white majority countries - have largely set the development agenda resulting in the prominence of the 'white gaze' in the sector. This is the assumption that 'western whiteness and modernity are the primary signifiers of progress and prestige and this is what we should be aiming for'.¹ This 'white gaze' is ultimately underpinned by white supremacy - a belief that white people are 'superior' to people of colour which has its roots, as set out above, in the colonial era. White supremacy and privilege is so ingrained in every level of society that it is dangerously normalised.

Within International Development white supremacy has another particular form - the white saviour complex. This is when white people help people of colour in a self-serving way. This perpetuates the same racist power imbalances we've seen since the colonial period. The 'white saviour' complex is quite visible in the way mainstream development continues to shape a racist and colonial view of the global south in the media. Many advertisements relating to international development depict people of colour as passive beneficiaries of aid and white people as those who deliver it, they choose not to show the resilience and determination of people of colour. Instead the media portrays people that need to be 'saved.' This must change.

What are the practical implications of the concentration of funding and resources in donors and international aid organisations from the global north?

In the 2016 United Nations Political Declaration on Ending AIDS, Member States affirmed the critical role of communities in advocacy, participation in the coordination of AIDS responses and service delivery. Evidence shows that the community HIV response has been effective at increasing knowledge of HIV, promoting social empowerment, increasing access to and use of HIV services, and even decreasing HIV incidence, all through the effective mobilization of limited resources.

However the community response has been continuously underfunded. An ODI study into the barriers to community organisation receiving funding shows that UN agencies and a number of larger INGOs dominate the humanitarian landscape, as they are perceived to have the

¹ De-centring the 'White Gaze' of Development
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Robtel_Neajai_Pailey/publication/336195397_De-centring_the_'White_Gaze'_of_Development/links/5efff4d92851c9c5e65d09e/De-centring-the-White-Gaze-of-Development.pdf

organisational structures and capacity to deal with shifting external circumstances.² A number of respondents to ODI's study suggested that the larger international NGOs themselves are the major hindrance to local NGOs receiving a greater share of resources since they crowd the space for local actors. Although local NGOs appreciated the different forms of resources and support they received from their international partners, they also felt these organisations hold a 'gatekeeper' role. The INGO model leads to a concentration of power and funding in the global north.³

Racism in the aid sector

Why do we need to have a discussion about racism in the aid sector?

Racism is a social sickness, pervasive and widespread within society at an individual, cultural, structural and systemic level. It is a public health problem which is killing people globally. Racism and racial discrimination can have a profoundly negative impact on a person's life impacting their mental health, quality of life, levels of career success and socio-economic circumstances. It can also contribute to intergenerational/transgenerational trauma. Racism in the aid sector also exists within the very discourse around aid and Development as well as in the governments, NGOs and global health agencies that operate within the aid sector.

The topic of racism is often avoided by those in power. The term 'White Fragility' describes how white people often have defensive instincts or reactions when questioned about race or made to consider their own race. However by white people not confronting their race and the power and privilege that accompanies this, whiteness continues to be seen as the perceived baseline from which all other races deviate.

Reflecting on this concept of 'white fragility' and the fact that International Development discourse is largely dominated by white majority countries and organisations in the global north, it is no surprise that 'race' has been left out of Development analysis. Professor Uma Kothari highlights some of the silences about 'race' in development ideologies, institutions and practices. She outlines how these silences hide the continuation of racialized discourses and practices in development. One of the areas of examination she proposes in order to better understand development in terms of 'race' is to look at how it is disguised through the use of specialized terminology and criteria when talking about the implications of poverty and social exclusion.⁴

Dr Robtel Neajai Pailey, Assistant Professor at LSE, states that 'We need to mainstream race as an anti-racist agenda for the present and future of development'.⁵ She states that we can't talk about aid without talking about the root causes of poverty. Racism is one of those root causes.

Racism operates within the aid sector, just as it does within any sector. The perceived 'altruistic' nature of the aid sector however may have given the impression that systemic and individually

² <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12468.pdf>

³ Ibid

⁴ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1191/1464993406ps1240a>

⁵ <http://www.open.ac.uk/ikd/dsa2019>

motivated racism didn't exist. We have had recent examples of this with the former Department for International Development⁶; within the global health agency 'Stop TB Partnership'⁷ and just last week within the INGO Amnesty International.⁸ This is just the tip of the iceberg the #CharitySoWhite campaign cites a statistic from a 2018 Charity Job survey on their website which showed that 54% of people had experienced discrimination due to their race/ethnicity. This has a directly harmful impact on mental health but it also is an indicator of wider systemic racism which discriminates against people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds impacting socio-economic opportunities. This, in turn, can create higher risk factors for developing mental health challenges. The Royal Society of Psychologists states that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are also less likely to receive the care and support they need when facing such challenges.⁹

What steps should the UK Government take to address racism in the aid sector?

