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WRITTEN EVIDENCE BY RESULTS UK TO THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE SUB-INQUIRY ON RACISM IN THE AID SECTOR

About RESULTS UK

RESULTS UK seeks to work with others to create the public and political will to end poverty by enabling people to exercise their own personal and political power for change. RESULTS UK is a movement of passionate, committed, everyday people. Together we use our voices to influence political decisions that will bring together an end to poverty. We undertake strategic policy, parliamentary and grassroots advocacy on four key determinants of poverty: economic opportunities, education, lack of voice and health, with a particular focus on child vaccinations, tuberculosis (TB), and nutrition.

Introduction

COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement have both underlined the discriminatory and oppressive structures that remain prevalent in our world. For those who have long campaigned to change the way aid works this also further demonstrates power imbalances within the aid sector and the impact this has had on the effectiveness of aid. In this submission, we will put forward answers to the following questions, as set out in the terms of reference of the sub-inquiry, in the hope that this evidence will help will contribute to a discussion around the ways the aid sector can become more democratic, diverse, inclusive, accountable, and effective:

1. What are the practical implications of the concentration of funding and resources in donors and international aid organisations from the global north?
2. Why do we need to have a discussion about racism in the aid sector?
3. What are the practical implications of racism in the aid sector?
4. How can aid actors be actively anti-racist?
5. How does the language used by aid actors relate to discussions around racism and power dynamics?
6. What steps should the UK Government take to address racism in the aid sector?
7. How could a systematic approach to tackling racism help to strengthen relations between aid delivery organisations and the communities where programmes are delivered?
8. How diverse is staffing within international aid organisations? Does this change at different levels of seniority?
9. What actions have international aid organisations taken to promote diversity and inclusion and what impact have these had?

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10. What actions do international aid organisations still need to take to promote diversity and inclusion?
11. What actions should donors such as the FCDO take to promote diversity and inclusion in the organisations they fund?

The answers we put forward in this submission are by no means exhaustive. When considering racism, diversity and inclusion in the aid sector there are many avenues that should be explored and it is crucial to acknowledge the previous work by experts and activists in this field who have spent decades researching and campaigning for progress on these issues in the sector. As an international development and global health advocacy NGO, which does not run aid programmes, we have endeavoured to include evidence which speaks to our experiences and expertise. However, we would like to stress our support and solidarity with the individuals and organisations from around the world who are leading the fight for racial justice in the aid sector and beyond. As such, RESULTS UK would like to endorse Bond's submission to this sub-inquiry.

Throughout this document we talk about the 'aid sector' as a whole rather than just NGOs because the challenges discussed need to be addressed by the wider sector, including the FCDO and other government departments responsible for ODA. In addition, many NGOs, private sector organisations and multilateral organisations, while independent of government, receive large amounts of government funding or have government representatives on their boards, meaning that the government and partner NGOs can mutually encourage best practice of each other.

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

Fundamentally, we need a discussion about racism in the aid sector because society needs a discussion about racism. The former is a product of the latter and cannot be solved in isolation, yet as a sector we also have the power and responsibility to take action now. International development actors, and particularly those organisations based in Western countries with violent imperial and colonial histories, have done far too little to recognise and respond to the structural racism and oppression that pervades wider society in general and the work of our sector in particular. Essentially, the sector must practice what it preaches. We have a moral responsibility to give racial justice and dismantling structural racism equal prioritisation alongside other focuses such as poverty alleviation, access to healthcare and education, and supporting human rights and citizen voice. Failing to do so undermines the integrity of what we do, stifles aid effectiveness and ultimately holds back the liberation of all people.

Racism, saviourism, discrimination and neo-colonial approaches to aid remain prevalent in the international development sector. The international aid system was born out of colonialism and expanded alongside decolonisation. The sector must be frank and honest in

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its appraisal of its problematic links to these projects if it is to truly address their legacies. Drawing attention to these issues is key to the future of development and humanitarian cooperation, and transforming aid as a concept, philosophy and practice. Shirking them will continue to undermine aid effectiveness and further denigrate trust and faith in aid as a whole in the eyes of the communities the sector professes to serve, and diaspora communities around the world.

