

Decolonising and depoliticising Bond's language

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 Does the language we use reinforce colonial or outdated thinking? Has our 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 our values?

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. We are now ready to get input from members.

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 avoid forms of words which reflect specific political or ideological thinking or are owned by a political party
- 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 remain constant even in times of political change
- Language should not reflect colonial or paternalistic views of the world
- Language should 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

Bond staff have taken the first step in identifying the principles that will guide this piece of work and the types of language we no longer intend to use in Bond's communications, sector advocacy efforts such as cross-sector letters and statements, and in time, Bond training.

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" ¹	"UK playing its part" instead of "UK leadership" UK working in solidarity with 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,
(British) expertise	British experience and validating language around lived experience
Levelling up	Making societies fairer , building a more just world
Beneficiary, world's poorest, most vulnerable people, people left behind,	the communities we work with, marginalised / excluded people, people who have been marginalised, under-represented groups/communities ² , "people that live on less than £2 a day", people in need
Developing countries, Third World, Global south,	Low-income countries, middle-income countries, fragile and conflict-affected states, "the countries/regions we/NGOs work in"
Mutual prosperity, aid in the national interest / public interest	Independent aid that works for marginalised people/people based on need

¹ We will no longer use political/govt phrases because it is neither appropriate or necessary to politicise language in order to be credible to policy makers. Our priority must be providing timely, relevant and useful policy briefings and comms that speak to both Bond and the sectors remit, priorities and our values.

² We will describe the people we work with around the word in an accurate and factual manner rather than associating words like poor, vulnerable etc. and instead will use words that make it clear what the drivers of their situations are e.g. excluded, marginalised etc.

Combative language e.g. "fighting global poverty" ³	Tackling global poverty
Capacity building ⁴	Sharing learning and knowledge, community organizing and movement building, community led development
Localisation ⁵ , shift the power	Locally led, shifting power and resources to communities,
Empowerment	'transformation' or 'claiming rights'

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" etc.	Parrotting 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

³ We will not use combative terms to describe the actions we/the UK needs to take/are taking

⁴We must not misrepresent programmes through language so they look like positive interventions if they are actually harmful approach. For example 'capacity building' sounds paternalistic and often is but we shouldn't instead describe them as 'community led development programmes' because we don't like the term capacity building because that would unintentionally allow this way of working to continue under a different name.

⁵ We will avoid use of jargon because it is inaccessible and creates barrier and excludes people