

AN ACTIVE LEARNING ACTION

TAKE TIME TO LISTEN, LEARN AND ACT ON ANTI-RACISM IN OUR ADVOCACY AND ENDING POVERTY

The recent 'Racism in the Aid Sector' report by Parliament's International Development Committee is an important reminder that international development has its roots in colonialism, and this legacy lives on. It is only recently that we have started to seriously examine damaging practices and racist narratives that persist in international development today. Racism is so well embedded within society as a whole that we can often perpetuate harmful stereotypes in our advocacy for an end to global poverty - often without even noticing. Since 2020 and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, RESULTS UK has explicitly been trying to do more and do better to address oppression and injustice in all their forms. We need to be consciously anti-racist to help break down some of the harmful ideas and assumptions that have shaped international development for decades. Where injustice and oppression exist in the world, they always create inequality and poverty. This month, we encourage you to join us to listen, learn and act on anti-racism, and consider what this means to you and your advocacy.

Most of us invest our time and energy with organisations in the development sector because we wholeheartedly want to see a better world. We have good intentions but sometimes the tactics used to try and help people in need actually contribute to and perpetuate racist stereotypes. The history of international development is complex, and we have inherited a world that has been shaped by centuries of oppression, but that doesn't mean we can't do anything to change it.

Colonialism, racism and international development

Firstly, it's important to acknowledge that this is a huge topic and it's impossible to do it justice in such a small space! Nevertheless, it's an essential starting point for this month's 'active learning' action!

During the colonial period, racial hierarchies were created and entrenched to justify the genocide, enslavement and marginalisation of People of Colour across the world, and the exploitation of land and labour. Such hierarchies placed White Europeans as 'modern and civilised' and Black peoples as 'savage and uncivil' who needed the guardianship of Britain or other European nations to 'progress'. Cultures and knowledge systems that existed before colonisation were deliberately devalued and erased from history.

After the Second World War, many formerly-colonised countries took steps towards independence, and a shift to supporting formerly-colonised countries to 'develop' was seen. What constituted 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' was effectively decided by politically powerful, white-majority countries in Western Europe and North America, who considered themselves to be 'developed'. Newly independent, formerly-colonised countries with populations who are majority Black, Indigenous or People of Colour (BIPOC) were considered 'underdeveloped'.

To help 'underdeveloped' countries on the journey to become 'developed', a range of institutions, organisations, financial programmes and aid structures were created. Underpinning this was a narrative of 'white saviourism' - the implicit idea that White people in 'developed' countries had the knowledge, technology and expertise to save BIPOC around the world from their misery, poverty and 'backwardness'. In such narratives, people living in poverty in 'developing' countries are shown as passive recipients of aid who have little or no role in shaping their own futures. While ideas of international development and aid have evolved over the last few decades, we still often see systems, structures, narratives and behaviours that echo this original view of 'development', and the oppressive racial hierarchies that these came from.

Why are we talking about this more now?

The murder of George Floyd in 2020, the subsequent protests, and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted how deeply ingrained racism is on a national and global level. This has been a catalyst for organisations in the international development sector to grapple with the complex and oppressive history of our work, and to start to address racism and oppression in the present.

Although there have been active debates about this in recent years, and some changes, the pace of change has been far too slow. This was highlighted in the recent report by Parliament's International Development Committee (IDC) '[Racism in the Aid Sector](#)' which states "*Racism manifests in the very structure of international aid; the sector still reflects the power relationships of colonialism.*" The report, which you can read about [in our recent blog](#), although [by no means exhaustive or perfect](#), looks at many aspects of international development including:

- The colonial legacy of aid:

-Some structures and agencies which exist today in the aid sector are a direct product of colonialism.

-The legacy of racial hierarchies created during the colonial era still leads to discrimination of BIPOC.

-The reasons how and why some countries are poorer than others is often overlooked. For example, Britain developed economically as a result of extracting from other nations, yet Official Development Assistance (ODA) is often described as an act of selfless generosity, rather than an obligation based on past and present exploitation.

- The language and imagery used by NGOs often perpetuates the 'white saviour' narrative. The very word "aid" can imply dependence and powerlessness.

- There are power imbalances between organisations in the UK and partner organisations in the so-called 'Global South'. Decision-making power and funding often lie with organisations in the UK rather than with communities directly affected by issues.

- There is a lack of racial diversity among staff and leadership in many NGOs. Staff who are Black, Indigenous or People of Colour sometimes face racism and barriers to their career.

- The cuts made by the FCDO last year to the ODA budget were made without collaboration with the people the programmes were intended to support, which led to mistreatment of partners and communities.

Collectively, we need to do more to tackle deeply ingrained racism and actively challenge narratives and behaviours that perpetuate racist ideas in international development.

"The aid sector needs to have difficult conversations about how power imbalances, racial injustice and poverty came about and how it can help to address these underlying factors."

- IDC report '[Racism in the aid sector](#)'

Resources



Watch and discuss the film '[Stop Filming Us](#)'. A film about the disparity between biased Western reporting and true Congolese culture.



Read more in our blog: '[Barefoot and begging - Pity communications do everyone a disservice!](#)' (Contains many other links)



Check out these suggestions from Health Poverty Action for other ways to describe the support provided to lower income countries and '[Rename "Aid"](#)'



Listen to personal reflections and conversations from a diverse range of people in the '[Rethinking development](#)' podcast



Watch the webinar '[Understanding development: Past, Present and Future](#)' hosted by SSAP and Hub Cymru Africa.

