

Final

Terms of reference for policy-supporting research

Tracks for the decolonization of the Belgian development cooperation

1 Context

The Belgian development cooperation has its roots in the colonial administration and has grown over the years into an institution that is geared towards the reaching of the internationally agreed development goals.

Past tried concepts of participation, ownership and national execution have not succeeded into a structural transformation of development aid that is still strongly donor driven. The strategies, instruments and partnerships of the Belgian development cooperation are still strongly permeated by colonial concepts of superiority, paternalism, and unequal power relations, and still picture western-style societies as the goal to reach.

Nowadays, the increasing inequalities and ecological breakdown caused by this western development model increasingly shows that this is not the optimal example for the rest of the world. It is time to reconsider the core principles underlying our aid model, to identify the colonial remnants in our international relations and to start imagining models for cooperation that allow for international solidarity on a renewed basis. The SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) agenda with universal and interdependent goals is already a step in this direction. Unfortunately, within development cooperation, it is still too often seen as an agenda for the so-called "South" countries, as was the MDG agenda.

In spite of the challenges and mistakes, the Belgian cooperation still presumes it “knows” what needs to be done. In addition to institutional colonialism embedded in rigid structures, procedures, and power relations, questioning the behavior is even more important.

In an administration we are used to have an Agenda: build a Grand Plan and work towards the end point. Existing power relations and behavior are however complex problems. They cannot be solved with a grand plan. The Grand Plan, and its modern form: the imposed strategy, best practices, the logframe, are good to build or move massive things mechanically, without much regard for the environment: build a dam or a road. Apart from the institutional settings, the colonialism of the system is also about day-to-day behavior and patterns. What is really the freedom to propose approaches by the partners from the South? How do we accept and treat local accountability and integrity?

News reports show that there is a growing demand for a change of vision and practices in the relations between the countries of the North and their representatives (mostly white former colonial countries), and the countries of the South and their representatives (ex-colonized, racialized). In recent years, claims have emerged and been structured, such as:

- 1) Diaspora's demand to be recognized in the society in which they live and in the relations with their countries of origin;
- 2) The "black lives matter" movement which points to an institutional racism stemming from colonial relations and mindsets;
- 3) The 60th anniversary of DRC's independence almost simultaneous with the major BLM demonstrations, was marked by the expression of the Belgian King's regrets for colonial crimes and sparked debates in DGD and Foreign Affairs;
- 4) A reluctance of certain "beneficiary" countries to the impositions of development cooperation;
- 5) A request for recognition and condemnation of Belgian colonial history (as well as the return of stolen objects or even reparation for crimes committed)

In parallel, thinkers and political scientists, African in particular, have developed a thought of philosophical and economic sovereignty which goes hand in hand with the critique of development aid.

Decolonization of development aid is not only relevant to government aid, but also to other actors financed by the Belgian cooperation, such as NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and other institutional actors, BIO (Belgian investment cooperation), UN agencies.

1.1 Brief inventory of this last decade decolonization movement around Belgian Aid

In the development aid sphere, alternative approaches emerge, especially amongst the big foundations, where grants are increasingly allocated based on a set of principles instead of detailed project proposals (see e.g., the [Elma South Africa Investment Framework](#)). Some Belgian NGOs have completed a strong reflection and sometimes proposed awareness raising activities or new and more ethical practices in the field (sos faim, ricolto, CEC, echo communication, Africalia, 11.11.11, CNCD etc.).

Narrow and wide effectiveness

The frameworks for effectiveness are taking the effectiveness of the Intervention of the North into account, while having scant attention for the wider effects on the ecosystem and the political economy in the South. E.g., Integrity efforts create interventions that are "clean" of harassment and corruption, without changing much of the environment of corruption and harassment where the ultimate beneficiaries live. Effectiveness on narrow short term financial terms or measured by simple indicators are not the right approach to measure the wider development impact.

The Accra, Paris, Busan conferences have brought about an important semantic shift from reconsidering the recipient as a "partner" and seeking "aid effectiveness".

The Millennium development goals change this dichotomous North-South frame within a more interdependent vision. But still, Global goals such as SDG's, the determination of extreme poverty, development index leading the lines of development policies willing to be universal but are in fact coming down from an occidental point of view, especially when the goals are translated into proxy indicators that impose a set of practices instead of leaving the choice of instruments and approaches to the partners.

United Nations proclaimed **International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024**, with this purpose: "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development." Belgium was investigated upon and strongly criticized.

At the national level in Belgium, debate about the Belgian colonialist past was recently reopened. This led to the creation of the "Truth and reconciliation Parliamentary Commission" that recently started its activities.

