



# Taking British politics and colonialism out of our language:

Bond's language guide



## Over the last few months, Bond has been reflecting on the language we use through our communications, advocacy and training.

We know many of our members are having the same conversations internally. Does the language Bond uses reinforce colonial or outdated thinking? Has Bond's 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 Bond's values of being open, dynamic, influential and collaborative?

At Bond, 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. This piece of work sits amongst a suite of work Bond is doing internally to get its house in order and to support the sector on several issues including pay transparency and fairness, inclusive recruitment, gender equality, shifting the power, diverse leadership and safeguarding.

## Why now?

- Language is used inconsistently across Bond and within the sector
- Language is often used in ways which validate those in power and validates 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 power structures can mean that the very people we want to help are robbed of their agency and their context
- Language and meaning change rapidly and it's time to review given the political and external context
- The sector is struggling to find ways to describe what it does publicly, and Bond 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 consistently define the issues we work on in a way that stays true to our values, no matter who the audience is
- 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 not dehumanise or portray people as "other" "victims" and us as "heroes" or "saviors",
- Language should remain constant even in times of political change
- Language should not reflect colonial, paternalistic or oppressive views of the world
- Language should be actively anti-oppressive and 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

## Suggested additions

- Avoid portraying the issues we work on as natural. Instead we should show that there is a cause and a solution – and the cause is often linked to inequality and a lack of power (rather than just about money)
- Avoid speaking on behalf of other people. Where possible, make space for people to tell their own stories from their own perspectives
- Be for something, rather than against it (e.g. rather than anti-poverty, say for a fair and equal world)
- Avoid fear and threat, and instead show the nuance of reality and that change is possible



## 1. Bond's depoliticised and decolonised language grid

No	Alternatives
Global Britain, language that harks back to colonialism e.g. or "Global leader" "global superpower" "force for global good"	"UK playing its part" instead of "UK leadership" UK working in solidarity with XXX 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, solidarity
British expertise	Talk about experience and use validating language around lived experience.
Levelling up	Making societies fairer
Beneficiary, world's poorest, most vulnerable people, marginalised people, poor people, people in need, voiceless (people have a voice we've just been ignoring it)	The communities we work with, people who have been marginalised / people who have been excluded / people who have not been listened to, under-represented groups/communities, "people that live on less than £2 a day", people in need of support, people left behind
Developing countries, Third World, Global south, sub-Saharan Africa	Lower Income Countries, Middle Income Countries, Fragile and Conflict Affected States, "the countries we/NGOs work in, regions, countries, world's most fragile states, Majority World
Mutual prosperity, aid in the national interest / public interest	Support that works for people who have been marginalised
Combative language e.g. "fighting global poverty"	Tackling global poverty / addressing global poverty
Capacity building	Sharing learning and knowledge, community organising and movement building,

No	Alternatives
<b>Localisation, shift the power</b>	Locally led, shifting power and resources to communities
<b>Empowerment / empowering</b>	'communities claiming their rights' use language that talks about 'autonomy' or 'equality' or 'rights' instead
<b>Working for / helping / saving / giving</b>	working with/standing in solidarity with/the communities we work alongside
<b>Aid</b>	'Social Development Finance'. 'Official Social Development Finance.' 'International SDG Finance'. Even Official 'Development assistance' would be better
<b>In the field/on the ground (sounds colonial / militaristic)</b>	In [insert name of location], or rather than "colleagues who work on the ground" say "colleagues who work with communities"

## 2. Grey phrases

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

Phrase	Reason
<b>Put an end to global poverty</b>	This works as a better alternative to "fighting global poverty", though it's a large claim
<b>Leave no one behind</b>	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
<b>National security</b>	Ok but would prefer "shared security"
<b>Experts</b>	Only if we are talking about 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'
<b>Elites</b>	Not to be used when describing ourselves but ok when talking about "elites" as a descriptor of a group of people in society
<b>Leadership</b>	Only ok to use if we can validate claims of "leadership" with evidence
<b>Soft power</b>	"Diplomacy" is better
<b>Value for money (VfM)</b>	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
<b>"Force for global good" etc.</b>	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
<b>National Security / shared security</b>	Links to the militarization of development cooperation. Suggest dropping 'security' altogether unless specifically in relation to violence or civil unrest, but not in the context of 'health security', etc.

## Resources

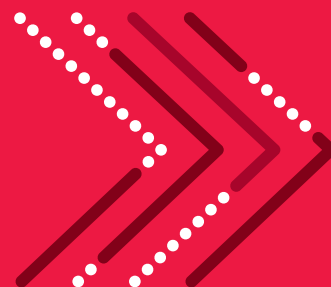
- [Health Poverty Action: A Practical Guide for Communicating Global Justice & Solidarity](#)
- [Common Cause Handbook](#)
- [PIRC guide on framing the economy](#)
- [PIRC guide on framing equality](#)
- [PIRC blog on "The Narratives we Need"](#)
- [Dochas code of conduct on images and messages](#)
- Jonathan Glennie's paper on '[Global Public Investment](#)' - which links the work on language as only one component of a broader shift in our thinking about the purpose and structure of international development work and the role of NGOs etc

is questionable, perhaps on occasion harmful.

- We would also love to explore ways we can bring in the concept of "inequality" more to the development sector, rather than just poverty. (I.e. bringing in the concept that poverty is about inequality)

## Additional thoughts from members:

- Is there any sense of priorities? i.e. a few words that we all want to move away from as opposed to a longer list which might be harder to operationalise (YES: aid, beneficiaries and developing countries – consensus amongst members that they need to go).
- Do the words we use accurately describe certain things, or reinforce certain mindsets? So "developing/developed" is a good example - it's not accurate, everywhere is developing in some sense, and we don't want to suggest there's a hierarchy. But the other issue is about whether ACTUAL ACTIVITIES and things we do are appropriate (and reinforce certain mindsets). "Capacity building" a good example here. It does accurately describe what it's aiming to describe, at least most of the time. But the suggestion of the document is that this actual activity





Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development.

We unite and support a diverse network of over 400 civil society organisations to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice.

Find out more at [bond.org.uk](http://bond.org.uk)

Bond  
Society Building  
8 All Saints Street  
London, UK  
N1 9RL

T +44(0)20 7837 8344  
E [info@bond.org.uk](mailto:info@bond.org.uk)  
W [bond.org.uk](http://bond.org.uk)