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Conference version for the Jubilee Symposium of MMS

Swiss NGOs engaged in international health cooperation: How to respond to the call for decolonization?

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Swiss NGOs engaged in international health cooperation:
How to respond to the call for decolonization?

Dear reader,

Medicus Mundi Switzerland - Network Health for All mandated the authors with providing a report on how the civil society members of the Network Medicus Switzerland have taken up the call for decolonization and, more particularly, for decolonizing international cooperation, and what can be done to go this way further.

Collecting the voices of members of the Network Medicus Mundi Switzerland (MMS) the report bridges from general assessments (what's the problem) to perspectives for the sector (what is to be done) and to more concrete perspectives for the organizations engaged in health cooperation (what will we do concretely) and Medicus Mundi Switzerland (what can you do for us, what can we do together). The proposals we have collected are not revolutionary, and they are positioned within the overall terms and realities of the sector. But taking them up and walking the talk from discussing to doing decolonization is already a challenge.

By commissioning this report, Medicus Mundi Switzerland dares to highlight the issue of coloniality, power, dependency, inherent racism, and unequal partnerships in international health cooperation at a moment when the Network celebrates its 50th anniversary, as an effort to bridge the past and the future. Congratulations on both your jubilee and this effort thus far.

In compiling and assessing the information on which this report is based, the authors have learnt a lot. We have a better understanding of the honesty and courage it takes for organizations based in Switzerland to fully engage in a difficult conversation that touches the core of their work and existence and in which there are no easy answers.

At the end of the endeavour, we are keen to talk more, to learn more about different views on coloniality and decoloniality, and to explore ways into lived solidarity and joint engagement for the common cause of health and social justice.

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1.   Introduction

1.1.   Background

The background of this report is nicely expressed in the terms of reference for the mandate given to the authors. Rather than rewriting it in our own words, we herewith quote it in full length:

"Over the last few years, the calls for decolonizing global health (governance, institutions, research, etc.) and decolonizing international cooperation (as part of a growing critique of 'aid') have become louder and cannot be ignored anymore by organizations working in international health cooperation, such as the members of Medicus Mundi Switzerland (MMS), the Swiss Network of around 50 Swiss organisations and academic institutions working in the field of international health cooperation.

While the concept of 'decolonization' and 'decoloniality' still needs/deserves further reflection, its political demands correspond with a critical assessment and self-assessment of 'aid' as expressed by actors within and outside the aid sector over the last decades already, also in the field of international health cooperation - see some analysis and workshops by the Medicus Mundi International Network or a current series of workshops organized by medico international. So, what is new about the call for 'decoloniality', and how to take it up, regarding issues such as legitimacy, relevance and effectiveness of 'aid', power, dependency and ownership within the aid sector, or new definitions of solidarity, partnership, and cooperation?

The new element is mainly a sharper language, and the critique being articulated from actors in the global south and not mainly from within the 'development business'. The call to finally get rid of colonial structures and patterns of dependency, racism, and exploitation is a strong and challenging one. Rightly so, the call for decolonization has the potential to redesign the way organisations in international health cooperation work and to make the sector fit for the future.

As a first step to engaging in the debate, Medicus Mundi Switzerland organised in 2022, in cooperation with some of its members, a round table on the topic in 2022 and published an edition of its 'MMS Bulletin', the Swiss online magazine on international cooperation and health.

In 2023, the year of the 50th Jubilee of Medicus Mundi Switzerland, shall be used for an in-depth reflection on international health cooperation, with a focus on the role of civil society organizations (Swiss NGOs) engaged in this field. One of the cornerstones of this reflection shall be based on a deep dive into the decoloniality debate. The joint reflection shall also be a starting point for institutional learning and, as necessary, change within MMS member organisations."

1.2.   The mandate

The expectations of MMS regarding this report are outlined in the Terms of Reference, as follows:

a. Mapping of the topic/challenge

- State of the decolonization debate in the fields of global health and international cooperation
- Critique/demands that can/shall be applied for the international health cooperation sector
- Main proposal on the way forward, to decolonize international health cooperation

b. Mapping of Swiss actors

- Level of awareness/knowledge of decolonisation (challenge, debate)
- Interest to engage in a decoloniality approach as an organization
- State of implementation via institutional values, institutional setup and instruments

c. Informing the way forward

1.3. Methods / steps undertaken

In implementing the mandate, the authors undertook the following steps:

1. Assessing the background and defining guiding questions

- We reviewed selected articles published by the Secretariat and members of MMS.
- We discussed the background and mandate with the MMS Director.
- We participated in an online consultation on "decolonizing global philanthropy".
- We undertook an online survey among Network members, via Secretariat.
- We defined a set of guiding questions for an in-depth dialogue.

2. Listening to Network members: What's the problem, and what needs to be done?

- We undertook 18 semi-structured interviews with 21 representatives of the MMS Network.
- We assessed the interviews regarding common themes and concepts, and identified quotes that illustrate these.
- We drafted a report on the interviews (20 pages with short introductions and quotes).
- We shared and discussed this draft and our initial assessments with the interviewees.
- On this ground, we drafted a set of conclusions and recommendations.

3. Complementing the perspectives of Network with a collection of resources and literature

- We undertook a collection and review of key literature and resources in the fields of decolonizing aid/cooperation and decolonizing global health.

4. Finalizing the report

- We shared a draft of the resulting report and its annexes with the Secretariat and Board of Medicus Mundi Switzerland and afterwards finalized the report considering feedback received in oral and written form.

1.4.   Terminology: working definitions

All in all, we tried to use, in our interaction with members of the MMS Network and in the report itself, a simple, common-sense language that is easily understandable and does not need any introduction or "translation", as much as this is possible in a field that nevertheless has its technical language and connotations. This is also valid for the terms introduced here.

Decolonizing global health and decolonizing (health) cooperation

In our report, we distinguish between the challenge of "decolonizing aid" or "decolonizing development cooperation" which refers to the sector in which most of the MMS members are active, and the parallel discussions on decolonization in a broader sense and on "decolonizing global health".

For purposes of this report, the term "decolonization" or "decoloniality" signifies an active effort to challenge various forms of oppression and the intersectionality of exclusion entrenched in health cooperation, health research, and knowledge generation among others. It is important to note that this differentiation is not rigid; it is fluid in the narrative of the actors engaged. This nuanced perspective is echoed by MMS:

> *"Decolonizing global health is a movement that fights against deeply rooted systems of dominance and power in international, mostly Western organizations and institutions. Criticism of the latter highlights the colonial origins of development cooperation which still shape the approaches, structures, and practices followed until today. (MMS)*

Aid, international cooperation, development cooperation

There are different connotations to talking about "aid", "development cooperation" or just "cooperation" or "partnership". However, in the available literature, these terms are mostly used as synonyms, especially in the English language. For this reason, and in this report, we adopt this interchangeable usage, recognizing that most members of the MMS Network today rather do not use the term "aid" anymore for defining their sector and work and that the discussion of these (and other) terms is itself part of a process of critical reflection within the sector.

