THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR LEADERSHIP, STRATEGY & DEVELOPMENT

(Centre LSD)

DECOLONISATION AND ANTI-RACISM FOR DEVELOPMENT WORK IN AFRICA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The twin issues of decolonisation and anti-racism have been recognised over the years to be important approaches to promote development in Africa. There has been a lot of academic papers, research and debate on the issues. But it has not fundamentally changed approaches to development work. This is why the renewed interest by Christian Aid and the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD) in 2023 is quite commendable. There is the need to critically re-examine African history and envision a new path forward for the continent, a path rooted in justice, equity and reclamation of African identity.

In this Policy brief, we make a case decolonisation and anti-racism agenda to drive development work in Africa. But first, we examine the trajectory of global development and the legacies of colonialism and racism in Africa.

2. TRAJECTORY OF GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

The concept of development has undergone significant changes over the years particularly since the mid-20th century. The initial focus was on economic growth and a developed society was seen as one that has moved from a traditional society to a modern one.[1] This conception was criticised by many scholars who propounded the dependency theories.[2] They argued that the underdevelopment of certain regions particularly in Africa and Latin America is a direct result of historical and ongoing exploitation by wealthier nations.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was dominance of neo-liberal scholars and theories organised around the Washington consensus and led by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank who promoted Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) as the model to stimulate economic growth. The core components of the programme are currency devaluation, trade liberalisation, public sector down sizing, fiscal austerity and market deregulation.[3] The impact on Africa was

catastrophic- economic stagnation, de-industralisation, debt crisis, poverty and inequality, lack of access to health and education, food insecurity and political and social unrest.[4]

In the 1990s, there was a shift towards a more holistic approach to development. The UNDP introduced the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1990 highlighting the importance of education, health and living standards.[5] This shift emphasized that development should focus on improving people's lives rather than focus on economic growth or Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This is why some scholars talk about holistic development which is a shift from focus on economic growth and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to well-being. The idea is to harmoniously advance the well-being of both people and the planet. Other scholars have developed what is called Gross National Happiness with nine pillars: Health; Education; Living standards; Psychological well being; Time use; Ecological Diversity and resilience; Community vitality; Cultural Diversity and Resilience; and Good governance.

In 2000, world leaders adopted the Millenium declaration leading to the establishment of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs). The eight goals of the MDG were meant to address the various dimensions of poverty including hunger, education, gender equality, child mortality, maternal health, disease, environmental sustainability and global partnership.[6] By 2015, the goals of the MDG were not met and the United Nations launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 SDGs aim to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions by 2030 while addressing issues such as inequality, climate change, peace and justice.[7] At the present rate, we are unlikely to meet the SDGs by 2030. However, there is sufficient knowledge today on what can be done to eradicate poverty and inequality. A big blow can be dealt on poverty and inequality through inclusive growth and job creation, inclusive governance and citizen engagement, social protection policies and programmes, addressing environmental

challenges including climate change, youth and women empowerment, leveraging technology, addressing issues of security and focusing on education, health, agriculture and infrastructure. The challenge is the leadership, strategy and the right method of organizing and work to ensure that political leaders, political parties, government, private sector, development workers and whole of society focus on what needs to be done. In this context, decolonization and anti-racism will be very important tools and approaches.

In 2013, the African Union launched a 50 year development agenda-Africa Agenda 2063. The agenda has a vision for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena.[8] The agenda prioritises sustainable development, human rights, cultural renewal and economic empowerment building on the continent's strengths while addressing historical and systemic challenges such as colonial legacies and racism. The Africa Agenda 2063 is designed to promote decolonization by its focus on economic independence and industralisation, emphasis on education reform and knowledge production, cultural renaissance and identity, Africa led development models, Pan-African solidarity and unity, promotion of human rights and social justice, empowerment of African Youth and women and active role in global governance. Unfortunately, African governments, scholars and development workers hardly reference Africa Agenda 2063.

