



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 Does the language Bond uses reinforce colonial or outdated thinking?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 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 topdown 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

Language should not be influenced by or validate existing power structures

Language should be consistent with our values

Published by Bond, Society Building, 8 All Saints Street, London N1 9RL UK
Registered Charity No. 1068839 Company Registration No. 3395681
(England and Wales) © Bond, 2021

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International License, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>

- 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 antioppressive 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
- Avoid fear and threat, and instead show the nuance of reality and that change is possible

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 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)



1. Bond's depoliticised and decolonised language grid

No	Alternatives
Language that harks back to colonialism e.g. or "global leader" "global superpower" "force for global good"	<p>"UK playing its part" instead of "UK leadership"</p> <p>UK playing a positive role in the world</p> <p>UK working in partnership</p> <p>UK working in solidarity with XXX</p>
British values	<p>Fairness, democracy, freedom and human rights are values that should underpin how and where we invest UK aid</p> <p>Shared/human values</p>
British expertise	<p>Specific experience and use validating language around lived experience</p>
Levelling up	<p>Making societies fairer</p>
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)	<p>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</p>
Developing countries, Third World, Global south, sub-Saharan Africa	<p>Lower Income Countries, Middle Income Countries, Fragile and Conflict Affected States, "the countries we/NGOs work in", regions, countries, world's most fragile states</p>
Mutual prosperity, aid in the national interest / public interest	<p>Support that works for people who have been marginalised</p>

Combative language e.g. "fighting global poverty"	Tackling global poverty / address global poverty
Capacity building	Sharing learning and knowledge, community organising and movement building, community led development
No	Alternatives
Localisation, shift the power	Locally-led, shifting power and resources to communities
Empowerment / empowering	'communities claiming their rights' use language that talks about 'autonomy' or 'equality' or 'rights' instead
Working for / helping / saving / giving	Working with/standing in solidarity with/the communities we work alongside
Aid	'Social Development Finance'. 'Official Social Development Finance.' 'International SDG Finance'. Even 'Official Development Assistance' would be better
In the field/on the ground (sounds colonial / militaristic)	In [insert name of location], or rather than "colleagues who work on the ground" say "colleagues who work with communities"

2. Grey phrases

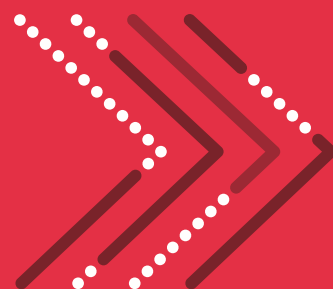
Below are the words and phrases that we believe in some contexts are ok:

Phrase	Reason
Put an end to global poverty	This works as a better alternative to "fighting global poverty", though it's a large claim

Leave no one behind	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
National security	Ok but would prefer "shared security"
Experts	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'
Elites	Not to be used when describing ourselves but ok when talking about "elites" as a descriptor of a group of people in society
Leadership	Only ok to use if we can validate claims of "leadership" with evidence
Soft power	"Diplomacy" is better
Value for money (VfM)	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
"Force for global good" "global Britain" "build back better" etc.	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

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





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

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

T +44(0)20 7837 8344
E info@bond.org.uk
W bond.org.uk