> *While many organisations have since long described their work as an equal cooperation with their partners in the Global South rather than aid, working practices are still too often based on power structures which perpetuate dependencies and prevent the development of local capacity." (MMS)*

Global North and Global South

Again, the terms "Global North" and "Global South" are not easy ones, and their use is not self-evident. We do so in the absence of a better terminology, and with caution, in the sense of the report "What is the role of Northern organisations in global justice advocacy":

> *"There is no universally agreed definition for the geopolitical terms 'Global South' and 'Global North', although they have often been used as shorthand to describe the different sites of struggle*

and domination. Both concepts are problematic in their oversimplification and creation of a false binary, but they can still be useful for broadly identifying who benefits from global economic and political systems and therefore holds responsibility for challenging this injustice." (<u>report</u>*)*

2.   Setting the scene

2.1.   Voices of the MMS secretariat and its members

In our initial explorations, the authors mainly referred to material already published by the Network MMS and its members, and to their initial steps undertaken to explore the field of decoloniality and its implications for the Network and its members. Here some observations:

Members and the secretariat jointly in the lead

We were informed that the topic of decoloniality has been put forward by Network members at open Board meetings of the MMS Network. On this ground, and supported by the Board, the MMS Director Martin Leschhorn became the visible leader in making decoloniality a topic for the MMS Network and in defining the scope of this ambition, such as in his own contributions to a <u>dedicated edition</u> ("Decolonizing health cooperation - Reflections on an upcoming transformation process") of the Bulletin of Medicus Mundi Switzerland, with an editorial and overview article.

The title of this edition of the Bulletin is programmatic, as the double perspective expressed in the communications by the Director and the Secretariat of MMS: Swiss organizations working in the field of international health cooperation cannot allow themselves not to react to the decolonization debate, and this needs to be done urgently and honestly. And there is an optimism that engaging in "decolonizing health cooperation" can pave the way to the future of the sector and the organizations in terms of sustainability, legitimacy, and relevance. For this reason, it makes perfect sense that the Network dedicates the jubilee edition of its annual symposium to the topic.

"The decolonization debate has the potential to make international health cooperation sustainable. But are non-governmental organizations, state actors in international cooperation and donors ready for this?" (Martin Leschhorn, MMS news)

Network members sharing institutional realities and lived experience

The strong and strongly visible engagement of some members contributed a key quality to the emerging dialogue on decolonization within the MMS Network: the link to the institutional realities and practices of the organizations working in health cooperation.

From the reports publicly available, we herewith highlight two remarkable small pieces: "<u>How to decolonize aid</u>?" by Tayson Mudakiri, Terre des hommes schweiz, and "<u>Power critical. IAMANEH Switzerland developing postcolonial perspectives</u>" by Serena Dankwa, IAMANEH. Matching the

decoloniality discourse with the practice and experiences of people and organizations engaged in health cooperation was also at the core of a roundtable "Bottom-up empowerment: A way to decolonize health cooperation?" organized by MMS in June 2023.

In their contributions, Tayson Mudakiri and Serena Dankwa ask if it is possible to achieve a new and different quality of engagement and partnership between Swiss-based organizations and their counterparts in countries of the Global South, an interaction and cooperation "at eye level" that is based on solidarity, in an environment and sector that is still shaped by colonial patterns and inherent power imbalances and dependency. This simple question, and its implications, has become the core of our further explorations.

> *"IAMANEH Switzerland has long been aware of the challenge of equitable partnerships in an unequal world. However, it takes courage to understand these inequalities as part of the (neo) colonial structure we are all still implicated in." (Serena Dankwa)*

2.2.   Global South perspectives

In April 2023, during the early stages of our work, one of the authors engaged in a rich three-day online discussion on "decolonizing global philanthropy" organized by the Decolonizing Wealth Project. Recognizing the distinction between global philanthropy and international health cooperation within the broader aid sector, insights from Global South representatives in the online discussion on "what is the problem with philanthropy and how the sector is expected to respond to the call for decolonization" helped us to define a set of guiding questions for our dialogue with members of Medicus Mundi Switzerland (find the results in an annex to our report).

2.3.   Initial interactions with Network members

In May 2023, the authors set up the questionnaire "Decoloniality and Swiss International Health Cooperation: Warm-up, communication line, and your availability for further interaction" which was then shared by the Secretariat of Medicus Mundi Switzerland with all Network members. 16 out of 61 members responded, providing the below picture:

The call for "decolonizing development cooperation is timely and relevant

Question: How do you assess the relevance and timeliness of the renewed call for "decolonization" and particularly, for "decolonizing development cooperation" (in a general way, not related to your organization)?					
Rating	1	2	3	4	5
Description	"Highly relevant"				"Not relevant"
Answers	9	7			

All organizations have taken up the call for decolonization and responded to it

Question: Has your organization taken up this call and reacted to it (programmes, communication, normative instruments, governance)?	
Yes, in our projects and programmes	9
Yes, in our communication	9
Yes, in some institutional instruments (strategy, guidelines, other)	8
Yes, in our institutional setup and governance	6
No, we do not see a need for particular action	0
Not sure / no information available	2

Almost everybody was available to deepen the conversation

Question: Can we send you a more detailed questionnaire or invite you to an online consultation or interview (June - August)	
Yes	15
No	1

3. How Swiss organizations respond to the call for decolonization

3.1. The interviews

In July and early August 2023, the authors conducted 18 interviews with 21 representatives of the Network Medicus Mundi Switzerland, representing the MMI secretariat, 15 member organizations and two individual Network members. To identify interviewees, there was no proper "selection process": The feedback to the online survey provided the authors with the names of Network members available for an in-depth discussion on colonial roots and realities of health cooperation, and some more joined the group after an oral announcement at the Assembly of MMS.

As all who were available for an interview also assessed the call for decolonization as "highly relevant and timely", we mainly spoke with the "already converted". We will further discuss the problem of the "silent (not responding) majority" within the MMI Network in our overall conclusions and recommendations. The questionnaire for the interviews can be found in the annex to this report. The compilation of key input received, is documented in another annex to the report.

As interviewees pointed out in a restitution session in mid-September, the way in which we selected, structured and introduced their input is already part of our analysis, and therefore not neutral or "objective" in a strict sense.

We agree with this reservation, but we do not see this report as an academic work, but rather a didactic one. We tried to move from our own understanding of decoloniality to carefully and openly listening to the interviewed Network members. We then structured their diverse input along what we understood as common main messages.

3.2. What's the problem? Is there a need to "decolonize health cooperation"?

3.2.1. The call for decolonization is highly relevant and timely

Despite their diverse personal and institutional backgrounds, interviewees unanimously reconfirm that the call for decolonization is highly relevant and timely. Several interviewees point out that there is a limited degree of openness or willingness in Switzerland to delve into the assessment of our own colonial roots, which continue to influence and shape our present interaction with the rest of the world. And there are some reservations regarding the use of the term "decolonization" to address issues of power relations and dependency.