Finally, in DGD's "civil society" department and among non-governmental cooperation partners, a reflection is underway and has led to various activities:

- Within the framework of GSK/CSC Belgium, a learning path with the actors of the non-governmental cooperation which have a global citizenship education program (60 CSOs and institutional actors as well as "Annonce la couleur / Kleur bekennen" on the issue of racial stereotypes in practices and behaviors, the place of southern partners and diaspora organizations, the organizations staff diversity and decolonization.
- A scan of stereotypes in the selection of audiovisual projects candidates for co-funding as well as a mandatory stereotyping meeting for the team of selected projects.

Training to better understand and use the concepts is also planned for DGEO staff in the coming year.

2 Defining the problem and identifying fields of activity

Colonial aspects of aid can be witnessed in the imposed structures, priorities, approaches and thinking patterns from western donor countries, undermining real ownership and self-realization from the intended "beneficiaries" of the aid.

Thus the partner countries and the "beneficiary" communities are "locked" in "poverty", dependence and essential inferiority which prevents access to sovereign development. Often the communication of development actors to the Western public reflects this vision of inferiority and poverty. These images are relayed by mainstream media and become the visual identity of the beneficiary countries people.

Within the context of the search for aid effectiveness, it is necessary to investigate the pathways to co-create a new model of development. It must respect the local ownership and leadership, improve the effective participation of local stakeholders and the accountability towards these stakeholders in the partner country of the Belgian Aid, without undermining the democratic oversight in Belgium.

The issue is institutional, cultural, and even racial. There is a need to map both the institutional racism of the system, and the cultural racism the excludes approaches emerging from the Global South while imposing views and solutions by Belgian cooperation as donor and its partner organizations.

For the Belgian development assistance, it is thus necessary to understand the degree of institutional colonialism generated by its structures and the behavioral colonialism of its culture.

Based on this, pathways for mitigation can be designed.

1. **The research** will be divided in 3 parts:

- a. Mapping the structural colonialism in the current structures, and investigating the cultural colonialism in current approaches, practices, behavior, and vocabulary.
- b. Understanding aspects of coloniality in aid, particularly in the Belgian context: workshops with staff of DGD (Directorate General for Development) and its partners, beneficiaries, and diaspora's members
- c. Proposing perspectives for decolonizing aid by identifying opportunities and added value and proposing a pathway for international solidarity and cooperation on an alternative basis.

This research consists of:

- a. A desk study of all relevant documents, studies regarding the structures and their inherent colonialism in some partner countries of the Belgian development cooperation (choice of countries to be determined in consultation with DGD).
- b. A consultation with relevant actors in Belgium who are involved.
- c. A field visit: consultation of relevant stakeholders in development cooperation in a partner country (embassy, Enabel, NGOs, multilateral partners, partner country governmental partners, local civil society, ...).

2. Applied research:

In parallel and considering the identified problems and opportunities management, more tailored research can be carried out in our partner countries. This applied research is determined together with DGD.

3 Expected results of policy support for Belgian Development Cooperation

Policy support is expected on four distinct levels:

1. Policy support to identify and create awareness on colonial aspects of Belgian development cooperation
 - Clear identification & overview of colonial aspects present in institutional structures and processes and in cultural behavior within Belgian development practice. It should help the Belgian Development Cooperation in the process of raising awareness on the problematic

inherent colonial core in which its instruments and culture are still embedded – a first step to start a participative process of decolonizing Belgian development cooperation.

The research should lead to an increased awareness of the fundamental colonial character of Belgian development aid that is in contradiction with its ultimate aims and with the intentions of Belgian development actors and co-workers.

2. Policy support to determine the place of development cooperation in the recognition of the history of colonization and its contemporary consequences.
3. Policy support to determine key aspects of a decolonized practice (humans and technical) of international solidarity and cooperation
 - a. Policy support to propose a pathway from the current situation to a structurally and culturally decolonized cooperation
 - b. Policy support to determine Tracks for more horizontality on each level of the process of a cooperation program/ activity (beneficiaries, partners, middle and high-level donor)
 - c. Policy support to propose a long-term vision and the co-creation of an alternative development model based on priorities adapted to partner countries.
 - d. Policy support to identify roles for bursary students and diaspora organizations in the partnership relations with their country of origin.
 - e. Policy support to decolonize the images communicated by the Belgian development actors on relations with the Global South.
4. Policy support to identify the challenges of decolonization within Belgian diplomacy, in its geopolitical and economic aspects, to clarify the place that a decolonized Belgian cooperation could have within Belgian foreign policy as a whole.

4 Piloting of the research

The research touches the totality of DGD and is especially relevant for the Directions that are funding field interventions: D1, D2, D3, D5. Therefore, the research is introduced by D0, but prepared by contributors from D3, D5, D1 and the field, but will be guided by a pluridisciplinary team from the different Directions.