As a first step, aid actors should follow the #CharitySoWhite campaign ask for every leadership team across the charity sector to:

- prioritise candid and honest conversations about racism;
- publicly acknowledge racism within the sector and within their organisations;
- and commit to tackling institutional racism within their organisations and in the sector.¹⁰

International Development and aid will always have its roots in the colonial era, however it is not a prerequisite that international development always reproduces those power dynamics, between the former colonisers and the formerly colonised, that so deeply entrenched themselves during the British empire. It is possible that we can use the brutality of the colonial era as a point of learning. The UK Government should meet the demands of the Africans Rising campaign #ReRightHistory which include: An honest acknowledgement of the harm and human cost of slavery and colonialism; truth and reconciliation commissions to provide a space for pain to be expressed and healing to begin; and reparations, that could include cancelling debt (a crucial step to interrupt the vicious cycle where global north white saviours; dominate those they once plundered), just trade deals and intellectual property systems and climate justice.¹¹

Reparations must also include remunerations to the countries and communities that were decimated by slavery. It was only in 2015 that, according to the Treasury, British taxpayers finished 'paying off' the debt which the British Government incurred in order to compensate British slave owners in 1835 because of the abolition of slavery. Nothing was paid to those who were enslaved and brutalized. The British Government borrowed £20 million to compensate

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/26/racism-endemic-at-dfid-staff-claim>

⁷ <http://www.stoptb.org/assets/documents/news/Statement%20--%20Independent%20review%20of%20allegations%20of%20racism%20and%20misconduct%20at%20Stop%20TB.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/report-found-instances-overt-racism-amnesty-international/management/article/1713497>

⁹ https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/better-mh-policy/position-statements/ps01_18.pdf?sfvrsn=53b60962_4

¹⁰ <https://charitysowhite.org/our-calls-to-action>

¹¹ <https://www.africans-rising.org/reighthistory/>

slave owners, which amounted to a massive 40 percent of the Treasury's annual income or about 5 percent of British GDP. The loan was one of the largest in history. If we payed the slavers, then we can pay those countries and communities whose populations were enslaved.¹²

How could a systematic approach to tackling racism help to strengthen relations between aid delivery organisations and the communities where programmes are delivered?

Ensuring community engagement in programmes leads to more effective programmes and greater access to services for key and vulnerable populations. Inclusive governance and partnerships with communities and civil society who may not traditionally have access to decision making power structures have been core to the success of the HIV response.

For example community engagement has led to greater access to treatment and prevention in the HIV response. In Nigeria it has been recognised that a community led approach led to a 64% increase in the likelihood of treatment access and a twofold increase in the likelihood of using prevention services. When community-led and-based organisations are empowered, they can play a significant role in service provision to marginalised communities. They can also provide expertise to governments on the specific needs of these groups and conduct advocacy on human rights to improve the legal and social environment for these groups and organisations led by these groups. The involvement of diverse communities will also help ensure more effective monitoring of the quality and level of coverage of services among the most marginalised whose experiences may not be captured through mainstream channels.

Diversity and inclusion

How diverse is staffing within international aid organisations? Does this change at different levels of seniority?

Research conducted by Third Sector of a sample of the UK charity sector highlights that the proportion of chief executives who identify as Black, Asian, minority ethnic or "other" (rather than white) has risen only slightly from 12 per cent in 2017 to 16 per cent today, while the proportion of other senior leaders from BAME backgrounds remains static at 10 per cent.¹³ The levels of representation in senior positions are even starker for women of colour. For trustees, the numbers have risen from 10 to 15 per cent'. More broadly, only 9% of the sector is non-white, compared to 12% of the private sector and 11% of the public sector, according to the recent UK Civil Society Almanac.¹⁴

Charity So White' highlighted that with people of colour largely taking more junior positions in UK charities, within the COVID pandemic and UK recession, they also made up a higher proportion of those furloughed, experiencing salary reductions or job loss.¹⁵

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/09/british-slavery-reparations-economy-compensation>

¹³ <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/diversity-study-picture-changed/management/article/1691930>

¹⁴ <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/>

¹⁵

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e832054d83bf21e68b6f422/t/5ee9ff9d6aa72c53f3ac6fb9/1592393633801/CSW+-+Racial+Injustice+in+the+Covid19+Response_FINAL.pdf

The chronic lack of diversity within the UK international development sector is also seen within international humanitarian agencies, including the UN. Research has highlighted that whilst there are often field jobs available for people of colour in LMICs, higher paid, more senior jobs at the U.N. headquarters in Geneva and New York go disproportionately to Westerners. For example members of the African country blocs account for 23 percent of overall posts for the OCHA but they are largely invisible in the agency's top ranks at U.N. headquarters¹⁶. The Asian, Latin American, and Eastern European blocs are have even worse representation, accounting for only 16 percent, 4 percent, and 3 percent of OCHA staff, respectively.¹⁷

What actions have international aid organisations taken to promote diversity and inclusion and what impact have these had?