Personal and institutional entry points

"At that time, I really wanted to save Africa, in the real sense. That's why now I'm passionate about decolonization. I really, really thought that we could change things there, at that time."

"I initially said, oh, another topic we have to discuss? Localization was always a topic for us. So let decolonization be discussed by the UN institutions, but not within our organisation. But I learned in

debates within the board and the management, and with the team as well, and we will definitely take it up for the next years."

"Decolonization is indeed in the DNA of our organization already. But I think the discussion about decolonization still helps. Because it's so easy to fall into certain old behaviours or old power balances or imbalances. So it helps maybe not to raise awareness but to keep it up, to reflect. As an organization as well."

Assessments of the call for decolonization

"If we don't live decolonization, I mean, what's the point of talking about it?"

"There is a movement coming from the South that demands to critically reflect on our science, and our approaches. And that is a good thing. That's why I think it is very timely. And so, it's a global discourse about decoloniality, which is here, and we have a responsibility to take it up. It is a responsibility and opportunity."

Reservations regarding the use of the term

"We certainly have to be aware and not use the term decolonization just for marketing purposes to freshen up our image a little bit. We need to go to the structural level, to what has made us colonial organisations in the end."

"Decolonization is definitely becoming a buzzword in different sectors. I mean, decolonization in academia, in the art world, etc. But I think it's just a tool as long as it's useful to make a critique and at a certain moment it stops being useful or it's being overused."

3.2.2. NGOs need to reflect on their work and honestly take up the critique of aid

Among the interviewees there are diverging assessments of the notions of "aid" and "cooperation" and the use of the term "decolonization" mainly by actors in the Global North. But interviewees agree that this shall not distract from a critical reflection on their work. And there are some strong statements that organizations working in the field of international cooperation cannot allow themselves not to react to international debates and critique by actors in the Global South.

The critique of aid, its legitimacy, relevance and practice are as old as the aid/development sector itself. As some interviewees state, not all shortcomings and failures of the sector can be reduced to "coloniality". On the other hand, in addressing and overcoming power imbalances, dependency and exploitation, the sector can learn from other societal fields (such as: gender, inclusion, climate) in which traditional patterns have been challenged, and people and institutions had to learn, and to change.

On listening to the call for decolonizing aid

"How can I really disagree when they say that this is a reality for them and when they feel like this about the system?"

"It is so hard to really make our partners respond and explain to us what we've done wrong in the past. It is hard for them in their position to do that. So that's what I like about this big discussion because it gives you the views of outsiders who have had the same experience but where dependency is a bit smaller, who can actually speak back with power."

"I don't really know if, in a deeper sense, it is possible to decolonize development cooperation. It is not only that development cooperation reproduces colonial patterns, but it's for me kind of inherently a colonial system or dynamic. It is hard sometimes to define where it stops and where it ends when we talk about decolonizing a bubble that for me has this inherently colonial, not only past, but also in the present."

On inherent issues of the sector: Have we learnt from the past?

"I would say aid can be a prolongation of colonization. But I would not say it per se has to be. There has been a development in aid and cooperation over the last decades. And I hope that this development is further going towards even more decolonizing structures and minds and habits and norms, etc."

"The critique you present is quite violent. It's very straight, it's very direct, it's very negative. Sometimes I recognize those patterns in our organization as well, unfortunately, and a lot of other times I can see that there are efforts made to avoid the patterns from happening again."

"I think the problem is not aid itself, it's aid in the way that it is currently structured."

From aid to cooperation?

"We changed from aid to cooperation and partnership approaches. We know for 50 years that these relations are problematic, and all practitioners have always known that and reflected about it. But it's still here as a topic, and I don't think it has eased. Many of the discussions are still with us and they aren't resolved."

"I see a difference between the term cooperation and the term aid. That's not necessarily always like that. But aid is for me more what is given, you know, with this charity idea, old-fashioned, and cooperation should be something where two partners cooperate, collaborate in a possibly more equal way, or that leaves open more equal space."

On linking between sectors and struggles

"I think we are not short of lessons because decolonization of aid is almost similar to conversations around inclusivity and participation. So, we can look at what we have achieved or what we have failed to achieve and what were the lessons in gender equality, youth participation, inclusion of minorities. Because they are instructive lessons there around full shifting of power and not just having decorative initiatives. I would not get into detail, but I would just encourage that we stay at that level of thinking that it's the same conversations now with a different topic, but we use the same principles."

"In the 90s when I started, I came into contact with a lot of post colonial critique, post colonial literature where this kind of power structures were already a topic. But somehow in the 2000s, in the years 2000 until 2010, this completely vanished. And it was very interesting for me that after

the Black Lives Matter discussions, these postcolonial theories suddenly reappeared in the public sphere."

3.2.3. Decolonization as a broader political and societal project

While interviewees agree that the call for decolonization and systemic change needs to be taken up by the cooperation sector, some interviewees clearly state that the call for decolonization goes far beyond the sector or that development cooperation is only one of many expressions of sustained colonialism or neocolonialism. In addition to addressing issues of stereotypes, power imbalances, and values within the sector, organizations working in the field of international cooperation also need to position themselves in addressing the determinants and expressions of colonialism across all sectors and politics.

"Decolonizing aid is certainly a necessity, but we shouldn't overestimate what aid is doing and what decolonization can bring. But it is a necessary step, I agree."

"There are two main challenges: one is to decolonize the sector. And the second one is to decolonize, as a kind of a societal project."

"There are a number of dilemmas in the whole field, because development aid or humanitarian aid is embedded in a whole system of aid structures, politics, values, and we can try to change things at our level, but it's not enough. I mean, this whole discussion really aims at system change and, inherent in it, is a critique also of power constellations and of how global power and economic structures are working today."

3.2.4. Elements of coloniality in the practice of cooperation

Interviewees agree that racist patterns, power imbalances and imposed values, terms and methods are at the core of coloniality, in all its expressions, also in the field of international cooperation. Many interviewees state that the control over finances and the narrow and imposed technical terms of cooperation and accountability need particular attention and action. They also state that this is an issue that cannot be resolved at the level of the Swiss NGOs, but only in a dialogue with "back-donors" and funders.

On root causes and ingredients

"We always remain on a surface debate around power imbalance and have neglected the root causes of it. We just struggle with going deeper in this, how colonization and imperialism have shaped the perception, the worldviews here in the north and, at the end, as well within organisations that are doing international health cooperation. So these deeply rooted causes of power imbalances were always neglected, and it only changed with the Black Lives Matter movement last year when we were confronted with the critique from the global South that it goes much deeper, the stereotypes we have, based in racism, and how we deal with gender imbalances and things like this. It goes really deeper."