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

The practical implications of racism in the aid sector are varied, deep-rooted and difficult to adequately summarise in just a few paragraphs. Racist undertones have often characterised the resistance to efforts to expand the localisation of aid programming. Often decisions around aid spending are made in European or North American headquarters that are detached from intended recipients geographically, politically, and culturally, which can lead to programmes being less effective. Justifications for this model of aid governance have often hinted that southern NGOs are more likely to mismanage financial resources or that they are vulnerable to security threats. The latter point is typified by the FCDO's recent decision to make it a 'reserved department' meaning the FCDO will not hire any new staff that are foreign nationals, citing security concerns as justification¹. DFID was previously an 'unreserved department' meaning foreign nationals could be employed in the department which operated in many country offices around the world.

This dynamic is mirrored across the aid sector where organisations often send staff from the UK, other parts of Europe and North America to head up country offices or to lead projects in low income countries. Often these people are perceived as experts in a field but are not necessarily experts in the application of their field to specific local contexts. For example, the factors that constitute a successful education system in the DRC would not necessarily be suited to Pakistan. These deployments suggest that local knowledge is viewed as secondary, despite local actors often possessing more expertise, and relevant experience. This results in the knowledge and experiences of local actors being undervalued and underused. Ultimately, this trend and the FCDO's 'reserved' status disenfranchises local communities, perpetuates problematic north-south power dynamics, suggests that some people are inherently less trustworthy or knowledgeable due to their nationality alone, and reduces the impact of aid by side-lining local expertise.

It is also important to recognise that as international aid actors, we collectively play a role in influencing the public's view of other countries and people. The aid sector has at times perpetuated racist and stereotypical views through the imagery and language used in communications and fundraising efforts. The same applies to politicians and newspapers in the way they have often spoken about aid and depicted recipient countries in public. These

¹ William Worley, *Exclusive: FCDO to become 'reserved' department, will not be hiring foreign nationals*, 2020, available from: <https://www.devex.com/news/>

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portrayals are damaging for a number of reasons. Not only are they patronising and insulting to the communities referred to, but they also contribute to perpetuating global power imbalances by reinforcing a world view and narrative that some people are less valuable than others, and that some communities are inherently or deserving poor. Challenging racist stereotyping by ending these depictions must take priority over short term fundraising targets or the production of communications materials, political point scoring, or selling newspapers. There is enough guidance and research on best practice in this regard that there really is no excuse for aid actors and other stakeholders to continue falling into these traps.

Another obvious and important example of the practical implications of racism in the aid sector is the effect it has on people of colour, both those working in the sector and those affected by aid projects. When people of colour experience covert or overt racism, and conscious and unconscious bias in their interactions with people in the aid sector, this can exacerbate or resurface previous trauma, cause significant damage to mental health and wellbeing, and reinforce a sense of 'othering'. This racism can materialise in a variety of ways, including micro-aggressions, overtly racist comments, whistle-blowers' complaints being inadequately addressed, unequal access to promotions and senior positions, cultural exclusion, stereotyping, white fragility, and white saviourism. It is the responsibility of those in the sector who hold power and are fortunate enough not to experience these issues to take action to increase diversity, inclusion and transparency, call-out other organisations in the sector, and be accountable for the steps they are taking to dismantle structural racism.

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

Based on our experience, and the feedback we have received from the many partners we work with in the global south, there are a number of practical implications of the concentration of funding and resources in the global north. With only 1% of all aid going directly to the global south², a significant problem that southern organisations often face is lack direct access to funding. Where southern organisations lack access to direct funding, developing effective southern-led advocacy and campaigning on the development challenges their communities are facing is limited without the involvement of a northern partner. This perpetuates existing power relationships, and makes it harder to avoid traditional thinking, encourage innovation or be led by local knowledge. In addition to lack of direct access, current models of bidding for funding are also restrictive and exclusive. With the majority of donors being based in high-income countries, those who are accustomed to the dominant cultural norms and practices are best equipped to access these funds, to the detriment of those who are not, creating an 'insider' and 'outsider' dynamic where local organisations are marginalised. This dynamic also extends to hiring practices with high-level

² <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/nov/09/five-reasons-donors-give-for-not-funding-local-ngos-directly>

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jobs in aid governance dominated by those from privileged backgrounds in the global north, further entrenching exclusivity and inhibiting local ownership of aid.