3. COLONIAL LEGACIES AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

In order to drive a decolonisation and anti-racism development agenda in Africa, it is imperative to first confront the deep legacies of colonialism in Africa. Colonialism has a profound impact on Africa's economic, political, social and cultural development. From the 19th to the mid-20th centuries, European powers divided Africa among themselves. At the Berlin conference from 1844-45, fourteen European

countries met to partition Africa and divide it among themselves. The European powers exploited Africa's natural resources and imposed foreign cultures and governance systems on the people. The development of Africa was obstructed and changed. The interest of the colonialists was the extraction of minerals and raw materials to benefit European industries. That pattern of production has continued till today. Colonial infrastructure such as railways, ports and roads were built primarily to facilitate resource extraction rather than to serve the needs of the people.   There was anarchy of production and colonial appropriation of the proceeds. They fixed the prices of the raw materials and the prices of finished goods from Europe leading to huge trade imbalance. This pattern has remained till today. They created ethnic divisions and hegemonic ethnic groups. They operated government that is removed from and alien to the people hence most Nigerian languages describe government work as white man's job (*Iluoyibo* in Urhoho, *Oluoyibo* in Ibo and *Aikin Bature* in Hausa). They created a judicial system that is alien to African way of conflict management characterised by mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration and negotiation. They created a justice system based on evidence that can be created, manufactured, manipulated or jettisoned based on European technical grounds. They created educational system that denigrated African languages, traditions and belief systems. African goods were labelled bad and dangerous. Local gin or *Ogogoro* became illicit gin. Schnapps and Dry gin became the drink to use in African cultural gatherings. European languages were imposed and African languages were supressed. Speaking of vernacular became a grievous offence that is met with punishment in African Schools. The African identify was corrupted. Any thing black was depicted as bad and even reflected in English language: blackmail, black sheep, black leg, blacklist etc. Indeed, Africans were made to believe that anything European (food, clothes etc) are better. It is so bad that in Urhobo language, if your child is well behaved and good, you say ***Omome na Oyibo*** meaning this my child is European. Primary School students are taught that Africa is a dark continent. They are taught that Africa had no

history. Even Rivers in Africa like River Niger where Nigerians were fishing in Lokoja was discovered by a European, Mungo Park. Colonialism increased inequality and widened that gap between the haves and have-nots. A Government Reservation Area (GRA) was created for the rich and powerful. After political independence, all the political, economic and social sectors were linked to the former colonial masters. There was no attempt to decolonise politics, economy, culture and social issues. Post independence leaders continued economic dependency and aid reliance.

Colonialism even affected and significantly shaped African perception of beauty standards leading to preference for physical traits associated with Caucasian ideals. They introduced ideals that celebrated Eurocentric traits such as fair skin and wavy hair while stigmatizing African features like dark skin and tightly coiled hair. Media, education (school uniforms) and religion controlled by colonial masters reinforced Eurocentric beauty standard. Western characteristics were portrayed as symbols of modernity, intelligence and sophistication while African features were represented negatively. The introduction of Western products such as bleaching creams (skin lighteners) and hair relaxers further consolidated Eurocentric beauty. Even today, these influences continued to be promoted by global media and social platforms. If you see an African woman who defies these influences to maintain a low cut or African hairstyle, wait until she has a special programme like marriage ceremony or birthday celebrations. All the peer, family and community pressure will be put on her to look beautiful (i.e. Eurocentric) on her special day.

4.   RACISM IN AFRICA

The colonisation of Africa was underpinned by racist ideologies that justified the exploitation of Africa and control of African people. Cecil Rhodes, the Prime Minister of the Cape colony once wrote "I contend that we are the first race in the world and the more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race."[10] Colonialism and slave trade went hand in hand. Racist justifications for slavery were used to

dehumanise African people. Human beings were raided and sold. In Europe and America, African slaves were advertised in newspapers and sold publicly.

There is also environmental racism in Africa.[11] Africa is disproportionately affected by environmental exploitation and degradation. International Oil Companies destroy African environments in a way that can never be contemplated in Europe and America. They do in Africa what they can never do in their own countries. A classical example is the ongoing environmental genocide in the Niger Delta. According to the UNEP report on Ogoniland, in the community Nisisioken Ogale, families are drinking water from wells that is contaminated with benzene- a known carcinogen-at levels over 900 times above WHO guidelines.[12] They also found out that the surface water throughout the Greeks in and surrounding Ogoniland contain hydrocarbons with floating layers of oil. In the recent report titled *An Environmental Genocide: Counting the Human and Environmental Cost of Oil in Bayelsa Nigeria*, the Bayelsa State Oil and Environmental Commission documented that the Niger Delta is one of the most polluted places on earth and thousands of oil spills, unrestricted gas flaring and frequent releases of toxic contaminants have poisoned people's farmlands, the water they drink and the air they breathe.[13] One study estimates that in 2012 alone, oil spills in Nigeria and predominantly in the Niger Delta resulted in over 16,000 additional neonatal deaths. Even official records by the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) documents that there were 16, 263 oil spills within a 17-year period of 2006 to 2023 which accounted for about 823, 483 barrels of oil spilt equivalent to 4, 103 tanker trucks or 130,933,797 litres of crude oil poured into Niger Delta environment. As this is happening and with the global move towards energy transition, the IOCs are leaving the Niger Delta without a clear pathway on how to clean up the mess that they have created. This cannot happen in their own environment.