"I also feel how toxic it may be even in everyday relations with our partners, wherever I fall into my white saviour privilege - because it's a privilege that I think I have all those solutions at hand and I can formulate these immediately. So this toxicity in the partnerships or in working together or in the whole system, it's not just words, it's really very burning."

On money, reporting requirements and the setup of cooperation

"I think the power imbalances are just inherent in a project where one person has the money and the other person has other things."

"There is a shrinking space for proper cooperation in Switzerland because of all this urge for more reporting, more impact evaluation and so on and so on. For us, this means that we have to comply with more and more conditions."

"Colonial patterns still determine how we work, our financing models, how we as NGOs are dependent from institutional donors that work again along these colonial patterns without realising it. In the end, the finances are coming from private donors, the philanthropic sector and state agencies. Private donors are often more conservative and have to be approached with exploiting the old colonial image that the poor, mainly black people are not capable of adapting to a modern world, but they should do so, and we have to help them. There is the whole old-fashioned marketing track the organizations are still using. But more, the philanthropic sector and state agencies come with their matrix of how to measure impact and success that is strongly reinforcing these power imbalances."

"There is this power imbalance. It is imposed by the back donors, which again comes from the federal government, which again comes from the taxpayers that want some terms of transparency and accountability again."

3.2.5. Overcoming dependency and power imbalances: A challenge for both sides

There are many statements that decolonization, in the sense of overcoming dependency and power imbalances, is a challenge for both sides in the field of development cooperation, for the actors in the Global North, but equally for those in the Global South, for various reasons and strongly depending on the societal and political context: There is a harmony of interest between those who benefit from the status quo and therefore oppose change; dependency can be a "cosy arrangement", and coloniality has led to an inherent culture of inferiority that can make it difficult to challenge the current situation and setup. Beyond this, in practical terms, an honest discussion between actors engaged in development cooperation is not easy to achieve just because of the existing power imbalance, dependency, and related fears of negative consequences.

A diversity of realities

"Colonial rule has expressed itself in very different ways depending on the context, so we shouldn't take decolonization as a blueprint, first of all. The colonial power put into power, in the countries, people who were thinking like them. Think about Amadou Hampate Ba, he described that in a funny way, but very clearly."

"Africans often do not even dare to say what you are saying does not work, and let's rather do things differently. It's because colonization is a culture. It affects the attitudes of the people. Those affected by the extension of colonization through the current structure of aid today neither believe they have the power nor consider themselves equal partners."

"By the way aid is structured today, the formerly colonized and those who are also affected by the extension of colonization do not believe that they have the power. And that they can be equal partners."

"Colonialism itself is a culture. It is a way of thinking; it's an attitude that people have. And in diagnosing the problem, it's important to put one thing on the table: that it's not going to be a one-way street, which then says, we challenge the Western traditional donor communities and countries to change the way they think and act. We also have to challenge the way in which recipient countries conceptualise and perceive aid and whether there can be alternatives to different ways of viewing that."

How do you speak out if you are dependent?

"I think that it's very, very delicate or difficult to have a discussion on dependency and power with those who, in reality, nevertheless depend on you. So how can they be free to tell you what they really think?"

"Colonialism is not spoken about usually. People are afraid that if you give partner organizations the opportunity, then there is this fear of revenge. I think if colonialism is not spoken about, then it's reproduced automatically because of the structure."

"We really need to create a safe space where we can discuss what we experience. And it's difficult not only for us; it's difficult for our partners. Maybe they are not ready to open up like that. So we need to find a way to connect."

3.2.6. Sustained stereotypes for good business

Several interviewees share the assessment that, after so many years of organizations raising awareness on colonial imagery and racist stereotypes in literature and media, these images and stereotypes are not just not overcome, but sometimes intentionally used by organizations for fundraising at a "home audience", because these pictures of Swiss organizations doing good and poor "recipients" not being able to help themselves sell good. So, instead of contributing to awareness-raising, the aid sector has the potential to sustain and strengthen racist stereotypes.

"The problem is that we deal with a population that doesn't know what happens in Africa. They get this image that in Africa, all children are dirty and poor, and they need us, people from the north. So we reinforce stereotypes, and of course this organization gets more money from the public because that narrative touches your heart. Even NN now is doing a massive campaign with this child dying, and it's just a shame. And I'm ashamed to work in aid in these cases, I have to say."

"How we market aid and how we get money for aid is extremely challenging. There is still a focus on this poor beneficiary. Donors purposely want us to look for people who are poor. They're not happy if people wear nice clothes even though they are poor. But they have their dignity; they also want to show and present themselves in a good way. But our marketing department is not happy and satisfied with that."

3.3. What is to be done to overcome colonial patterns?

3.3.1. Overcome racism and stereotypes

Insights from various interviews reveal a pressing need to address racial biases and harmful stereotypes that remain entrenched within the aid and corporation sector. While the challenges are multifaceted, including communication and fundraising, interviewees state that all initiatives to overcome racism and stereotypes must start with the people who work in the sector and then become integral components of an institutional culture and practice. In the field of communication, interviewees share concrete examples of good practice and instruments to which they refer (find more good practice in the annex to the report).

On people and institutions

"I mean, you cannot disagree. It's a matter of basic respect to overcome racism and stereotypes in our institutional communication. I would also say we must act to promote the storytelling of the partners. Without influencing them, letting the people say what made a difference with this project. They are formatted to say what we expect them to say to us, you know, and I think here there is work to be done."

"The reinforcement of stereotypes, this has to do a lot with values of an organization or a person, it has to a lot with my personal identity: Do I identify myself as the white knowledgeable big person or do I identify myself as one like everybody, as equal so colour doesn't matter, I learn from others, we learn from each other, with each other?"

"Communication is more than words, it is about acting."

Good practice (examples)

"If we really try to break up that it's just people from the north to write something or people from our organization, then contributions also need to come from the people from the South who are working on the project, so that we have different points of view."

"I suggested another version of that fundraising letter. So we sent out two letters, one that was the traditional one and one that's the one by me and the colleague, which was a bit toned down, less sensationalist, etc. So far we don't have the results yet. It looks like the more complex got less money, but those people who donated gave more."

"For communication, we have analysed all our communication work. We have also shared the entire picture database with Fair Pictures, so they can use it in their analysis."

3.3.2. From equal partnership to jointly promoting change

The reflections of the interviewees on "how to do better" focus on moving from imposing topics and modalities of work to a proper and fully equal partnership, based on listening to the realities and demands of partners, accepting their ownership and leadership, and trusting in their capabilities. While the partnership challenge has been discussed and addressed in the development sector for

decades, also under the perspective of aid effectiveness, the promotion of "localization" has recently led to new attention.

More ambitious perspectives on redefining the role and contribution of development cooperation are framed around the concepts of allyship, linked struggles, and joint engagement in promoting change, built on the realities, potential, and contribution of each partner.

On ownership, equal partnership and localization

"We still have to see that the people in their contexts are the experts in their situation, so that we are not the ones that are going to tell them what is important."

