

## **The philosophy and culture of aid: Racism in the aid sector - Bond Submission**

1. Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development and humanitarian aid. It unites over 400 organisations, ranging from small specialist charities to large international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) with a world-wide presence. Most of these organisations are charities registered in England and Wales.
2. This submission was developed in consultation with the Bond People of Colour Working Group (made up of 124 POC from across the sector), the GADN WOC Forum and Charity So White.
3. We welcome this inquiry focusing specifically on racism. To understand the impact of racism across the sector, we need to understand what has led us to this point. We also must recognise and acknowledge that racism is part of the historical legacy. In order to truly become an antiracist sector, we must embrace that this is complex, and look through an intersectional lens to include protected characteristics including - socio-economic background, gender, disability and age.
4. It is worth noting that not all Bond members had the opportunity to endorse this submission, so their omission is in no way a statement on their commitment to anti-racism. However, some organisations that did have the opportunity, endorse this submission, such as RESULTS UK, Hub Cymru Africa, and Saferworld.

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

5. Following WWI and before the end of WWII the Bretton Woods system was put into place after an agreement was signed by 44 Allied nations, including the United States, Canada, Western European countries, Australia and Japan. It put into place a system of institutions and procedures to regulate the international monetary system. Through this the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and the Development (IBRD) which is part of the World Bank Group, were set up.
6. Above all, the Bretton Woods agreement was set up for the major economies of the world to ensure their economic stability, following on from the devastation of the World Wars. Already, we see how Global Southern countries were not considered in this agreement or in the building of the institutions and the systems of the IMF or IBRD. The Scramble for Africa saw European control go from 10% of Africa to 90% of Africa by 1914.
7. In the SDGs we see SDG 1 No Poverty. We must ask ourselves honestly if modern poverty has colonial roots, and we need to acknowledge that and recognise the repercussions still faced today. That means reflecting on the scale of wealth extraction during the colonial period, both the extraction of human capital through the slave trade, and through extraction of resources. The slave trade, and plantation economies made up a substantial portion of Britain's GDP in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.
8. A clear legacy of colonialism can be seen through racial hierarchies and colonial occupation. Slavery and indigenous displacement were all part-justified in the belief that black and brown bodies were less than fully human. This belief has been deeply embedded and its echoes can be seen as it plays out in modern day society with preconceptions about people of colour, through discrimination in hiring, lack of inclusion because of not being "good enough" and whose expertise we value.

9. International development is automatically geared towards “developing” countries, ensuring that a gap is maintained between those countries which are “developed” and those which are “developing”. The legacy of the British Empire and others, and the slave trade must be explored. One perspective is that without European colonialism, the world would continue to be “backwards”, and that perhaps, without the British Empire, there wouldn’t be infrastructure like railways, governance systems or common languages in areas of the world that would have remained “uncivilised”.
10. However, the other side that is often not explored as fully, is that through Empire, and colonisation, countries were violently stripped of indigenous groups\_(and their resources), with the voice and agency of the vast majority in newly colonised regions being removed. When those leading Empires struggled to imagine societies that did not look like their own, native populations across regions were violently and systematically impoverished, displaced, enslaved or killed.
11. Bond has already started to engage the membership to surface how we can realistically shift the power. Bond has been facilitating a system change initiative which aims to catalyse action by UK NGOs to shift power and resources to local communities for equitable and people-led development. It starts with the assumption that the system needs to change and that to do that we need to start to understand it. As we move forward, we aim to support locally-led development by addressing three barriers to change, namely UK INGO governance and organisational models, donor policy and practice and lack of trust in emergent locally-led development approaches.

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

12. With funding and resources flowing from the Global North, the most developed, well-funded countries are put first in the planning of tackling global issues. This is the wrong way around. We “trust” Global Northern countries to know what is best for global Southern countries, rather than sharing the funding and resources and putting more into the hands of the local communities in the Global South. So that they have equitable stakes in addressing development issues.
13. Funding and resources concentrated in the North mean that Global southern communities are not consulted or invited into discussions about programming, and where funding will get spent or not. The local communities are not brought into the development of programming until far too late, if at all.
14. This then means that programmes are less effective and perhaps not as sustainable, and they are more likely to fail or have lower success rates - which results in aid not being spent as well as it could be.
15. It perpetuates power imbalances in terms of who decides what is needed, how the world is conceptualised, systems and processes that fit the organisations and donors in the North (instead of being suitable for communities/local organisations and type of programmes) and stresses just upward accountability.
16. Concentration in the North begs the question “whose poverty is being addressed, is it for the North or South?” Given the utilisation of the funding, a greater percentage remains in the North.

### **Racism in the aid sector**

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

17. Discussions about racism are necessary because racism is endemic. And those conversations are needed everywhere. They are needed even more in the

international development sector because of the historical links with colonialism, and because of the nature of the work that has perpetuated a world view that divides countries and people into developed and developing, almost always along racial lines.

