



DECOLONISATION

ALL WE CAN'S JOURNEY TOWARDS COMMUNITY LED-DEVELOPMENT

OUR CONVICTION

As All We Can, decolonisation of aid is a call to a way of life because it starts with us being conscious about the way we use our power, the value we attach to the wisdom in local contexts and how we challenge injustice in the spaces we live and work. It is this personal conviction that has become a collective commitment for us as All We Can to challenge colonial legacies, power imbalances and structural racism that undermine equity and local agency.

Challenged by our Methodist roots we are called to “act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with our God”. This demands we stand up for what is right, be equitable and look out for the concerns of others, with compassion and humility acknowledging that we are on a learning journey as well.

In practical terms decolonisation of aid is both a process and an outcome of transforming our mindsets, behaviours, and practices to actively stop reinforcing narratives and actions rooted in supremacy, racism, marginalisation, and inequality, to facilitate locally led development—across all levels of our work, including within All We Can, partner organisations, and the communities they serve.

INTRODUCTION

As a justice seeking organisation, All We Can has been pioneering the decolonisation of aid and philanthropy since 2015, putting the principles of power sharing, local leadership and dismantling colonial structures into practice. While we have long advocated for a system that centres local voices and dismantles entrenched hierarchies, the wider sector is only now beginning to heed these calls for change.

Since 2020, voices from grassroots organisations, the RINGO project, and the Shift the Power movement have joined us in calling for a radical redistribution of power, resources, and narrative control. Despite these growing movements, the aid system remains dominated by donor driven agendas, entrenched colonial mindsets, and western-centric approaches that marginalise local knowledge. Local organisations are often relegated to the role of implementers rather than being empowered as critical players in the development sector., Reliance on external aid continues to sustain dependency, reinforcing power imbalances that hinder long term, sustainable development.

This paper shares a summary of our journey, lessons, challenges, and re-commitment to further strengthen our resolve and be stronger advocates for just aid.

DECOLONISATION OF AID - WHAT IT MEANS AND WHY IT MATTERS

Long before it became a buzzword, All We Can was already challenging traditional aid structures and advocating for more equitable partnerships.

The principles of decolonising aid are deeply rooted in our Methodist values, which call us to justice and dignity for all. Our new strategy (2025–2030) commits us to ‘a world where every community has the power, dignity, and resources to lead their own future.’ This is both an ethical imperative and a practical necessity: communities that lead their own development are more likely to design relevant, lasting solutions.

For us, decolonisation of aid is both a process and an outcome. It requires us to transform mindsets, behaviours, and practices that reinforce superiority, racism, or inequality. Colonial mindsets and systemic racism, rooted in white supremacy and the white gaze, remain deeply embedded, making genuine progress towards equity minimal. Western-centric approaches dominate methods and measures of success, sidelining local knowledge and leadership. Local organisations are undervalued as implementers rather than leaders, while dependency on external aid erodes confidence and restricts community-driven action.

Decolonisation of aid calls us to start by challenging ourselves as individuals to understand and accept the colonial nature and power imbalance of the current aid system, acknowledge the power and bias we all hold, and having a personal conviction to challenge it. It asks us to develop a willingness to consistently engage in difficult, personal reflection to understand one’s own position within the aid system, values and assumptions and how one may benefit from or be complicit in the existing power structures.

Decolonisation calls us to value and draw on local knowledge, leadership, and lived experience as the foundation of development. It means supporting communities to design and own their own solutions, nurturing self-worth, innovation, and sustainability. When communities lead the design and implementation of interventions, and we act as a critical friend, enabler, and facilitator rather than a director, the solutions created are more relevant, sustainable, and empowering.

This also requires strengthening local organisations, rooted in their communities, who will continue to work alongside those communities long after external funders exit. This fosters local ownership, reduces dependency, and increases the likelihood of long-term success, building more equitable, resilient, and self-sustaining systems where progress is driven by the communities themselves.

Decolonising Aid also enables us to have a dynamic and responsive partnership because we reflect on, and learn from our actions, improve practice, work with flexibility and adapt to the context rather than stay restricted by rigid pre-determined processes.

“OUR VOICES ARE HEARD, THIS BOOSTS CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN OUR ABILITIES, INSPIRES CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION IN DEALING WITH OUR COMMUNITY PROBLEMS”

REPRESENTATIVE FROM ZUBO TRUST, ALL WE CAN PARTNER

HOW WE PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

At All We Can, we walk alongside partners for the long term (15 years), funding strategies rather than short projects. Our approach prioritises flexibility: unrestricted funding enables partners to adapt to local realities and seize opportunities as they arise, while also embedding mutual accountability in partnership. We appreciate and recognise that local partners are best placed to support communities and hence facilitate capacity strengthening to enable them to develop as autonomous, learning, sustainable organisations.