RESULTS UK's anti-oppression journey

Since 2020, RESULTS UK has been explicitly on a journey of doing more and doing better to address racism and all forms of oppression and privilege. We know we are not perfect and there is a long way for us to go. You can find out more about this ongoing work [here](#), which has included internal conversations, workshops, blogs and public events (check out some recordings below!)

We have also been critically assessing the language and narratives we use in our own work. We are working with a consultant to create an anti-racist language and framing guide which we will use internally and also share with our grassroots network. This work will also inform how we approach RESULTS' future strategy in ending global poverty, and how to enact our anti-oppression values.

Some examples of how efforts to embed anti-racist values affects our advocacy:

- We now routinely refer to 'aid' as Official Development Assistance or ODA.
- We've all seen images of suffering or starving children used by charities to elicit donations. While there's no doubt that many people do face such extreme poverty and hardship, constant use of these images perpetuates the idea that people in black-majority countries are helpless, and in need of the help of the public in majority-white countries, and suggests to the public that nothing has changed, despite their help. We try to avoid these stereotypes and feature people telling their own stories where possible, and add captions and descriptions with names, places and contexts to any images of people that we use.
- We believe that people with lived experience of poverty and marginalisation should be involved in setting the priorities for how to end poverty. So, for example, we advocate for multilateral organisations (such as the [Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and malaria](#)) that already prioritise the voices of people with lived experience and where this is not the case, we advocate for organisations to improve the way decisions are made.
- Similarly, RESULTS works in partnership with organisations around the world that have more direct experience of the issues in the countries in which they are based, to inform our advocacy positions. For example, the [ACTION global health advocacy partnership](#), a collaboration between NGOs in multiple countries, seeks to collectively address global health inequalities.
- In May 2021, we held our 'anti-oppression and inclusive campaigning' grassroots training session with [Jon Cornejo](#) to kick off this journey. Following on from our National Conference 2022, which explored the theme '[The Power in All Our Voices](#)' and hosted speakers from all over the world, we felt that now is a perfect time to have an 'active learning action' to continue this journey.

Our grassroots network is at the heart of RESULTS, and to make meaningful steps towards understanding, confronting and addressing racism and other forms of oppression in our advocacy, we need to be making steps together.

RESULTS event recordings



RESULTS National Conference 2021
Take a stance and find chances for change
11-12 September

Taking a stance on the language we use:
why the way we talk about poverty and injustice
matters
with

Motunrayo Fagbeyi, Mitzi Jonelle Tan,
Sarika Bansal, Abraham Makajuola

[National Conference session 2021 about why the language we use when we talk about poverty and injustice matters.](#)



A Celebration of Black Leaders in International Development

With guest speakers:
Carine Bambara, Farrah Nazir,
Lorriann Robinson, Zainab Asunramu

Online event, via Zoom
Wednesday 27 October, 6 – 7 pm
Registration via Eventbrite

RESULTS

[Black History Month 2021 event 'A celebration of Black leaders in international development.'](#)



RESULTS National Conference 2022
The power in all our voices
2-3 July (hybrid event)

Sunday Session:
"Decoding Aid":
Developing, Debunking and How to Break Them

Joan Okitoi
Freelance communicator
and co-host of the #GlobalDev Communicators Connect

[National Conference session 2022 about stereotypes of aid, where they came from and how to break them.](#)

"Learning about oppression is a life-long personal journey through which we can strive to learn about issues and perspectives we aren't aware of and ourselves. We all have biases and privileges we aren't mindful of."

- RESULTS Educational Fund (USA).

Find out more about what our sister organisation in the USA are doing on anti-oppression [here](#).

"Be comfortable with not being comfortable"
As Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, former Chief Executive of Christian Aid, said in her evidence for the IDC report '[Racism in the aid sector](#)'.

TIME TO REFLECT

This month, and any month:

We refer to our 'anti-oppression' work as a journey, because it's not a quick fix. The aim of this month's action is to encourage thinking and learning about racism and other forms of oppression, to normalise conversations around these sometimes uncomfortable topics, and make steps to understanding what we can do in our advocacy and in our campaign groups. We hope this month will help you start, or continue your journey!

Listen

- Listen to some of the resources shared in this action sheet, and find other podcasts, talks and programmes related to this topic. You may want to chat in your groups about your thoughts on what you've heard and read, your personal experiences and how you feel about this topic.
- Listen to others in your group, and to the speaker on our monthly conference call. Listen openly, without judgement, so that everyone feels respected and heard.

Learn

There's always more to learn, and different perspectives to learn from. Remember that everyone has different experiences and knowledge.

- Individually: identify what you want to learn more about, check out some resources and find some more resources to help you to keep learning.
- As a group: Share what you'd like to learn more about and look at resources together. Learn together by hosting a film screening of '[Stop Filming Us](#)' and discuss it after or a 'book club' night having read one of the blogs shared.

Act

- Try to consider, and make small changes to, the language and images you use in blogs, social media, media and in your advocacy letters.
- Check out section 5 of our [Group Guidance](#) on inclusive groups, and consider what you can do in your group to create open and welcoming spaces for everyone.
- Tell us if there's more support you need, and if you have any thoughts and ideas for how RESULTS can do more, and do better, on our anti-oppression work.
- Challenge harmful assumptions and narratives when you come across them.

If you would like any support with this month's action, would like to chat to our Campaigns team about the topic, or want to tell us how you've found it, email **Campaigns Coordinator Tanya Begum at tanya.begum@results.org.uk**