18. Racism is about power and the elevation of some populations to positions of primacy and domination and the denigration and subordination of others. It is ingrained throughout society and it is about who has access to opportunities, to jobs, development, to education, healthcare, and who is protected by the law. This inquiry must focus on **how** the sector is racist.
19. Racism is a legacy of colonialism and continues today in many forms, some of which are overt and obvious – such as racist “jokes” or slurs, and oftentimes, in covert ways, such as gaslighting - manipulative and psychologically abusive behaviour that racialised people experience, sometimes on a daily basis.
20. The aim of gaslighting being is to undermine and make a person question their own judgement, perception or memory. Racial gaslighting is the same – and it makes the victim question their judgement on issues of racism. Racialised people also face preconceptions of not being good enough if you are person of colour, or not being clever enough, and in actions that aim to subvert, restrict or deny people of colour access to opportunities, education, development or funding.
21. Racism across the sector and institutions permeates how the world is conceptualised, with organisations in the global north assuming they hold the expertise, and so know what Black and Brown people need, which perpetuates the White Saviour complex. Believing that the global north should be holding the power in managing and deciding on resources for programmes in the global south. This is also true of INGO offices that are situated in the global south, which is still working under this framework.

### **What are the practical implications of racism in the aid sector?**

22. It can lead to lack of trust in white professionals when working with local communities. In the UK sector, people from racialised communities do not feel welcome or accepted in the sector.
23. Racial discrimination and racial abuse goes unchecked, accepted, played down and accepted as “normal” or “not a big deal”. Meanwhile the harm it is doing to people of colour working in the sector is huge, having an effect on their mental health, their confidence levels, the sense of not belonging in the sector and their sense of worth.
24. People of colour can leave the sector after experiencing racial abuse, and so the sector becomes more homogenous, geared towards those who are accepted and who are welcomed into the sector. This is talent and specific expertise and lived experience that is leaving the sector, meaning we are not as informed in our decision making.
25. The result is that senior levels of the sector are held by the white majority, as people of colour dwindle in the lower echelons, having been passed over for development opportunities and promotions.

### **How can aid actors be actively anti-racist?**

26. Aid actors need to commit as a whole sector to deeper introspection, and real commitment to understand the historical power imbalances that were part of colonialism, and which have gone on to shape modern poverty and define racial inequity. Viewing the sector through this lens, could result in a recommitment to, tackling global challenges together.

27. It will mean that those who hold power over decision-making, over evaluating, over funding, hiring, firing, development opportunities and more, need to cede power and control, to work in true equitable partnership with local communities.

### **How does the language used by aid actors relate to discussions around racism and power dynamics?**

28. If the language we use to describe the work we do in aid and development, reinforce colonial or outdated thinking, then we need to think again. The language we use is powerful and reverberates through generations as it is passed down.
29. The aid sector must advance as the global society is doing, and that means rethinking words like “beneficiary” and “donor” which evokes that sense of one group “benefitting” from another group who has more. Using that term automatically sets aid recipient communities on a lower, subordinate level than those giving.
30. Our language needs to reflect our values as a sector. For example, if we are truly committed to ensuring that the most marginalised communities do not get left behind, then we must first reflect on why those communities are marginalised in the first place – links back to colonial legacy. Aid now must ask the question of why countries are poor in the first place?
31. Bond has proposed an approach to the way the sector uses language, that can help members understand the racism and power dynamics implicit in the language that we use. It is our responsibility to decolonise and depoliticise our language.<sup>1</sup> In order to truly live our values as a sector we need to reflect them in the language we use about our work and how we describe the communities we work with.

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

32. Acknowledge the colonial legacy of the aid and development sector. We must be clear on the legacy of colonialism and its connection to development and aid today.
33. Acknowledge that the power imbalances that exist are not acceptable, and we must dismantle the way we currently work, to instead build collaborative ways of working in true equitable partnership with local communities.
34. Commit publicly that the sector needs a cultural change to address the harm of racial abuse that people of colour endure both in the UK and abroad.
35. Recognise and engage with people of colour in the sector, with the understanding that although they are not holding the most senior of positions, they have a perspective that is extremely valuable and should inform decision-making processes.
36. All organisations that are funded by government should undertake a race equity audit to establish levels of diversity within those organisations and to benchmark this over the lifetime of the funding arrangement.
37. Launch a transparent audit of the effectiveness of aid as it is delivered now. In the context of Brexit, there is an opportunity for the UK to re-establish relationships with its former colonies – on an equal playing field. And rather than cutting aid, we could be looking to commission an audit to truly understand the impact of Britain’s colonial legacy, how that continues to manifest and how to correct it – with aid being one part of that equation.
38. Understand that aid is part of an enduring legacy of colonisation. Instead of the UK formally recognising and correcting centuries worth of exploitation and wealth accumulation at the expense of countries in the Global South, aid is conceived of and provided through the prism of altruism instead of reparatory justice. Aid does not

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2020/12/taking-british-politics-jargon-and-colonialism-out-of-our-language>

equal generosity. Rather, aid must be reimagined and contribute to the correction of wealth exploitation and aid must recognise the resources and culture of countries in the Global South.

