Glossary of terms in international development

Does the language we use reinforce colonial or outdated thinking? Has our language evolved to capture our efforts to be more progressive, considered, inclusive and locally-led? Are we reinforcing political language that undermines our remit? Is the language we use both publicly and privately consistent with our values? At Hub Cymru Africa, we believe we have a responsibility to take a position on this and have agreed that there is some language that we will no longer use in our own communication.

Why now?

- From advocacy to training, language is used inconsistently across many sections of the sector; this needs to be corrected
- Language is often used in ways that validate those in power and top-down power structures
- If power changes hands and we change our language with it, it makes us seem inconsistent in terms of our values and what we stand for
- Using language inconsistently dilutes our brand and dilutes our values, and can undermine our case or puts us at risk of being called out for being duplicitous
- Using language that reinforces existing imbalanced power structures can mean that the very people we want to help are robbed of their agency and their true contexts
- Language and meaning change rapidly and it's timely to review our own
- The sector is struggling to find ways to describe what it does publicly, through better and accurate language, Hub Cymru Africa can convene and support new thinking
- Other sectors are much better at using accessible language which has helped strengthen public support and understanding for their work. We need to do the same.

The principles guiding us.

- Language should not be influenced by or validate existing power structures
- Language should be consistent with our values
- Language should be consistent across all areas of our work
- Language should avoid forms of words that reflect specific political or ideological thinking or are owned by a political party
- Language should describe our work, our staff and our relationships with those we work for in a way that does not undermine their own agency or capability
- Language should remain constant even in times of political change
- Language should not reflect colonial or paternalistic views of the world
- Language should support equality, diversity, and inclusion
- Language should be accessible, clear, and free of jargon, particularly the use of theoretical or academic concepts
- Language that is problematic should be challenged and not left for others to resolve.

Contents

Glossary

Disability specific terms

AVOID *	USE *
(the) handicapped, (the) disabled	disabled (people)
afflicted by, suffers from, victim(s) of	has [name of condition or impairment]
confined to a wheelchair	wheelchair user
mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal	with a learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural)
cripple, invalid	disabled person
spastic	person with cerebral palsy
able-bodied	non-disabled
mental patient, insane, mad	person with a mental health condition
deaf and dumb; deaf mute	deaf, user of British Sign Language (BSL), person with a hearing impairment
the blind	people with visual impairments; blind people; blind and partially sighted people
an epileptic, diabetic, depressive, and so on	person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression
dwarf; midget	someone with restricted growth or short stature

fits, spells, attacks	seizures

Examples of enabling beliefs in our sector and how to engage them:

AVOID	ALTERNATIVE
We support People of Colour/Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME).... or any term that centres on 'whiteness' or colour	We work with minoritised communities or racialised communities.
We work in International Development	We stand in solidarity, work together, take collective action, inclusion, stand with.
Giving people/them a voice	Amplify their voice
We support poor communities in…	We work collaboratively with partners in… to support communities
Together we can create change, get involved with the growing movement for change.	We all have agency to create change
Those living in poverty are survivors that need our help.	Help those living in poverty, give those affected a voice, they need our help, we need to help them, poverty will continue without our help, our work has helped many out of poverty.
People still need our help; people are trapped in a cycle of poverty.	We have a global responsibility to address inequalities that exist globally especially those in abject poverty.
Your poverty is your own fault (if you work hard you will succeed)	Things that focus on individuals who have managed to get out of poverty by hard work—although this might be true, it implies that others have not worked as hard which is likely to be false.

UK leadership; Global Britain and language that harks back to colonialism e.g. "Global leader"; "global superpower"; "force for global good"	UK **playing its part**; UK working in **solidarity with**; UK **playing a positive role** in the world; UK working **in partnership**
British values	Fairness, democracy, freedom and human rights are values that should underpin how and where we invest UK aid. Shared/human values.
(British) expertise	British experience and validating language around lived experience
Levelling up	Making societies fairer; building a more just world
Beneficiary, world's poorest, most vulnerable people, people left behind	The communities we work with; marginalised / excluded people; people who have been marginalised; under-represented groups/communities; people that live on less than £2 a day.
Developing countries, Third World, Global South	Low-income countries; middle-income countries; fragile and conflict-affected states. "The countries/regions we/NGOs work in".
Mutual prosperity, aid in the national interest / public interest	Independent aid that works for marginalised people / people based on need.
Combative language e.g. "fighting global poverty"	Tackling global poverty
Capacity building	Sharing learning and knowledge; community organizing and movement building; community-led development
Localisation, shift the power	Locally led, shifting power and resources to communities.

Empowerment	'Transformation' or 'claiming rights'

Grey phrases

Below are the words and phrases that we believe in some contexts are ok.

PHRASE	REASON
Put an end to global poverty	This works as a better alternative to "fighting global poverty", though it's a large claim
Leave no one behind	Suggests people who are being marginalised have no agency, but this is a key concept to the SDGs so ok to use in an SDG context
National security	Ok but would prefer "shared security"
Experts	Only if we are talking about a specified area of expertise e.g. not 'expert on East Africa' but 'expert on nutrition programmes in East Africa' or 'expert on global education policy'
Elites	Not to be used when describing ourselves but ok when talking about "elites" as a descriptor of a group of people in society
Leadership	Only ok to use if we can validate claims of "leadership" with evidence
Soft power	"Diplomacy" is better
Value for money (VfM)	If holding the govt to account for VfM meaning quality programmes that do not waste money, or when talking about the importance of having a specific select committee for ODA = YES, if referring to ensuring VfM for the British taxpayer = NO because this risks endorsing poor quality programmes or cutting corners to save money

"Force for global good" etc	Parroting back phrases to hold government to account is ok,but needs to be in quotation marks to make it clear it isn't our language and should be used sparingly

Further readings

- Glossary of terms used by the Department for International Development: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/glossary-of-terms-used-by-the-department-for-international-development/glossary-of-terms-used-by-the-department-for-international-development
- https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/which-awful-devspeak-words-should-we-ban-your-chance-to-vote/: https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/118173/bk-deconstructing-development-buzzwords-010910-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
- Glossary of development terms: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/dcr-2012-52-en.pdf?expires=1604598917&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=45DF2E0C0965AE4FC96CD1828D046373
- The 'Global South' is a terrible term. Don't use it!: http://re-design.dimiter.eu/?p=969
- It's time to put an end to supremacy language in international development - https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/its-time-to-put-an-end-to-supremacy-language-in-international-development/
- A Ladder of Citizen Participation - Sherry R Arnstein - https://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html
- Deconstructing Development Discourse: Buzzwords and Fuzzwords - https://www.academia.edu/2636393/Deconstructing_Development_Discourse_Buzzwords_and_Fuzzwords