

# DECOLONISATION OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Emmanuel Kumi, PhD  
Centre for Social Policy Studies



**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

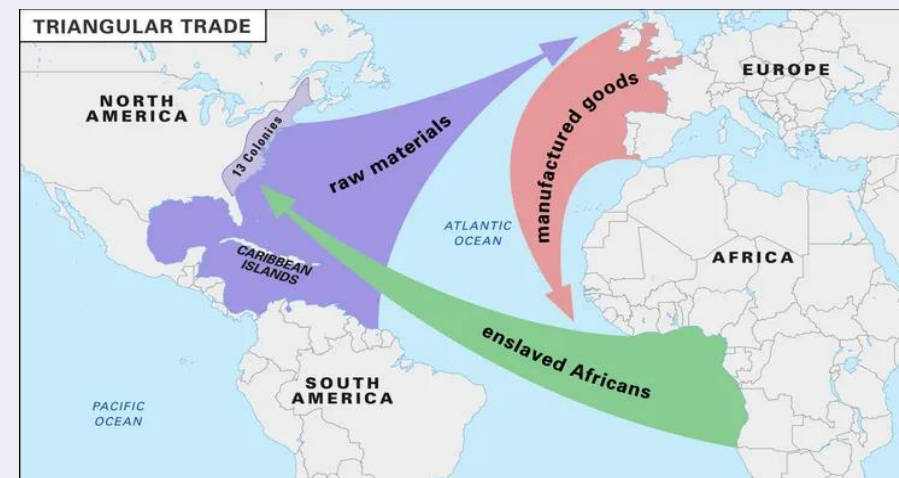
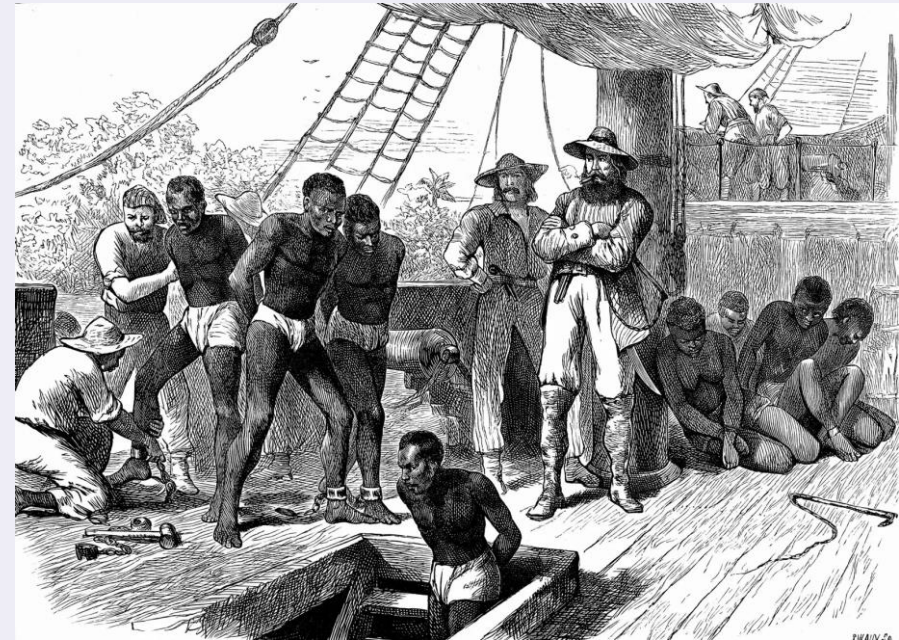
# Outline of Presentation

- Historical Overview of Colonialism in Development
- Colonial Remnants in Contemporary Development Cooperation
- Actionable Pathways towards a Decolonised Development Cooperation
- World Cafe



# Historical Overview of Colonialism in Development

- ❑ Slave trades are interlinked with under development:
  - Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Late 15<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> Century)
- ❑ Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade had devastating consequences:
  - Loss of Labour reserves
  - Stagnation of African economies and societies.
  - Political instability and weakening of states



# Colonialism and Development Cooperation

- Following the abolition of slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, there were renewed economic interests for cheap labour, raw materials and the persistence of racist ideologies fueled by the colonial project.
- Racist ideologies provided legitimization for ‘Western Supremacy’ framed around discourses and languages (e.g. ‘White Man’s burden’).