Concentration of funding and resources in northern donors and aid organisations also often results in projects being designed, and personnel hired, according to the priorities and perspectives of the funder, rather than the local organisations and communities where it is being spent. Donor reporting is often extractive and fails to take into account the realities of small southern NGOs that find it disproportionately burdensome on their organisational capacity. The result of this is that limited time and resources are exhausted filling in extensive reporting instead of being used for project implementation and activities. Donors, including countries like the UK, need to be more comfortable with the notion of ceding some power over how and where aid is spent to partner countries in the global south. Alongside this, donors like the UK must avoid the temptation to instrumentalise aid as a means of pursuing self-interest and instead allow aid spending to be determined by demonstrated poverty impact and alignment with locally articulated poverty alleviation priorities.

How can aid actors be actively anti-racist?

Careful and thoughtful use of language and images is just one of the key ways in which aid actors to ensure they are actively anti-racist. As mentioned, there needs to be a move away from communications and fundraising language and images that portray donor recipients as being dependent and without agency to change their own lives. Language and images need to focus on the positive impacts that providing aid can achieve and also the importance of partnership between countries and organisations in driving real change.

The policies and procedures that support both the internal ways of working (such as hiring, pay etc.) and the programmatic work (such as how we work with southern partners, allocation of funding, programmatic design, research priorities etc.) done by aid actors need to be regularly and carefully reviewed. These policies and procedures need to be living documents, carefully followed by the whole organisation to ensure that all organisations are implementing the values they espouse. These reviews should also take place at regular intervals so they are able to benefit from thorough monitoring and evaluation processes.

Aid actors need to speak out against injustices, when doing so doesn't endanger anyone or break safeguarding obligations, even if it jeopardizes donor relations or relationships with other partners. One of the downsides to the merging of the FCO and DFID is the loss of DFID separation and autonomy from foreign affairs, which enabled DFID to speak out more often and more objectively. Donors, civil society organisations and multilaterals should encourage and welcome whistleblowing and the calling out of racist behaviour from within their own ranks. As part of this, learning from the safeguarding processes that have been put in place, reporting mechanisms should be made available both internally and externally so that the whole aid sector can be scrutinised.

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The importance of aid funding and the weight it carries means donor language is highly influential in shaping global discussions. UK Government FCDO language is often determined by a UK-centric political narrative rather than locally based grassroots partner best practice, which again undermines local expertise.

The elements of universality in the SDGs form a useful framework for all aid actors to use to develop their organisational strategies and all resulting policies and procedures. This will ensure that they always take a universal approach to all their work, that starts with all countries and people being equal and alongside one another in their approach to learning from one another about the most effective and fair ways to achieve development progress. This approach needs to begin with an approach that all countries and aid actors are able to learn from each other, with expertise being located in all different places.

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

We would like to see a move away from language that associates aid and development work with charity and saviourism, because the ideas of charity are deeply ingrained with concepts of helplessness and emotional appeals to pity as opposed to our shared humanity. As mentioned previously in the submission, we would like to see a move away from unhelpful fundraising language and images that perpetuate the idea of charity and the emphasis placed by aid actors on the importance of the expertise of the UK and other major donors creates a sense of superiority which can undermine local expertise.

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

As explained earlier in this submission, the FCDO policy of only hiring British nationals, which was inherited from the FCO but not DFID, undermines the ability of people from the country where aid is being provided to inform and influence the way in which programmes are set up, and how the learning is then used in future. This policy also promotes a culture of dependency, undermines the sustainability of aid and has xenophobic undertones. We recommend that this policy is changed to allow local staff to be hired to do humanitarian and development work as they once did for DFID.

When the FCDO is choosing implementing partners to work with it needs to ensure they are or have close links with locally based grassroots level organisations around priorities and also implementation of programmes. This will help to ensure that local people, values and local knowledge form the basis of how the work is carried out, rather than having external donor-led ideas imposed on the programme.