To improve diversity within their organisation, Oxfam and Save the Children have taken the approach that diversity must be intentional.¹⁸ Oxfam have created posts at senior management level specifically to look at diversity within the organisation and have moved their headquarters to Nairobi. In 2020 Oxfam's Director of women's rights and gender justice embedded 40 "diversity champions" at different levels at Oxfam, calling out unconscious bias or racist and sexist practices, particularly around recruitment and HR. Supported by Oxfam's CEO who is a person of a colour, Oxfam have been working to embed anti-racist objectives into the charity's strategic objectives, so that the organisation can be held accountable for its progress.

Although not an international aid organisation, operating within the international development system, STOPAIDS has taken steps to promote diversity and inclusion with our organisation. STOPAIDS has designed an anti-oppression framework to ensure that in what we're advocating for and how we do that work we are identifying and actively challenging behaviours, communication and systems that perpetuate oppression.

Through this anti oppression lens, STOPAIDS plans to further review and strengthen its HR and recruitment practices. A review of our recruitment practices conducted last year led to us to take steps to reduce unconscious bias and the barriers that may prevent people of colour, and those from marginalised communities, from applying for roles. For example, we limit job descriptions and person specifications to those that are necessary for the effective performance of the job, 'blind applications', advertise opportunities in places where applicants from underrepresented groups will be able to easily view or access it and ensure that the recruiting team have diverse representation to help avoid unconscious bias. And being conscious of the lack of diversity within international development organisations Boards, STOPAIDS has taken steps to improve this through targeted recruitment and reserving positions for people living with HIV.

What actions do international aid organisations still need to take to promote diversity and inclusion?

¹⁶ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/10/16/un-diversity-problem-workforce-western-ocha/>

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/diversity-study-picture-changed/management/article/1691930>

To promote diversity and inclusion, and work towards addressing the systemic issues that cause them, international aid organisations should seek to follow an anti-oppression approach and be actively anti-racist. Anti-oppression work seeks to identify strategies to deconstruct and reconstruct power in a way that will address the systemic inequalities that are operating at the individual, group and institutional level, as opposed to producing and reproducing oppression. By doing so, the person or group adopting the anti-oppression approach encourages and recognizes differences in peoples' ability to participate and add value to the society at large. This helps to create more inclusion and shared enjoyment of resources and privileges. Anti-oppression work also functions to encourage solidarity, whereby those who have privilege work in solidarity with those who do not, by sharing power and creating authentic and equitable collaboration. This approach has real resonance for driving organisations to be critically self-reflective and meaningfully act to address the barriers that are preventing people of colour from entering and advancing within their organisations. This could be in terms of addressing unconscious barriers, ending wider recruitment practices that favour white people and allowing the option for flexible working.

What actions should donors such as the FCDO take to promote diversity and inclusion in the organisations they fund?

A first step would be for donors to consider which organisations they fund and whether an unfair proportion of their ODA resources are channelled to organisations based in high income countries, rather than supporting alternative models for delivering finance directly to local NGOs and community groups. Action For Global Health's 2020 'Stocktake Report' highlighted that aid channelled through international NGOs, or NGOs based in donor countries, occupied 93% of all NGO finance from the UK ODA to health pot in 2018. For the two years with available data (since 2017), 95-96% of health ODA to the private sector was channelled to private actors in the provider (i.e. donor) country. Within plans for the proposed ODA cuts, it is critical for the FCDO to consider whether local NGOs and community groups are being disproportionately affected, and act upon this. The FCDO and other donors should support alternative models for delivering finance directly to local NGOs and community group such as the model deployed by Thousand Currants and the Robert Carr Fund.

As explored above, there is a lack of diversity within both the organisations that the FCDO funds and the INGOs it is represented in, including UNAIDS. The FCDO should leverage bilateral relationships and position as a funder to work collaboratively with the sector and drive further action to promote diversity. This could involve monitoring of an organisation's steps to improve diversity and inclusion as a condition of receiving UK ODA, and pushing intergovernmental networks - like the UN and G7 - to take anti-racist and decolonial approaches.

Given that donors are also part of the international aid sector, they should also take steps to improve the diversity and inclusion within their own organisations. For the FCDO only 7.47% of their Senior Management Structure are BAME but it is welcome that they have an aspiration to increase this to 13%, alongside targets for other underrepresented groups.¹⁹ It is also welcome that the FCDO are taking steps to develop a diverse talent pipeline and creating a more inclusive

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fco-diversity-and-equality-report-2020/foreign-commonwealth-office-diversity-and-equality-report-2019-to-2020>

culture. However, given that the 2019 FCO Staff Engagement Survey results showing that bullying and harassment increased from 13% to 14%, it is clear that further work is required to tackle this, especially considering that people of colour are often disproportionately impacted by bullying.²⁰ The FCDO should work collaboratively with the broader aid sector to develop best practice and a comprehensive approach to increasing diversity across the whole sector.

²⁰ *ibid*