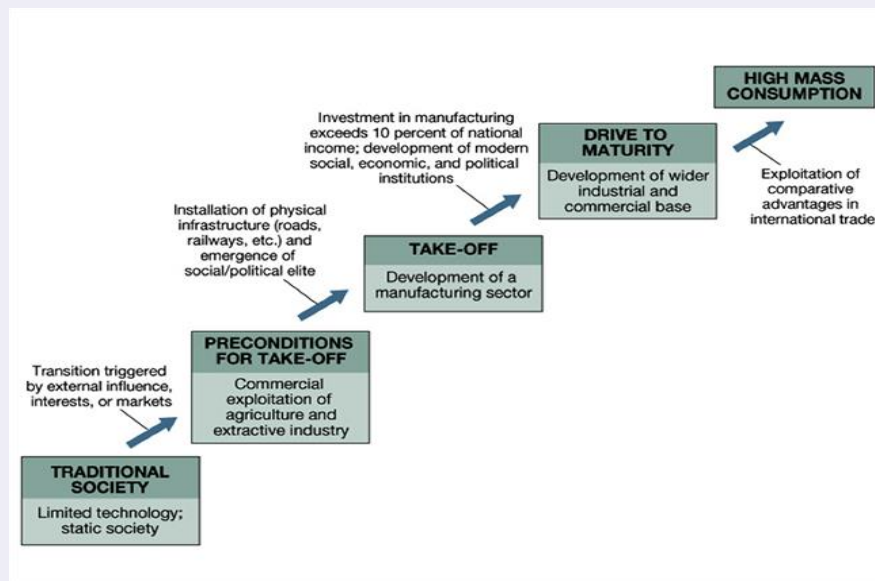
# The origins of Development Cooperation

- ❑ The signing of the Atlantic Charter in 1941 promoted the principle of self-determination and sovereignty, free trade and economic collaboration etc.
  
- ❑ The end of the Second World War in 1945.
  - Marshall Plan
  
- ❑ American President Harry Truman's speech on development in 1949 (i.e. the Point Four Programme)
  - Worldwide development initiative centred on technical cooperation
  - “Aimed at the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas”
  - Global call for action in promoting development

“The grinding poverty and the lack of economic opportunity for many millions of people in the economically under-developed parts of Africa, the Near and Far East, and certain regions of Central and South America, constitute one of the greatest challenges of the world today” (Truman, 1949).

# Overview of Theories of Development (1960s- 1990s)

- ❑ Domination of development thinking by unilinear models
  - Walt Rostow's modernisation theory based on Euro-American experiences.
  - Five stages of economic growth and development.



- ❑ First World VS 'Third World'; Developed VS Underdeveloped
  - The ideologies of the modernisation theory reflected that of the colonial era.
- ❑ Criticisms of the modernisation theory