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There needs to be more joined up monitoring of the SDG commitments that the UK signed up to, both within the UK and globally, to ensure that the principles of universality and equality are applied to all aid work.

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

The relationship between donors and recipients has typically been characterised by racial disparity and a lack of diversity. This has been illustrated most starkly at fundraising events such as Comic Relief, where white Western celebrities have typically visited people living in poverty in the global south in an attempt to drum up cash from the pitying public watching at home. Though Comic Relief should be credited for committing to ending this practice³ these narratives remain a feature of problematic fundraising advertising, with distressing images of people suffering in humanitarian disasters, all with the aim of raising more money to finance aid assistance. These appeals reinforce tired colonial narratives of benevolent, rich and white-dominated, European and North American countries 'charitably helping' helping under-developed predominantly African, Middle-Eastern and Asian nations. Furthermore, while the obvious need to respond to these disasters cannot be overstated, the rapid fundraising efforts implemented once a disaster hits has profound implications both for the relationship between donor and recipient, as well as for operational effectiveness. The rapid influx of money that normally occurs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster is generally welcomed, but the risk of 'donor fatigue' is a very real one, as is the risk that older humanitarian disasters get forgotten and neglected. Giving countries more autonomy over financing resources, and investing more heavily in risk mitigation and preventative strategies would have powerful and positive implications in the strengthening of relations, as well as decreasing reliance on the traditional style of fundraising efforts we are all so familiar with.

The FCDO's recent announcements of cuts to the UK's ODA budget suggests that recipient countries have a markedly limited amount of autonomy over the UK's ODA spending decisions. FCDO spending allocations are determined by FCDO ministers on the advice of civil servants, with the role of recipients in the process is opaque at best, and non-existent at worst. The opaqueness of the process is compounded by the 'national interest' methodology that can be applied to spending allocation decisions – which can confuse the process, with the true requirements of a recipient agency or community perhaps being lost, conflated or deemed secondary. Tackling this imbalance is an essential step to improving relations, and improving the quality of aid delivery. To do this, the FCDO has to maintain progress made by DFID in decentralising and localising funding decisions to country offices and avoid Whitehall-centric models of spending allocations.

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-54716750>

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

Staffing in international aid organisations is a difficult thing to judge objectively without HR data from each organisation. However, a survey conducted by the Acevo found that only 3% of charity chief executives were from a BAME background, and that 54% of BAME candidates for promotion had experienced racial discrimination.⁴ These statistics lend credence to our own anecdotal and surface-level observations of the apparent lack of diversity in the sector, and particularly at leadership levels both in the FCDO, NGOs and multilaterals. In a sector defined by the relationship between more developed, majority-white countries and organisations, and poorer nations populated largely by people of colour, the distinct lack of opportunity for BAME progression must be addressed. Doing so will improve the effectiveness of aid as decision making shifts to people with lived experiences, bringing with them new perceptions of what constitutes a priority, helping to dismantle 'saviourism' and improving cultural sensitivity and appropriateness.

The historical domination of Geneva and New York as the centres of multiple aid agencies, health multilaterals, and diplomatic hubs is understandable given Geneva's importance to the establishment of the humanitarian system, and the headquarter locations of the UN and the Bretton Woods institutions in the US. The same can be said for other historical hubs for the aid sector and diplomacy such as London, Brussels and Paris. However, concentrating power and resources in very expensive, European and American cities creates a profound imbalance and exclusivity, with the HQs often dominated by individuals who can afford to live in these places. The endemic problem of unpaid internships within the aid sector – a crucial foot in the door for lots of young, aspirational people – exacerbates this problem, and reinforces the economic and social inequality that pervades staffing in these organisations.

In 2004 Action Aid moved its international HQ to Johannesburg, South Africa and in 2017, Oxfam International did the same, moving their International HQ to Nairobi, Kenya. Although this is just one element in a string of measures that can and should be taken, these moves have set an example that other organisations should strive to follow. Such relocations are not just symbolic. This move places power over decision making in a place at the heart of a region that often requires humanitarian and development assistance. Working with local stakeholders and having the ability to recruit more people from the region will inevitably start to shift the narrative and begin to make hiring practices more equitable, more representative and crucially, more effective.