5. CONCEPTUALISING AND OPERATIONALISING DECOLONISATION AND ANTI-RACISM

Decolonisation traditionally refers to the process by which colonised nations attained political independence from colonial masters. But today, the term is more expansive and extends beyond political sovereignty to include economic, cultural and social liberation from foreign subjugation and control. Therefore, decolonisation aims to dismantle structures and attitudes rooted in colonial ideologies and the reassertion of cultural identity, language and knowledge systems that colonial powers marginalised or erased.[14]

Decolonisation is imperative because of the negative impact of colonialism. Decolonisation as an approach to development therefore require African countries to reclaim their agency, reformulate policies rooted in local context and knowledge for political, economic and social empowerment.[15] In other words, decolonisation approaches have to be comprehensive and cover economic, political, cultural and epistemological dimensions. Decolonising African economies will mean shifting away from serving as producers of raw materials towards a diversified and locally centred economies with focus on self-sufficiency, industrialisation, and production of goods and services that benefit the local people. Decolonising politics in Africa will mean prioritising African governance models that reflect African values and systems of accountability with local participation.[16] Decolonising cultural imperialism will mean reviving indigenous languages, histories and cultural practices. Decolonising knowledge systems will mean challenging Eurocentric theories and perspectives and promoting African perspectives, philosophies and solutions. As a result, operationalising decolonisation is not merely overcoming colonial legacies and impositions but also building a new future rooted in African values, knowledge and aspirations to build economies and governance systems that prioritise local human needs and cultural heritage.

Anti-racism encompasses a range of ideas and political actions which are meant to counter racial prejudice, systemic racism, and the oppression of specific racial groups.[17] It is a set of beliefs, actions and policies targeted at opposing racism and promoting racial equality. As some scholars have argued, anti-racism goes beyond passive rejection of racism and it requires individuals, organisations and societies to actively identify, confront and eliminate systems and structures that perpetuate racial inequity.   Within the African context, this means resisting global racial inequalities rooted in colonial and neo-colonial structures as well as internalised racism and discrimination such as ethnicity.

Anti-racism is needed in Africa because of legacies of colonialism and apartheid in Africa. Anti-racism in economic development will demand that African nations engage in fair trade and resist exploitative practices of multinational corporations. Anti-racism in culture will mean reclaiming African identify, values, history and conceptions of beauty from stereotypes imposed by colonial narratives. Social anti-racism will emphasize promotion of access to education, health care and social services. Anti-racism in political development will mean resisting neo-colonial influences and neo-liberal policies of the IMF and World Bank. Anti-racist environmental justice will mean addressing climate injustice and environmental genocide as it is happening in the Niger Delta.

6. CHRISTIAN AID SUPPORTED RESEARCH ON DECOLONNISATION AND ANTI-RACISM

In January 2023, Christian Aid supported the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD) to conduct a research on Decolonisation and Anti-Racism and produce a manual to guide social development work.[18] This was in recognition that Decolonisation and anti-racism are important frameworks that can be used to address historical injustices, systemic inequalities and power imbalances rooted in colonial histories.[19] It is a demonstration of the

commitment of Christian Aid to develop knowledge and practice that aligns with the principles of decolonisation and anti-racism to create a foundation for transformative learning and equitable partnerships.

The methodology used in the research included desk study/literature review, Focused Group Discussions (FGDS) and Key Informant Interviews (KII). The research especially the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) revealed that "most Nigerians experience racism mostly only when they travel or live in Western countries." But the legacy of colonialism affected the way the people acquire knowledge, understand their history, comprehend the world and define themselves. It also showed that poverty can be directly linked to European exploitation and resource extraction. Colonial legacy ensured that successive administration including military regimes constructed systems that gave privilege to a few and marginalised the majority. Decolonisation is therefore relevant to change land distribution policies, education systems, economic policies, trade relationships and international partnerships.

