

# LESS FUNDING, MORE EQUALITY?

## *Decolonising development in a world in crisis*

This short flyer lays out some further resources (and summaries of) that can guide you to understand better the colonial roots and continuities in the global development- and aid sector.

### Historically

#### The foundational argument: 'Development' was born colonial

- *Truman's 1949 inaugural address*,
  - where he introduced the concept of "underdevelopment" for the first time, framing two-thirds of the world as economically backward and in need of Western technical assistance.
  - This is the birth certificate of the modern development apparatus, and it was issued at the precise moment formal colonialism was ending
  - Aid replaced formal colonialism. Aid became control in a new jacket, framing the Global North as a saviour of 'underdeveloped, impoverished countries' (which was underdevelopment caused by Global North's own extractivism, exploitation and genocide).
- *Wolfgang Sachs- The Development Dictionary (1992)*
  - Sachs argues that "development" is a Western discourse that operates as a mechanism for the cultural and economic production of the "Third World"
  - defining what counts as progress, poverty, and expertise in ways that always position the West as the standard.
- *Arturo Escobar- Encountering Development (1995)*
  - Escobar builds on Sachs, and lays out how development created an entire apparatus (institutions, knowledge systems, professionals) that reproduces colonial power under a humanitarian vocabulary.
- *Gilbert Rist, The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith (1997/2014)*
  - Rist traces development as a secular religion: a belief system descended from the Christian missionary civilising mission, which itself was one of colonialism's justifying ideologies.
  - He shows that "each time the promises of development fail to materialise, the response is always more development", a self-reinforcing logic that structurally cannot acknowledge its own failures.

### Continuity of coloniality in Development/Aid:

#### The structural argument: aid as control

- *Kwame Nkrumah- Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism (1965)*
  - Nkrumah argued that newly independent states had achieved formal sovereignty but remained economically controlled by former colonial powers, and that aid was one of the primary mechanisms of this control
  - By influencing agenda-setting, where funding goes, but also other economic mechanisms.
  - He showed how aid (bilateral grants, loans, technical assistance) came with conditions that served donor interests: purchasing requirements that kept money circulating in donor economies, policy conditionalities that prevented recipient governments from pursuing economic strategies that would reduce dependency
- *Ramachandran (2025)- From Empire to Aid: Analysing Persistence of Colonial Legacies in Foreign Aid to Africa*
  - This paper uses OECD data to show that colonial powers consistently provide more bilateral aid to former colonies than to comparable non-colonies and that the types of aid (health, education, social protection) mirror colonial-era patterns of "civilising" investment.
  - The colonial relationship doesn't end, but instead it gets laundered through aid bureaucracy.
  - Example: Tied aid → by 1970, almost half of British Commonwealth aid was tied, meaning recipient countries could only spend it on British goods and services.



## The epistemological argument: knowledge as colonial infrastructure

- *Walter Mignolo- Local Histories/Global Designs (2000)*
  - Development doesn't just transfer money, it also transfers epistemologies from GN to GS
  - It defines what counts as knowledge, whose expertise is credible, what problems are worth solving, and how solutions should be measured.
- *Frantz Fanon- The Wretched of the Earth (1961)*
  - Describes the psychological and cultural dimensions of epistemological dominance
  - He highlights how colonial power operates not only through institutions but through the minds of the colonised, including through the creation of a local elite that has internalised Northern frameworks.
  - The "national bourgeoisie" chapter is directly applicable to the aid sector's elite capture problem.
  - Rasanathan et al., 2026 actually operationalises this: → nearly 80% of health research publications still originate from high-income countries, despite the data and specimens often coming from LMICs.

## The debt and reparations argument

- *Jason Hickel, The Divide (2017)*
  - Hickel analyses the net financial flows between North and South. The Global South sends vastly more money to the North ( through debt service, capital flight, tax evasion by multinationals, and unequal trade) than it receives in aid.
  - For every 1% into the Global South, the Global North makes \$14.
  - The Danish strategy document actually includes a figure (Figure 6) showing that illegal capital flight from Africa in 2020 was DKK 575 billion against DKK 311 billion in development assistance inflows.
  - So instead of 'Aid' (which is used now as a tool of investment), to repay our colonial debts, we should seriously investigate alternatives measures such as debt relief/reparations.

## Buzzwordification & Elite Capture:

- *Themrise Khan - Decolonisation is a comfortable buzzword for the aid sector*
  - Her argument that even decolonisation framing is a Northern imposition is exactly what you need for your buzzwordification section.
- *Olúfémi Táíwò- Against Decolonization: Taking African Agency Seriously*
  - Intellectual and moral critique of today's decolonization movement. Decolonization has lost its way. Originally a struggle to escape the West's direct political and economic control, it has become a catch-all idea, often for performing 'morality' or 'authenticity'; it suffocates African thought and denies African agency.
- *Olúfémi Táíwò-Elite Capture: How the Powerful Took Over Identity Politics (And Everything Else)*
  - Táíwò identifies the process by which a radical concept can be stripped of its political substance and become the victim of elite capture—deployed by political, social, and economic elites in the service of their own interests.

## Imagination/Reflection Exercise: mapping your own decolonial actions

- Around you, imagine/draw four rings:



- 1. Individual: the decisions you make personally,
- 2. Interpersonal: the relationships you shape
- 3. Institutional: the institution you work within
- 4. Global: the global system you're part of.

Question, within these rings:

- where in those four rings do you currently use your influence to shift power toward the people development claims to serve?
- Where do you use it , consciously or not, to protect the status quo?
- which gaps in this map do you see that you could change now?

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