"Equal partnership is more complicated and difficult than said. It is a very tricky situation. On the one hand, we have donors with requirements. Also, there is the question of transparency and funds. I think it's also complicated because we love to speak about ownership and equal partnership, but finding ways to get there is really difficult."

…and how to get there

"The core is mutual respect and mutual partnership, and discussing the values and basics of the partnership."

"So when you can't get rid of the inherent power imbalances, you can discuss it for 20 years or 50 years, but the point is how we can still get into a partnership so that we have a common goal and we see you as a partner with your values that are equal and not ours being better or yours. That is the basic understanding of how we want to work."

"Nikita Dhawan, a professor at the TU Dresden, promotes the art of listening. To listen to what the people want. They have to be the actors on their own; how they want to do things, what they think is best for them, and you are just accompanying and maybe just supporting and being with them, learning with them."

Beyond the partnership paradigm: Joint promotion of change

"Our approach is allyship. I am not sure if we have done that all the time. But I think this is something that has shifted in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement. The movement, the tools, the discourses it frames, and the way it approaches things are relevant to take up because they ask us if we're allies."

3.3.3. Financing and partnership modalities

Most interviewees flag the issue of overcoming traditional, entirely donor-controlled financing modalities and the related rigid accountability and reporting requirements as the single key step to achieving equal and trustful cooperation. But getting there is a challenging task for Swiss NGOs, as some of the rules and requirements are imposed by "back-donors". Some organizations are exploring this field by promoting more flexibilization and less rigid reporting, and by testing new financial instruments such as grants and innovation funds. Again, this is not something new. Unfortunately, earlier efforts to promote new models of financing and partnership as core ingredients of "aid

effectiveness" have not found the support needed for changing the financing patterns that sustain dependency and power imbalance.

It's the money!

"Finances and who makes decisions about the money is the question that people don't easily want to hear here. And this is the hurtful one. I do think we have to experiment. Our systems are not trust-based enough in general to accommodate mistakes and allow learning processes for both sides, provided that money is accounted for by South partners."

"I think this question of trust and flexibilization of funds-how much do you allow organizations in the South to decide, that is a big question and that for us is a challenge to also influence our donor requirements because we have to be transparent."

On grants and other innovative instruments (examples)

"Right now people have to come up with complete budgets and budget lines, but we are now also having a new instrument of grants, so that a partner will just get money and they can spend whatever they want. They need to send like a broad outline and then they can do whatever they want with it within this outline. That is also something that gives more power to the partners, more decision making and more ability to act."

"We have started with small innovation funds not yet designated to a specific project or specific goal and indicator."

3.3.4. From programmes to strategies and transformation

Across various organizations represented in the interviews, a resounding shift is taking shape: A deliberate move from mere programs and projects to developing comprehensive strategies and institutional instruments that might even lead to profound transformation of the organizations itself. These organizations recognize that to effect transformation, they must be willing to dismantle colonial patterns that persist within their institutional structure and culture.

Is the adaptation of the institutional setup a core ingredient of taking up the call for decolonization? Interviewees do not fully agree, but there are some very strong calls to look at hierarchical patterns and the places where decisions are taken and to integrate diversity and voices from the Global South in the setup of the institution.

On the need to "go up the structure"

"To build local capacity and ownership goes two ways. It's not just that we need to build local capacity in the global South. Also, we need to build our capacities if we really want to shift power, and then we have to learn how to lead these processes. We don't have this capacity at the moment. We don't know how to talk to our partners or how to organise such a process so that we can really shift the power. Probably nobody has a recipe, but it's OK; we're all learning, but it's not just at the local level. This is also capacity building on our side; we need to become, I would say, more modest."

"We are, I would say, really coming from the operative level and addressing coloniality and decolonization in our webinars, but also in our international programme and development cooperation, and the aim is that it will go up the structure."

Good practice: Promotion of decolonization as an institutional strategy or project

"As you know, our organization is currently developing our programme strategy. In this process, a working group is currently working on shifting power and expanding on the principles set in our earlier discussions around our long term vision. Decolonization and localization have taken center stage."

"So we are now at a stage with this working group and programme strategy where we will break down what key strategies we think we can already start implementing in the next four years, beginning in 2025 and beyond, to decolonize our cooperation, and much of it, I think, also becomes clearer."

A key towards decoloniality: Change the institutional setup (?)

"Let us talk about the institutional setup. I really believe this will also produce imbalances. To be honest, our organization struggles with hierarchical patterns."

"Our boards need more diversity and power shifts because this is where discussions must change."

"The institutional setup depends on an organization's view, approach, history, and the human factor."

3.3.5. Conclusion: Change needs to come

Most interviewees conclude that change is needed: To have a future, the development cooperation sector and the organizations engaged need to fully address the issues of dependency, inherent racism, and power imbalances. But interviewees are also aware of the complexity and scope of the challenge and agree that boldly taking up the call for decolonization needs time and care. It might be a hurtful experience and, for some organizations, even an existential one. However, there is also a sound optimism that "we can do it".

From talking to acting

"Whether we call it aid, development cooperation, or international health partnership, the power imbalance is inherent to the whole system. Acknowledging it is one thing; changing it is another."

"We need to make it clear that this change will come anyway. And we can just avoid the discussion, or we can address it honestly and openly.

Handle with care

"The more you get involved and dig into it, the more you also see how complex it is. So this is also part of this process. The contexts are extremely different and it's very complex. So it is also to see how to deal with this complexity."

"Well, I think we must go step by step. We should not just expect that a better thing takes place, because it could be a worse thing. So I think we must be careful."

Go where it hurts

"I see that we already have a tendency in the debate to shy away. We have organisations that say, come on, this is an old story, we are talking about partnership and how we build partnerships since the 80s. Now, this debate is coming up. They do not understand that we really have to confront ourselves with a debate that should and must hurt ourselves."

"If there is too much appeasement, I don't see the way forward for organisations like us. I mean there is a way forward, but it's not an attractive way forward because then we will just be the colonial institutions and we risk becoming partners to the interests which are real. I mean that they are real. There is a real interest in our Northern nations to control resources, to be the leaders. It's good for us all. These forces are here and they're very strong."

Go for it

"I was never a friend of fast changes, but I'm a big, big supporter of change."

"I think we can do it. I am absolutely confident. The theory is there, the experiences are there, the capacity to reflect is there. In the end, it's about doing it. It is the time and the resources that have to be allocated to do that to reflect in our own organisations."

3.3.6. Specificities of the health sector

The interviews focused on the challenge of decolonizing (health) cooperation. However, some of the interviewees, also related to their background, broadened the scope and introduced issues of coloniality that concern the health sector and international health beyond the practice and methods of cooperation. Here just some impressions.

To broaden and deepen the understanding of how Swiss organizations engage in the discussion of neighbouring issues as "decolonizing knowledge", "decolonizing health" or "decolonizing global health", a follow-up study and set of interviews would be needed.