An important aspect of the report is the need for indigenisation or localisation. Indigenisation acknowledges injustices, challenges colonial narratives and allows for indigenous communities to regain control of their own stories and knowledge systems. As prescribed by one of the key informants, indigenisation of work practice in Nigeria should entail the use of "appropriate theories and practice methods including socio-cultural values, norms and philosophies."

Social work practice and training should take into account the environmental, cultural and ideological variability of a people. "It is necessary that indigenisation should focus on skills, outlook, philosophies, theories and models that are local in content", quoting a participant in one of the FGDs. In other words, social work practitioners must start from within and then go on to determine the problems and their solutions, resources and skills available, processes

and procedures to use and what help may be required or borrowed from outsiders. Accordingly, social work knowledge and practice must emerge from "local initiatives which should then sustain it." It also follows that the rightful basis of social work training must be knowledge from practice. There is the need to develop indigenous theories that will assist social workers in providing the kind of services and support systems that are derived from their client's values, beliefs and culture. Social work practitioners and their clients need to modify and develop conceptual frameworks and methodologies rooted in their socio-cultural practice contexts.

There are a lot of lessons from the study for Nigeria. It showed that colonial exploitation and resource extraction contributed to poverty in colonised territories including Nigeria. The legacy of colonialism affected the way formerly colonised peoples acquire knowledge, understand their history, comprehend their world and define themselves. This is why decolonisation is important to address land distribution policies, educational systems, economic policies, trade relationships and international partnerships. For Nigeria, decolonisation will mean addressing poverty and reshaping power dynamics through alternative development strategies, preserving cultural identity, promoting indigenous education, establishing transparent governance, ensuring equitable power distribution, redefining international relations and challenging colonial biases. This will also mean not depending on aid for development, indigenisation of social work practice and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI).

There are lessons from philosophical thoughts in Nigeria such as the concept of *Omoluabi* in Yoruba land which is founded on the principles of respect, equitable wealth distribution and social justice.[20] Drawing from this, development workers in Nigeria can focus on people (respectful relations and collaboration), place (context and language), expectation (shared goals and shared benefits), framework (participation, cooperation and collectivism), data production

strategies (field work, observations, folklore, songs, artefacts and dance), ethics (community led and community values), and representations (capacity, knowledge and skills transfer).

Participants from both the FGDs and KIIs appear to agree on the need to understand the myriad of forces impacting local policy and programme development, and the relationship between foreign aid, poverty alleviation and development. One of the key interviewees suggests that social work "is concerned with the social well being of vulnerable, marginalised and oppressed groups in the society in light of broader interventions aimed at poverty alleviation and social development."

Furthermore, the study showed that Development partners, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and faith based organisations (FBOs) have great roles to play in decolonisation and anti-racism efforts. It is important to note that methodology is important to social work practice and interventions since it frames the subject being tackled, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed, shapes the analysis and defines the goal.[21] It has been argued that methodology legitimates and delegitimates, validates and invalidates, approves and disapproves, passes and fails, claims to knowledge and knowledge production.[22] In order words, methodology is the exercise of power to include and exclude. Therefore, INGOs and Faith Based Organisations should develop methodologies that promote culture-specific knowledge and practice and prioritise local, empirically based awareness that provides culturally appropriate solutions to particular contexts. To decolonise social practice, it is necessary to transform its focus from the promotion of individual happiness to the cultivation of collective well being, from a concern with the instinct to the promotion of human needs, from prescriptions for adjustment to affordances for empowerment, from the treatment of passive victims to creation of self-determining actors, and from globalising, top-down approaches to context-specific bottom-up approaches. Through these conscious efforts, the social work practitioner can attain the goal of a humane and just social order.

Similarly, Development partners can facilitate collaborative processes, support locally led initiatives, promote localisation, challenge assumptions and values, lobby for policy changes and engage in truth and reconciliation. INGOs can play a vital role of fostering decolonisation by taking practical steps such as adopting locally relevant approaches and challenging current strategies and approaches through a decolonisation lens. FBOs can contribute to decolonisation by reassessing their world views, participating in collaborative processes and establishing decolonisation and anti-racism practices.

In addition, an important aspect of decolonisation is Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI). Decolonisation cannot be divorced from the complex web of intersecting identities including race, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status(class). Recognising these intersections is paramount for crafting policies and interventions that address the unique challenges faced by different groups. There is therefore the need for inclusive policies, incorporation of diverse voices, investment in capacity building and inclusive monitoring, evaluation and learning.