# Overview of Theories of Development (1960s- 1990s)

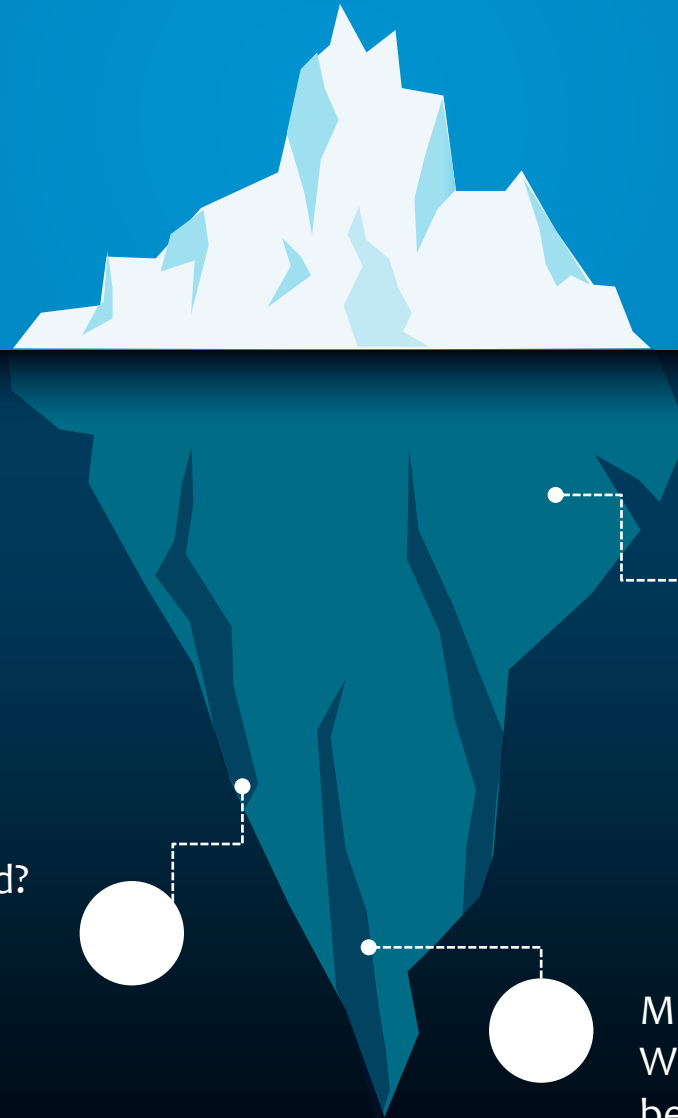
## ❑ Neoliberalism development policies

- Structural Adjustment Programmes in the 1980s and 1990s (***An era of development of the 'Global South'***).
- Political conditionality was used as the basis for accessing development finance and loans.

## ❑ The rise of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as development alternatives?

- ❑ Criticism against NGOs (e.g. NGOs too close to comfort?; Lack of accountability; Crisis of legitimacy; Donor dependency etc.)

# THE ICEBERG MODEL IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION



EVENTS  
- What is happening?

PATTERNS OF  
BEHAVIOUR  
What trends are there  
over time?

SYSTEMS STRUCTURE  
How are the parts related?  
What influences the  
patterns

MENTAL MODELS  
What values, assumptions and  
beliefs shape the system?



# Iceberg Model and Colonial Remnants in Contemporary Development Cooperation

## The Iceberg Model

- ❑ **EVENTS** (i.e. observable patterns and behaviours replicating colonial patterns)
  - **Language structures power relations and inequality in aid organisations between national and international staff (e.g. English as lingua franca)**
  - Imagery used by some INGOs to represent intended beneficiaries reinforces negative stereotypes about people in developing countries.



# Iceberg Model and Colonial Remnants in Contemporary Development Cooperation

## ❑ Knowledge, Skills and Expertise

- The ‘ecology of knowledge’ privileges Western knowledge while non-western knowledge is ignored or undervalued.
- Colonial legacies creates a sense of superiority for Western Ideas and Expertise

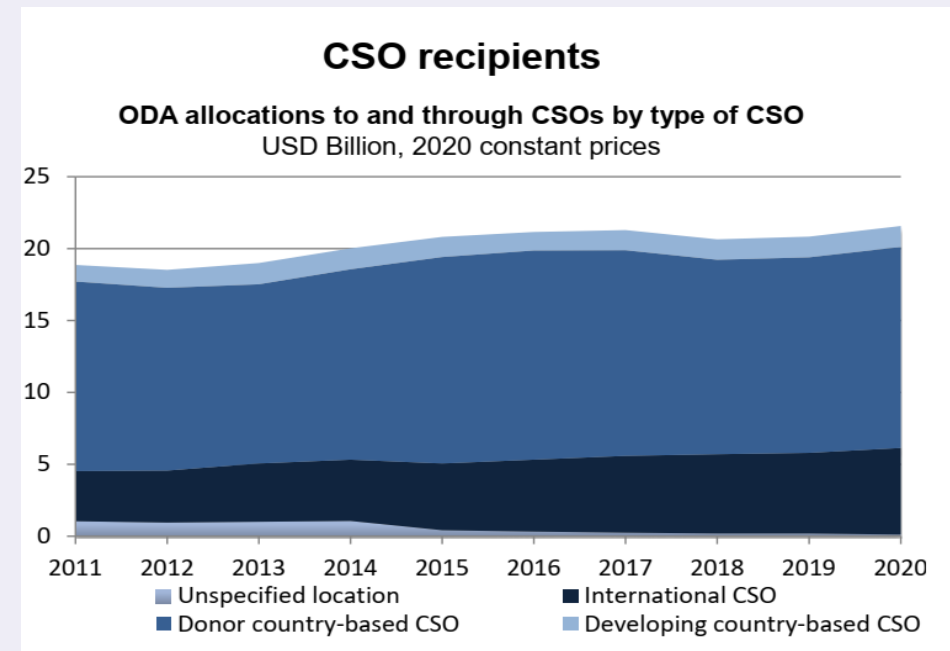
“Western ideas are seen as a better option[....]Even the Government of Ghana relies a lot on foreign experts because they actually believe that anything Western is better [....] We do have a serious problem; we need to decolonise our minds” (Interview with a Development Consultant in Ghana).