Decolonizing health

"Decolonizing health cooperation must take into consideration some specificities of the health sector, notably, the history of the introduction of biomedicine, because biomedicine has been introduced by whom? By the colonial power in order to treat the staff so that they can work in the plantations and by the missionaries to save the Souls. Biomedicine was imperialist in a sense, so that makes a big difference for the decolonization of the health sector. That makes it a bit more tricky."

"And it's also a wake up call to understand how much resistance that is still here, maybe also popular health science or health knowledge that is on the ground and that we maybe haven't taken enough into our systems. And I think this is all part of this decolonizing approach. So it's what we take from

the South because so many solutions come from there, but also how do we finally overcome the, yeah, imperial setup of our science."

Decolonizing the notion and promotion of (sexual) rights?

"The call for sexual rights can be confused with the kind of a colonial approach so that promoting the rights of every person is something that does not fit with some societies, cultures and religious patterns, so it is also something imposed. The rights-based approach is an important approach, but I also see that it's kind of coming from the global north. In the end I would say the goals can still be the same, as a lot of activists and NGOs in the global South share them. We probably also have to listen to them and to ask them how we can change our narrative so that we are not following this power structure that is leading to countries in the global South rejecting the claims."

3.4. What next steps to be done as a Network?

3.4.1. Continue to convene, inspire and challenge Network members

As documented above, there are some worries expressed by interviewees that the language of coloniality and decolonization might hinder some Network members from engaging in an honest discussion about their past and future. But, all in all, interviewees express their gratitude for Medicus Mundi Switzerland challenging and inspiring its members and for the honest and sensitive way this has been done so far. And they expect "more of the same".

> *"I would like to thank Medicus Mundi for this. Because I think it's more important than I thought…"*

> *"And also what you are doing currently, I think this is great. So I think that's the right way to go. You are actually fostering this discussion, bringing in also the experience that you have from the Kampala Initiative, and things like that. So I do think Medicus Mundi is actually pushing this debate, and I think that it is great as a networking thing."*

> *"Well, I think the first steps taken were careful so far. I think it's fine."*

3.4.2. Set up a community of practice

As a concrete practical step to overcome a "sporadic" look at decoloniality and engaging interested Network members in a process of joint learning and advancing good practice, several interviewees propose to set up a community of practice. There is also the expectation that, once there is a core group breaking down the "difficult" concept of decoloniality into concrete steps, practices and instruments, this might help others to engage.

> *We should overcome this modality of looking at it sporadically, just initiating a conversation and going a bit further into providing a space for really advancing the practice.*

> *I think it would be interesting, particularly after this symposium in November, to see how the interest is in forming a community of practice in a way you meet regularly and people can exchange on what works, what does not work, where you stand, what is possible, what not. There is a great diversity, however. But this should not discourage us from setting up a community. Or to continue this conversation and to look at the practice.*

3.4.3. Engage in a policy dialogue with SDC

Interviewees are aware of the particular relation of Medicus Mundi Switzerland with the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, with SDC being both a main funder of the Network and one of the Network's main entry points for advocacy regarding the policies and practice of Swiss international cooperation and solidarity. And they raise related expectations, because they see a need for SDC to more fully and substantively engage in decolonizing international cooperation beyond its current promotion of localization.

> *Medicus Mundi should also question SDC on the way they work, how they want to support the NGO's in the future, and how they position themselves in this decolonization debate. So I think this is also important.*

> *At the national level, how could Medicus Mundi, and for example members who are members of Alliance Sud see how to push together decolonizing aid, in a dialogue with SDC.*

> *You have a bigger role to play in advocating for us at SDC, for example on financing. Changing certain schemes. When they analyse NGOs, they look at certain criteria, for example number of Europeans in the field, or who is on their board. This might change to: Do they have many South people on the board? How do they open themselves to people coming from the South in the decision-making processes?*

3.5. Discussion: Perspectives resulting from the interviews

We have already discussed the issue of "talking to the converted". The interviews show that it is really helpful to "listen to the converted", because they have many things to tell. The overall picture provided by the interviews can be summarised as follows:

Diversity
There is great diversity in the individual and institutional backgrounds and realities among the MMI Network members that we interviewed. This diversity is not only evident in the way they are organized but also in their approaches to taking up the call for decolonization. Thus, there are no preconditions for engaging nor a single way or blueprint for doing so.

Experience and good practice
A significant number of the interviewed organizations have taken concrete steps to address colonial vestiges in their communication, cooperation approaches, and institutional reforms. With the diversity of organisational backgrounds and institutional setups, there is a rich set of experience and good practices existing within the MMS membership. These experiences can be shared for inspiration, guidance, and mutual learning.

Honesty, engagement and leadership
All interviewed individuals and institutions demonstrated an honest willingness to overcome colonial patterns within their respective organizations and work. Such an effort positions them as change agents within the broader MMS Network where they can inspire others to open up themselves for a

conversation on coloniality and change and to jointly shape instruments for collective learning and reflection across a broader team of engaged institutions.

Analysis and action within the overall setup of the sector
You mainly hear what you ask. And we asked Swiss NGOs about how they address coloniality and its manifestations within the sector. For this reason, most responses highlighted the need to review existing approaches to "development cooperation" (doing it better, doing it differently) and align with conventional development cooperation norms. However, a few suggested a shift toward solidarity and reimagining development cooperation beyond aid.

Fields of action beyond the own organization
Intervieews moved beyond institutional concerns, recognizing decolonization as a challenge for both the Global North and Global South partners. And they highlighted colonial patterns entrenched by "back-donors'' within the development sector through imposed terms and modalities by institutions such as SDS. This talk about "others" can be questioned as apologetic, but we see it rather as a realistic and pragmatic perspective that underscores the need to understand and address systemic dynamics for effective transformation of the sector.

4.   Conclusions and recommendations

We consider the series of interviews with representatives of members of the MMI Network as core of our work. We apologise if we missed important input by colleagues who, for reasons of capacity, just could not engage. And we would have loved to hear from others why they are not interested or willing to engage in a conversation on decolonizing health cooperation.

There are some clear directions resulting from the interviews that are translated into recommendations to the Network and its members, in the way we have understood them.

As we could interact only with a limited number of Network members, these directions still need to be validated and agreed upon by the broader membership, in a continued process, starting with the MMS Jubilee Symposium in November 2023, and to be steered by the Board and Secretariat.

4.1.   Recommendations to Network members

- Call it as you want, but do it
- Walk the talk
- Engage as an institution
- Share, inspire, learn
- Act locally

Call it as you want: If you think that it is time for an honest reassessment of what your organization is, how it works, and how it is organized, then go for it, and call it as you want. If the promotion of "localization" and "equal partnerships'' are the key elements to which you refer, this is valid enough. Just do it. If the additional element of "decolonization" helps you to sharpen your lens and better define the way to go, then make this explicit.