The study also indicated that Faith actors play crucial roles in development and humanitarian actions, despite the secular dominance in these spaces. Local faith voices, deeply rooted in communities, have been marginalized even though they practice more equitable and locally-led approaches, often without labeling their work as 'decolonisation.'
There is an intersection between religious teachings and decolonisation principles, where faith organizations, once complicit in colonialism, are now taking steps to decolonize by acknowledging their past roles, supporting indigenous faith traditions, and promoting social justice. Interfaith collaboration, including traditional faiths, is essential in advancing decoloniality, fostering understanding, and promoting positive social change. A broader and more rounded interfaith

collaboration, when grounded in shared values and a commitment to justice, can be a potent force in advancing decolonisation efforts, fostering understanding and promoting positive social change.

The study concluded that there are huge economic and social benefits of decolonisation and antiracism including increased self-sufficiency and economic growth; reduction in exploitation and resource drain; increased trade and investment opportunities; enhanced cultural identity and pride; improved access to education and healthcare and increased political participation and representation.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Decolonization and anti-racism are essential frameworks for redefining development work in Africa, addressing both historical injustices and contemporary inequalities rooted in colonial legacies and racial biases. In this policy brief, we have underscored the deep-rooted impact of colonialism and racism on Africa's social, economic, and cultural systems, emphasizing the necessity for an African-led transformation agenda that centres local knowledge, reclaims African identity, and promotes equitable resource distribution. Colonial exploitation created structures that perpetuate poverty, restrict economic independence, and marginalize indigenous cultures. By implementing decolonization and anti-racism principles, African nations can disrupt these structures and work towards inclusive development that aligns with their values, needs, and aspirations. This reorientation requires a commitment to indigenized social work practices, inclusive governance, and equitable partnerships that honour Africa's unique socio-cultural contexts.

In order to pursue a decolonisation and anti-racism agenda, the following recommendations are proffered:
1. **Promote Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Education Reform:** African governments and development organizations should

prioritize the integration of indigenous knowledge and languages within educational and social development frameworks. This includes creating curricula that reflect African history, values, and perspectives, thereby fostering a strong cultural identity and countering the colonial narrative.

2. **Strengthen Economic Self-Reliance and Local Ownership:** African countries should focus on policies that promote local production, self-sufficiency, and economic diversification. Regional trade initiatives, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), should be strengthened to support intra-African trade, reduce dependency on former colonial powers, and promote local industries.

3. **Implement Inclusive Governance and Citizen Engagement:** Decolonization in governance requires adopting inclusive policies that ensure equitable power distribution and involve citizens in decision-making processes. This approach enhances accountability and aligns governance structures with African values, strengthening political sovereignty and national unity.

4. **Develop Culturally Sensitive Social Work Practices:** Social work education and practice should be indigenized to reflect African socio-cultural realities. This involves using local methods, theories, and values in social services, enabling practitioners to offer support rooted in the lived experiences and needs of African communities.

5. **Address Environmental Exploitation and Promote Environmental Justice:** African nations, especially those affected by environmental degradation, should enforce stringent environmental protection policies. Collaborating with local and international organizations, these nations can hold multinational corporations accountable and advocate for sustainable practices that prioritize the health and well-being of local populations.

6. **Encourage Interfaith and Cultural Collaboration in**

Development Work: Recognizing the influence of faith in African communities, development organizations should engage religious and traditional leaders in decolonization efforts. Interfaith collaborations grounded in shared values can promote social justice, enhance understanding, and contribute to community-driven change.

7. **Engage Development Partners in Supporting Decolonization Goals:** International NGOs, faith-based organizations, and other development partners should adopt methodologies that respect and integrate local knowledge. This approach encourages partnerships that empower African-led initiatives and facilitate context-specific solutions to development challenges.

8. **Enhance Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI):** Anti-racism and decolonization strategies must consider intersecting identities, including race, gender, and socio-economic status. African countries should enact inclusive policies and engage diverse voices to address the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups, ensuring that development efforts are equitable and comprehensive.

By embracing these recommendations, Africa can pursue a path of development rooted in justice, equity, and cultural pride, setting a foundation for sustainable growth and self-reliance. We cannot continue to pursue a neo-colonial agenda in Africa. A decolonisation and anti-racism agenda is imperative in Africa.

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