

Decolonizing Aid: The Use of Language and Lexicon.

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Reflection Questions for Mission 21:

1. What has been the influence of Christianity on the psychological development in the Global South and how does this legacy translate? Stockphrase: Bible and the gun. The colonial powers used the gun and the Missionaries waged psychological warfare.
2. Did this steer towards a deeper psychological insubordination and how can we use language to reverse the deeper psychological impact?
3. In Many parts of Africa, different religions were aligned to different tribes e.g. in Uganda, the Baganda in the Central region became Anglican Christians. Did Christianity bridge ethno-linguistic differences or strengthened them?
4. Is there a need for the Church to first and foremost decolonize its own institutional structures even before decolonizing aid? There are structural constraints within the Church – quite hierarchical and patriarchal.

1. Translations, Ivory tower Versus Ebony Tower knowledge:

Language is the human basis of belonging, thinking and communicating. It sets the terms of relational engagement. The aid-related dominance of English or French or Spanish means translation into indigenous languages. This empowers those doing the translating, but with the paradox that their own language matters less while inculcating a post-colonial inferiority complex.

Typically the burden of translation usually falls on the weaker, dependent party. This situation creates educational and class barriers to inclusive representation in communication and whose voice counts.

As a result, without meaningful language change, systems change is likely to remain superficial. It also remains so, if the passion, vibrancy, tone and energy of communications by the less powerful continues to be constrained by the legalistic, bureaucratic 'soulless' style of written agreements, reflecting the dominance of a linear type of logic and argumentation. Aid system terminology is predominantly technocratic as well as relying on colonial tongues, mindsets, power dynamics and frameworks for action. This situation and its labelling impose a foreign normative agenda, creating problems of shared understanding.

2. Charity versus Development:

Charity is portrayed as “helping” and this often invokes up victimhood and passivity in order to validate the assistance being given. There is a growing awareness that these portrayals uphold, rather than counteract, historical and politicized notions of “the other.”

This leads to reinforced narrative frames and deepened ignorance among the general public in rich countries, and perpetuate distorted and powerless stereotypes among people who are poor in formerly-colonized countries.

3. Lexicon:

The desire is the ‘abolition’ of jargon, in addition to ‘banning’ the use of neo-colonial clichés which are racial, sexist and pejorative.

In addition to cleaning out jargon and clichés, there is need to have an inclusion of words or idioms from other languages that express an idea or condition better than English. So, A lexicon includes a list of ‘banned’ words, phrases or idioms, e.g., beneficiaries; funders; terms associated with sexism, racism, etc. A lexicon contains preferred expressions for currently common and distorted terms, e.g., use resources instead of funds; recognise knowledges rather than knowledge; refer to counterparts, not partners; use engagement instead of participation.

Conclusion:

I am persuaded that without meaningful language change, systems change is likely to remain superficial if at all. It also remains so, if the passion, vibrancy, tone and energy of communications by the less powerful and privileged continues to be constrained by the legalistic, bureaucratic ‘soulless’ style of written agreements, reflecting the dominance of a linear type of logic and argumentation.