Walk the talk: Decolonization does not happen through talking or writing, but through action. Key areas where action is needed, as identified by Network members, include concrete steps in the fields of communication, programme management, financing modalities and the overall setup of partnerships and collaborations. Be aware that these are also the most visible fields where your partners can directly assess your honesty in walking the talk of decolonization.

Engage as an institution: While the promotion of decolonization can start at the concrete level of communication and projects and can be initiated and guided by individual "change agents", at a certain point, walking the talk also demands that an organization fully engages in a process of institutional reflection, positioning, and change, including addressing the institutional "hardware" by diversifying staff and board. As outlined by the Network members who have initiated or experienced such processes, this is not possible without the engagement and leadership of the top level(s) of the organization. And it takes time. And it needs resources.

Share, inspire, learn: Our report clearly shows that, if you are already engaged in honestly taking up the call for decolonization in your own work and your institution, you are not alone. So dare to share, dare to inspire others and dare to learn from others, according to your courage: either in a protected "insider circle" such as a community of practice set up by the Network for its members only, or, at a

certain stage, in a conversation beyond your comfort zone, and involving a variety of actors, experiences and expectations.

Act locally: The decades-old slogan "think globally - act locally" is also valid for the members of the MMS Network. But consider complementing your "acting locally", in cooperation projects and programmes, with acting locally in Switzerland, through sensitization and advocacy, as part of a global coalition to overcome political and economic systems of dependency, exploitation, and extraction.

4.2.   Recommendations to Medicus Mundi Switzerland

> - Continue to convene, inspire and challenge Network members
> - Set up a community of practice
> - Engage in a policy dialogue with SDC
> - Rename the Network

Except the last one, our recommendations are directly based on the voice and expectations of the Network members we have interviewed. So we do have only a few things to add here.

Continue to convene, inspire and challenge. Your role is very much appreciated by many Network members, but we are a bit puzzled regarding the obvious issue of not all Network members being ready (or interested) to get convened, inspired and challenged. This might need some more reflections, also in the Board of the Network, and in a continued dialogue.

Set up a community of practice: There is sufficient interest, leadership and capacity in the Network to go ahead with this proposal. The challenge will be to find a way that allows many organizations to contribute and benefit despite the great diversity of institutional realities and positioning. As the two authors are engaged in the Network Medicus Mundi International, we could also imagine setting up such a community together, and maybe even reaching out beyond our membership, such as in the case of the emerging community on <u>climate and health justice</u>.

Engage in a policy dialogue with SDC: We are encouraged by the <u>statement</u> of MMS regarding decolonization and localization in a hearing on a new Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation. The Symposium in November might be a next step of exploring and advancing such a dialogue. But some Network members have more specific expectations: MMS shall support them in a much more sensitive and difficult conversation on changing the general terms of funding and accountability. Such an engagement of MMS, to speak for its members who have their limitations and hesitations because of their structural position and dependency is, obviously, also a sensitive matter for the Network itself. It needs particular attention and capacity and can probably only succeed if it is done in close intersectoral cooperation with other NGO platforms and alliances, mainly Alliance Sud.

Rename the Network: Finally, our last, and maybe unexpected recommendation: We think that "Medicus Mundi Switzerland - Network Health for All", with its current positioning that includes an honest engagement in promoting decolonization, cannot continue to call itself "medicus mundi", the "*doctor of the world*". This name, with its obvious connotations, contradicts the Network's new aspirations. In the year of the Network's jubilee, we recommend to consider throwing some ballast overboard.

5.　"The broader picture": Collection of resources and literature

We complement our report with a collection of resources and literature (full version: <u>annex</u>) for those interested in delving deeper into the colonialism and decolonization discourse. Our collection is neither a "comprehensive guide" nor an easy toolbox. The authors see it mainly as a "guided tour" to some entry points we used ourselves to deepen our understanding of what is the problem and what can be done.

Decolonization, "decolonizing global health" and "decolonizing aid" have not only become buzzwords but also the topic of a multitude of publications over the last few years, and there will be many more. Watch out for these. Good news for the members of the MMS Network is that you are not alone and do not need to reinvent the wheel of "doing decolonization". You can refer to a great variety of experiences and guidance from organizations outside Switzerland and working in other sectors within the field of development cooperation.

5.1.　Start here: The call for decolonizing aid

While our collection of resources includes pieces that are very dense and difficult to read, here two more easy reads to start with. They are challenging anyhow.

● **The age of white saviours is over**
"This article highlights three aspects that are pivotal to a new, decolonized understanding of development aid: the historical and political contextualisation of development cooperation, a complete revision of the images and narratives that are being conveyed by development actors, as well as the ongoing evolution of the modalities of cooperation." (Kristina Lanz, AllianceSud, 2022)
https://www.alliancesud.ch/en/politics/development-policy/development-policy/age-white-saviours-over

● **Meeting report: It's Time to Decolonise Aid**
"Structural racism reinforces colonial dynamics in global development, according to our new report out today. We are calling on international aid organisations to decolonise aid and tackle structural racism head-on, in our new report, 'Time to Decolonise Aid'. The report is a study into the colonial legacy of the aid system. It outlines the steps needed to transform power relations towards greater equity." (Peace Direct, 2021)
https://www.peacedirect.org/time-to-decolonise-aid/

5.2.　Listen and learn

There are some webinar recordings and podcasts that open the thematic field of "decolonizing aid" in the same way as the pieces listed above. Go for these if you prefer listening. Just be aware that you cannot really relax…

- **Decolonizing Aid - The aid organizations are looking for ways out of old power patterns**
  "Here the white saviours, and there the poor, needy people: clichés still play a disastrous role in development cooperation today. Is it possible without it?" (Nicole Freudiger, Swiss Radio/TV SRF, 2023)
  German original/podcast: here
  Englisch (automated translation): here

- **Decolonize Aid**
  "An honest look at the continuing power imbalance in development cooperation and a joint search for new strategies for cooperation at eye level. With partner institutions from four continents." (Recordings as part of the documentation of a mission21 summer school, 2022)
  https://www.mission-21.org/en/what-we-do/events/decolonize-aid/

- **Decolonising aid**
  "I cannot take responsibility morally or in any way for a call to dismantle the global health or the humanitarian system immediately. And that is very clear. None of us has the moral grounds to say whoever dies, dies from the disruption of services, whoever loses their job, loses their job, as long as we achieve the greater goal while I sit here in Geneva and talk on behalf of people. That is not the point" (Interview with Tammam Aloudad, The New Humanitarian; podcast and transcript)
  https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/podcast/2020/1/6/rethinking-humanitarianism-decolonising-aid

5.3. On your way? Guidance and self-commitments

For organizations engaged in advancing decoloniality in their institutional practice and setup, we collected some guidance and instruments of self-commitment. But be aware that there is no blueprint and that, in this challenging field, testing, sharing, and discussing your approaches, efforts - and failures - with trusted peers might be the way forward. Feel free to get inspired anyhow….