- National staff of donor agencies often occupy the lower rungs of the organisational hierarchy but do majority of the world on the ground:  
“We always do the biggest chunk of the work [... ]. They [the foreign experts] ask us to submit the report to them for reviewing, and they will submit it as if they did the work, in most cases without even acknowledging us. (interview, Local NGO staff in Ghana)

# Iceberg Model and Colonial Remnants in Contemporary Development Cooperation

## ❑ Funding and Partnerships

- Official Development Assistance (ODA) to recipient countries often serve the interests of the donors.
- Donor country-based CSOs and INGOs receive the majority of ODA to CSOs compared to developing country-based CSOs.
- Imbalanced power relations in North-South Partnerships.



Source: OECD, 2022

# Iceberg Model and Colonial Remnants in Contemporary Development Cooperation

- ❑ **The Deep Structures (e.g. Mindsets, Attitudes, Values and Mental Models)**
  - Colonial legacies in development cooperation shape how actors position and think about themselves (e.g. The ‘White Gaze Problem’ and ‘Whiteness’).
  - Superiority of Western knowledge, expertise and practice in the development sector because knowledge and development discourses are produced in the West.
  - The development sector is assumed to be ‘colour-blind’ but in reality it’s racialised and entrenched in discrimination.

# Actionable Pathways towards a decolonised development sector

- ❑ **A two-pronged approach for addressing colonial remnants in the development sector.**
  
- ❑ **Addressing colonial mindsets, attitudes and Values**
  - Reflexivity and Intentionality
  
  - ‘Institutional decolonisation’ in the development sector.
  
  - Alternative framings of development cooperation to embrace diverse perspectives.

# Actionable Pathways towards a decolonised development sector

- ❑ **Actionable insights to decolonise development policies, practices and behaviours**
  - In terms of **communication**, some organisations are creating spaces for more diverse linguistic expressions (e.g. BOND UK has a **language template**-Third World Countries to Low-Income Countries; localisation to locally-led development etc.)
  - Increasing use of **hope-based communication** to promote positive framing of development issues.

## Good practices for communication

- Language should be: practical (easy to understand and concise), accurate (corresponding to the situation described) and respectful;
- Communication style should: focus on solutions, showcase an organisation's values and what they stand for, and inspire hope;
- Storytelling should be: contextualised (sensitive to individual circumstances, cultures and narratives); agency-affirming and ethically produced.

# Actionable Pathways towards a decolonized development sector

## ❑ Resource Mobilisation and Grant Making

- Emphasis on promoting mutual accountability and valuing a diverse range of resources (e.g. local knowledge and expertise, legitimacy etc.).
- Adoption of bottom-up and participatory-grant making approaches.
- Changes in donor funding modalities and arrangements (e.g. the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dialogue and Dissent Framework).

## Good practices for resource mobilisation and grant-making

- **For everyone:** acknowledge that all resources, whether financial or not, can contribute to transformational change; ensure funders and grantees are mutually accountable to each other.
- **For funding and grant-making organisations:** emphasize longer-term and flexible funding; shift administrative and due diligence tasks to donors; implement innovative and participatory approaches to grant-making; fund partners instead of projects.

# Questions and Answers



**Thank You**



# World Café



# Procedure for World Café

- ❑ **Tables with a table host + 3-4 participants**

- ❑ **Three rounds of 20 minutes each:**

  - Round 1: start discussion on a table

  - Round 2: move to different table and continue discussion

  - Round 3: go to table of round 1 and wrap up

- ❑ **Table hosts take notes**

# Central Questions for World Cafe

1. INWARDS: What does a decolonised development cooperation mean for you and your organisation?
2. What do you think development partners (Danish CSOs, INGOs, donors, local CSOs) should do to promote a decolonised development cooperation?
3. What implications does a decolonised development cooperation have on the work of CSOs in Denmark and their partners in the Global South?