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

⁴ <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/no-increase-in-percentage-of-black-and-minority-ethnic-chief-executives-acevo-finds.html>

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RESULTS UK has not done extensive sector-level analysis of the steps various aid organisations have undertaken, but is aware that many commitments have been made in the last year and we would expect the sector to be in the process of substantial positive change. Here, we will focus on what actions we have taken as an organisation to promote diversity and inclusion. We hope by doing so we can demonstrate good practice and areas for improvement.

RESULTS UK has applied an anti-oppression lens to our work on both recruitment and staff retention. On recruitment, we want to lift the barriers to entry into the sector for people from diverse backgrounds, so we have changed the language we use on our job descriptions, set up an internal Inclusive Recruitment Group and integrated questions on equality, diversity and inclusion into our job interviews so applicants are aware of our prioritisation of these issues and know the culture they are joining. We are committed to retaining staff and ensuring staff don't leave because of racist cultures and a lack of inclusivity so mainstreaming our anti-oppression work is also paramount. We are in the process of setting up a mentoring scheme to pair younger staff with more experienced colleagues both for career advice and personal support as they transition through their career. We encourage open discussions about racism and bias through our dedicated Slack channel, which has become one of our most active staff forums. We also hold monthly staff sessions on anti-oppression themes such as reviewing language, and organised a series of events for black history month celebrations. RESULTS UK staff and management engage in a number of cross-sector working groups on diversity, equality and inclusion, including those bringing together people of colour and diasporic communities. All of this is centred around a strategy of listening, learning and acting, in that order. Effective learning and acting cannot happen without listening first. Whilst we have made progress, it is important to acknowledge that we still have a way to go and we are by no means the finished article. We are committed to developing our anti-oppression strategy and values further, and continuing down a path of listening and learning.

RESULTS UK is also a partner of [ACTION](#), a global partnership of advocacy organisations working to influence policy and mobilise resources to fight diseases of poverty and achieve equitable access to health. ACTION partners work across five continents in both donor and lower income countries. The word partnership is important as it rejects the top down, donor led model of international development that all too often characterises the sector. Advocacy priorities are set by the partnership as a whole and equal weight is given to all voices. No one from a donor country carries out advocacy unless it is deemed useful by those in lower income countries. We believe this model is not only the right thing to do but leads to better advocacy outcomes as our policies are informed directly by the needs of people in high burden countries.

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

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As with many partnerships and coalitions, the ACTION partnership secretariat is based in the USA, which does risk people in the US office having a disproportionate amount of influence over the priorities and activities of the partnership. To combat this risk and for the partnership to work effectively with a secretariat based in the US, colleagues in the American office strive to limit any power imbalances afforded to them by working in the partnership's secretariat. This involves ensuring that people from different parts of the world are equally represented in important decision making processes, chairing meetings in such a way that all voices are heard and implementing policies that prevent decisions being made without the approval of partners in the global south.

Another RESULTS UK project that has centred and built on these principles is the Youth Leaders for Health programme, which brought together global health advocates from across a number of African countries to coordinate campaigns for universal health coverage and collaborative African approaches to combating diseases like Malaria. The project's external evaluator concluded that the project was a fine example to follow for those interested in 'decolonising development' in the way that power over the objectives, innovation and activities of the project were placed in the hands of the advocates themselves.

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

The FCDO should insist on reviewing the diversity and inclusion policies of the organisations applying for funding. These reviews should include requirements on minimum criteria, which should serve as a benchmark to assess the diversity and inclusion policies of organisations it is considering funding. When creating the criteria, the FCDO should consult diversity and inclusion specialists to ensure it is robust. Moreover, The FCDO should use its position on the boards of multilateral organisations to strengthen the diversity and inclusion policies of those organisations, identifying best practice and calling out inadequate progress where applicable. Most importantly, the FCDO should hold itself and its own work to the same high standards that it holds those it funds.

For any questions or further information please contact Lucy.Drescher@results.org.uk