39. The amount of money provided through UK aid is a drop in the ocean compared to what the UK owes to developing countries because of its colonial legacy. Aid could instead, be seen as a first step in trying to correct centuries of wrongdoing. But it must go hand in hand with a larger commitment to reshaping the international rules of the game which keep developing countries poor. The UK can use the G7 and COP26 to do this.
40. Thinking about restorative justice, through the Build Back Better idea, the UK could take a restorative justice approach to the rebuilding of economic systems and action on climate change to ensure that when addressing the climate emergency and the economy marginalised communities are put at the heart of these responses, so that it works for them.
41. Good statements and measures are proposed, reviewed and nicely presented but we need a clear shift from rhetoric to reality on matters of racism.

## Diversity and inclusion

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

42. Bond survey results from July 2020 in which we had 150 organisations responded, we know that:

Small Orgs (income <2Mil)	Of Staff: BAME Women – 15% BAME Men – 8%	BAME Senior Management 25%
Medium Orgs (2m – 20m)	BAME Women – 11% BAME Men – 6%	19%
Large Orgs (>20m)	BAME Women – 7% BAME Men – 5%	17%

43. We know that people of colour can be found more in the lower levels of organisations and large programmes, as they are not afforded development opportunities to progress to Head, Director or CEO level.
44. We know that this issue is compounded by intersectional characteristics such as being black and differently abled or being a woman who is coloured. It makes it much harder for such people to climb up to senior levels, despite education or qualifications.
45. Apart from lack of diversity at leadership level, we also see areas of work across the sector that are less diverse. For instance, Finance teams tend to be more diverse in the sector than Policy teams which tend to be predominantly white. The whitest teams being the ones who shape policies and take decisions on programmes and areas of work. This is true of who represents the sector and therefore the communities we work with. With the more diverse teams being the service functions for the organisation.
46. The whole development sector needs to re-think its systems and process of allocating aid/resources, so they are not based in exclusionary practices and

privileges (for instance of being in the north, having good reliable internet etc) that reinforce colonial architectures.

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

47. Not enough has been done within aid organisations. Conversations have started, and in some places recruitment practices have been reviewed to be more equitable and unbiased. But so far, action has been very limited.
48. For example – Bond is supporting organisations to build anti-racist practices in their own organisations, and we are engaging with CEOs and senior managers through two cohorts. We have plans to engage with other senior managers and Boards on this to build up anti-racist practices.<sup>2</sup> Initial learnings have shown that CEOs and senior managers feel high levels of fear and anxiety when starting conversations about racism or racial justice. This is a factor in why change has not yet happened on a larger scale.
49. There remains a lack of tangible action, and lack of public commitment by leaders and accountability from organisations.
50. The impact cannot be garnered yet, as initiatives have not been in place long enough.
51. If all aid actors (including donor agencies) agree to reimagine aid and work towards a different kind of aid that provides restorative justice to the Global South, it would have a far bigger impact on diversity hiring than changing recruitment practices, as it is about culture, purpose and values.
52. Many organisations have been developing diversity and inclusion policies, and training staff on diversity, unconscious bias, having conversations on racism, and so on. However, in some cases those trainings have become tick box exercises, lacking the necessary component of social and racial justice they should have. In many cases trainings have good intentions, but if these are not part of wider and longer-term interventions and organisational change, they won't achieve much, and will not move us forward.

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

53. Commit publicly to taking action and being held accountable.
54. Learn and openly speak about the historical colonial legacy of the sector.
55. Review recruitment practices and ensure that a statement of “welcoming applications from all backgrounds” follows through to ensuring shortlists and interview panels include people of colour. For examples, Bond has been working with Multiverse to bring in paid-for apprentices into the sector from young people with diverse background.<sup>3</sup>
56. Rethink what ‘expertise is’ and recognise lived experience as valuable.
57. Centre lived experience of people of colour from communities in the UK and in local communities where organisations work.

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<sup>2</sup> Getting comfortable talking about racism webinar series - <https://www.bond.org.uk/events/getting-comfortable-talking-about-racism-0>

Building Anti-Racist Practice for CEOs: Peer-Learning Cohorts - <https://www.bond.org.uk/resources-support/anti-racism>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bond.org.uk/jobs/apprenticeships>

58. Include partner local communities in programmatic work from the very start, giving them equitable decision-making powers, right through to evaluation of the programmes.
59. Commit to and focus on ways to shift the power from the “Global North” in real partnership. They should properly work towards shifting the power/localisation/locally led responses, and set targets for shifting decision-making and resources to communities and local organisations. This should be reflected in the scaling down, closure or repurposing of INGOs and strengthening of local organisations.

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

60. Recognise and acknowledge the 9 asks that were launched by the GADN Women of Colour Group on systemic racism and White supremacy in the development and aid sector.
61. Commit to a different way of funding, and implement the recommendations in Good funding practices
62. Commit to entering partnership with local communities and NGOs, and rethink what evaluations means in terms of what “success and failure is” and according to whose standards, the Global North or Southern countries.
63. Commit publicly to implementing anti-racist practices and be held accountable, this is an invitation to do better.
64. Commit to being flexible in your funding and working for long-term change, not ‘quick fixes’
65. Bond is leading a piece of work to convene the sector to see how we can tangibly shift the power – FCDO needs to be part of these conversations and part of this work.