

**Workshop Title: How to decolonise development cooperation within aid?**

**Convener's name, organisation :** Nina Luhr, SAIH

**Main issues, questions discussed:**

- Should we use the terms decolonization or localization? Preference for shifting power, or locally led development can be contributed by questioning frameworks, such as those from state donors.
- One example of practical approaches is the budget—keeping it more flexible, for instance, having less strict budget lines. This way, partners do not have to ask whether they can use money for "chocolate" instead of candy, and you must answer yes, no, or why.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems can be developed and implemented by the local partner, including more qualitative methods/indicators. Sometimes we need to challenge donor frameworks (e.g., numbers on a yearly basis) or aggregate indicators from various partners.
- A general question on constraints arising from donors when "localizing" and the added value of our own organization/INGO at all if everything/more is locally led. The challenge is accountability.
- Equal partnership: who chooses the partner? Shouldn't local organizations choose us rather than the other way around? Long-term partnerships can help build trust and lead things locally.
- Some local partners no longer have problems with colonization; it's more about complex power relations.
- COVID-19 forced us to have more trust in local partners. It's no longer possible to strictly follow activities in a log frame when formal schools are closed. No more visits, donors became quite flexible, and it worked. Perhaps that is a lesson.
- An example of having local offices instead of operating from Europe. However, staff there is often hired from Switzerland, complying with our standards. Often, they have more in common with "us" than with local people from various (often poorer, indigenous, rural) backgrounds. Thus, diversification in local offices is important, as local power relations also exist.

**Subgroup led by Leon Tilky:**

- Personal story x: GIZ is reentering Latin America, going in again with a concept of "we have noticed China is doing work there, so we have to be there." Who is in this discussion of decolonizing, who is deciding what is done?
- The problem is that aid is dependent on politics. The Swiss traditional way in, with an eye for trade relations from the early 1950s on. Still today, geopolitical interests are key (trade as well as preventing northward migration through economic development).
- Development agencies and the way they treat staff, "local" employees, vs expert contracts. Who decides policy within development organizations, what are the inequalities inherent in

our work? We need to look at our organizations, at the way we behave and communicate, how we shape the policies. You always have to be aware of your privilege. Local elites do not value local expertise and practices; they look to the international level. Global Partnership in Education: to get funding, they still need to show how their national plans stack up, so it's a means for the North to impose its standards.

- Aid is an industry. Localization: it's a fig-leaf.
- Leon: a common complaint of MoE: NGOs had an office in the ministry
- Ministries say they cannot adapt to donor's priorities; they don't have the time to sit and write policy because they have to react to donor priorities.
- Counter examples: xx in Turkey, you have to go through the MoE.
- Valeria: In Nepal, you have to go through local NGOs, which are not independent from power relations either. They also have to follow the agendas of the NGOs.
- Xx: The Turkish approach was positive in the sense that it did not lead to a parallel system of education, as happened in Lebanon. This, despite the lack of capacity locally.
- The question of a double standard: It gets challenged a lot about what she does, but colleagues in pharmaceutical companies don't, and they do not reflect on what their work implies for the world.
- The challenge of how to bring "expected" localization together with the expected "Swissness" from our government.

#### **Conclusions:**

#### **Do you have any concrete recommendations? (to yourself, to participants, to RECI, to other actors?)**

- Use the terms decolonization, localization, or similar, as long as you are aware of your privilege and work to shift power to locally led development.
- Challenge yourself and your donor to shift power by keeping the budget more flexible.