"ALL WE CAN PARTNERSHIP ENABLES US TO MAKE DECISIONS AND SPEND FUNDS AS NEEDED WITHIN THE SCOPE OF OUR ORGANISATIONAL ACTIVITIES (AND STRATEGY); THIS SUPPORT HAS EMPOWERED US AS ORGANISATIONS TO BE IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT AND LEAD OUR OWN DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES"

REPRESENTATIVE FROM AMNET, ALL WE CAN PARTNER

IN OUR PARTNERSHIP MODEL:

- We integrate assessment of decolonisation principles and practices into annual partnership evaluations to ensure mutual accountability.
- We facilitate ongoing dialogue and reflection with partners to translate decolonisation theory into practice, actively seeking feedback and challenge.
- We invest in efforts to secure long-term, flexible, and unrestricted funding to support partner-led learning, growth, and community-led development.
- We support partner peer-learning spaces to enhance use of local knowledge, confidence, and autonomous decision-making.
- We deepen understanding of methodologies, tools, and processes (e.g., CLD, DRR-CR) that strengthen locally led development and build partner capacity.
- We build partnerships on trust, openness, mutual accountability, and co-created reporting, with annual participatory evaluations of partnership quality.
- We listen to partners, involves them in decision-making, and treats them as equals, fostering genuine partnerships rather than traditional funder-recipient relationships.
- We organise activities on shared learning forums, supporting organisational development, and promoting financial independence, e.g., through facilitating partners to establish social enterprises.
- Our Country Representatives, based in the global south, manage partnerships, strengthen partner capacity, and ensure partners and communities own their narratives.
- We empower partners to generate their own income and sustain community-focused work.

OUR PARTNERS DEMONSTRATE DECOLONISATION IN PRACTICE:

- They involve communities at every stage of intervention design and implementation.
- They employ local staff, use local languages, and adapt activities based on community feedback.
- They build equitable workplaces and participatory organisational cultures.
- They ensure decisions on how to address local needs are in the hands of the communities themselves, allowing them to set their own priorities.

"WE SEE OURSELVES NOT AS SERVICE PROVIDERS, BUT AS FACILITATORS OF LOCALLY LED CHANGE, WORKING TO SHIFT POWER AND RESOURCES TO WHERE THEY BELONG — IN THE HANDS OF COMMUNITIES."

REPRESENTATIVE FROM ADHENO, ALL WE CAN PARTNER

LESSONS LEARNED

From our journey, we have learned that:

- Long-term, flexible funding is essential for building local organisational confidence and sustainability as well as achieving lasting impact.
- Power shifts must take place close to the point of impact, not in distant offices.
- Ownership of narratives safeguards dignity and authenticity.
- Local leadership and knowledge ensure development is relevant and lasting.
- Reflection is critical to challenge unconscious biases.
- Collaboration with other stakeholders amplifies progress. All We Can has potential to play a more active role engaging and advocating with other donors and philanthropy players.

OUR NEXT STEPS

We intend to build on our journey by:

- Strengthening internal systems that embed locally led approaches across our team and operations.
- Continue to meaningfully shift leadership and decision making to those with lived experience, closer to the point of impact.
- Holding ourselves accountable to decolonisation principles through planned regular reflection on how well we are doing on our journey and how we are working with our learning at individual and organisational level.

- Advocating within the wider sector for aid models that reduce bureaucracy and genuinely shift power, actively engaging our partners with other donors where possible.
- Deepening peer-learning spaces for partners, supporting their autonomy and confidence to make bold decisions, and linking them to sector spaces to share their own experiences, in their own voices.
- Expanding fundraising for long-term, flexible, and unrestricted funding.
- Assessing and having conversations on how our Monitoring and evaluation systems and frameworks can be more contextual, partner and community led and designed.
- Scaling community-led development methodologies across willing NGOs and churches .
- Collaboration with other stakeholders amplifies progress. All We Can has potential to play a more active role engaging and advocating with other donors and philanthropy players.

ANTICIPATED CHALLENGES

Decolonisation challenges entrenched systems. We expect resistance from donors, superficial reforms rather than systemic change, and discomfort with confronting privilege. These obstacles may slow progress, but we remain committed to our justice-seeking agenda.

Dismantling long held beliefs and practices takes time: Our own momentum and energy to the cause may be slowed down by what may be deemed as slow progress and the pressures of meeting different demands, but we choose to intentionally organise and manage ourselves in ways that will keep us focused.

THE FUTURE WE ENVISION

We imagine a future where justice, dignity, equality, and shared power form the foundation of development. In this future, communities define their own paths, have the resources to thrive, and are recognised as the rightful leaders of their development.

**We choose to be bold enough to imagine this world,
and brave enough to build it.**