- **Transforming Partnerships in International Cooperation**
  "A clear, practical guide for civil society, donors, international NGOs and intermediaries in the sector. Based on consultations with 200 participants from 70 countries, the research offers comprehensive recommendations to transform every aspect of partnerships between entities in the Global South and North. It highlights how we can all build more equitable and decolonised partnerships through trust-building, open communication, flexible funding and the prioritisation of local ownership." (PeaceDirect, 2023)
  https://www.peacedirect.org/transforming-partnerships/

- **Manifesto for responsible communication on international cooperation**
  "International cooperation is born of solidarity with excluded and disadvantaged people. Those communicating about international cooperation assume responsibility – towards people who enhance their livelihoods thanks to cooperation and towards those who show solidarity. As development organisations we assume this responsibility by reflecting critically on the way we shape the content of our communication and fundraising. "(Alliance Sud, 2020)
  https://www.alliancesud.ch/en/manifesto

- **Decolonizing wealth: 7 Steps to Healing**
  We as humans have given money its value of exchange, so we also have the power to change how we utilize it. These steps are a means to both heal, and translate this healing into action."
  (Decolonizing Wealth Project)
  https://decolonizingwealth.com/7-steps-to-healing/

- **Anti-Oppression Framework**
  "The StopAids UK anti-oppression framework is grounded in its core values of humility, shifting power, solidarity, and co-ownership"
  https://stopaids.org.uk/our-work/anti-oppression-framework/

5.4. The parallel debate: Decolonizing global health

Access to scientific conferences, unequal opportunities to publish research, and the overall patterns of knowledge production have been at the start of a virulent debate on "decolonizing global health", mainly in some academic journals. This discussion is far from being over and has extended to other fields of "global health".

- **Will global health survive its decolonisation?**
  "There are growing calls to decolonise global health. This process is only just beginning. But what would success look like? Will global health survive its decolonisation? This is a question that fills us with imagination. It is a question that makes us reflect on what Martin Luther King Jr saw when he said in 1968, in the last speech he gave before he was killed, that 'I've been to the mountaintop…and I've seen the Promised Land.' If what he saw was an equal, inclusive, and diverse world without a hint of supremacy, then, that world is still elusive. Similarly, an equal, inclusive, just, and diverse global health architecture without a hint of supremacy is not global health as we know it today." (Seye Abimbola, Madhukar Pai, The Lancet 2020)
  https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32417-X/fulltext

- **Decolonizing Global Health - What does it mean for us**
  "The calls for decolonizing global health are increasing in both numbers and intensity. The discourse is undoubtedly gaining traction and increasingly a topic for discussion in journals, the public global health debate and at international conferences. A natural question that begs to be answered in the European public health community is 'What does it mean for us?' Here, we provide a few possible answers to that question." (Forsberg and Sundeval, EUPHA 2023)
  https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/33/3/356/7188203

- **Decolonising Global Health. An Introduction by Olivia Rutazibwa**
  In this interview, Rutazibwa argues that in order to decolonize global health, we must acknowledge colonial histories and their continuing impact. According to Rutazibwa, decolonization efforts however should not be limited to verbal statements but must be strengthened by actions" (Bulletin of the NVTG, 2022)
  https://issuu.com/nvtg_mt/docs/2022_mt_03_decolonising_global_health

- **Are we really interested in 'Decolonising global health' or are we rushing to prove our wokeness?**
  The author raises critical points for reflection that decolonization efforts may become superficial

and potentially create a new system of oppression that the movement seeks to dismantle.
(Laura Mkumba, Medium, 2020)

5.5. More radical perspectives on decolonizing solidarity

We have included, in our collection, also some challenging pieces that open the conversation to the "broader picture" not covered in our report: Can decoloniality even be achieved within the patterns of cooperation, or what would be a more radical way of civil society organizations from the Global North engaging in linking realities and struggles for promoting the change we want to see when we talk about decolonization. Here are some entry points. And if you only have time to read one piece, start with the first one.

- **Black Lives Matter is also a reckoning for foreign aid and international NGOs**
  "Talking about racism is not enough. We can't afford another 50 years of apathy towards the oppression that's perpetuated by the aid system." (Degan Ali and Marie-Rose Romain Murphy, openDemocracy 2020)
  https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/black-lives-matter-also-reckoning-foreign-aid-and-international-ngos/

- **What is the role of Northern organisations in global justice advocacy (learning note)**
  "As Northern international development organisations finally begin to acknowledge the colonial legacies that shape the sector, it is time for a critical examination of their roles in global justice advocacy which is intimately tied to this legacy. Here, based in part on contributions from 31 advocates worldwide, the Gender and Development Network (GADN) shares reflections, dilemmas and suggestions for change." (GADN 2022)
  https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/northern-organisations-global-justice-advocacy

- **Decolonizing Aid**
  "Critical actors around the world are making the case that we need a 'decolonial turn in development studies and practice to unravel the roots of the power relations that produce and stabilize the racist, gendered, sexualized, and class hierarchies that characterize the modern world. Decolonization goes beyond critique and paves the way for the realization of alternative visions and practices of world-making. And in the spirit of Audre Lorde's dictum, 'The master's tool will never dismantle the master's house', the question is how to abolish the master's house. Do we have to? And if it were (to be) abolished, would we also have to abolish aid?" (recordings of a series of webinars hosted by medico international, 2022-2023
  https://www.medico.de/en/decolonizing

The authors

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Thomas Schwarz is the former Director of Medicus Mundi Switzerland and, since 2018, has been working as Executive Secretary of Medicus Mundi International - Network Health for All. Thomas describes himself as an experienced and trusted civil society manager, networker, facilitator and advocate in the fields of global health governance, international health cooperation, universal and equitable access to health care, and the social, political and economic determinants of health and health policies. He likes to explore, initiate, and facilitate new, and often financially hopeless, civil society initiatives.

The authors met each other for the first time at the Kampala Workshop on "How to advance cooperation and solidarity within and beyond aid" organized by the Medicus Mundi International Network and the People's Health Movement together with a group of partner organizations. Since then, both authors are engaged in the Steering Group of the Kampala Initiative, an informal structure of independent activists and organizations across Southern and Northern boundaries set up for formulating, promoting, and disseminating a new civil society narrative on cooperation and solidarity within and beyond aid.

Thanks

Many colleagues within and beyond the MMS Network inspired us in our work, but many also contributed to it and supported it in a more concrete way. Considering the confidentiality of some exchanges, you will not find your name here. But yes, it is about you: Thank you!

Annexes

While annexes 1-3 provide some background information about the modalities and progress of our work, the authors consider annexes 4 (interviews) and 5 (resources and literature) as integrated parts of the report. The annexes are currently available as Google documnents, as follows:

Annex 1: Consultation on Philanthropy, April 2023
Annex 2: Questionnaire MMS, May 2023
Annex 3: Interview guide, MMS
Annex 4: Interviews MMS, July-August 2023
Annex 5: Toolbox with resources and literature