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Discomfort to discovery

Exploring racism and anti-racism in development narratives

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About the authors

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Acknowledgements

In 2020/21, IIED conducted an internal review to better understand whether and how dimensions of racism play out in the narratives that it writes and publishes. With this exercise, IIED focused on exploring how far its written content acknowledges or omits historic patterns of enslavement, colonial exploitation, present day racism, and coloniality. The exercise is relevant to the wider discourse on racism in the aid and sustainable development sectors, particularly for organisations considering how internal discourse and external communications influence strategy, values and culture. The authors worked alongside experienced anti-racist practitioners to design a two-step methodology: having reviewed relevant academic literature, they developed a framework to facilitate discussions with IIED colleagues around the narratives in four communications products, including the organisational strategy. The framework identifies six dimensions of racism and coloniality that are dominant in aid and development storytelling: colour blindness, White gaze, saviourism, eurocentrism, neutrality, and exclusion. This evaluation shares findings from those discussions, exploring which dimensions participants found most prevalent in the communications they analysed. The review succeeded in starting a valuable process of reflection; it also revealed that the narratives IIED uses to communicate its work do not sufficiently acknowledge how patterns of coloniality and racism impact on the sustainable development challenges that the organisation works on. This evaluation concludes with a roadmap for change that sets out the actions IIED will take based on the review.

Contents

Summary

IIED is a research institute focused on global sustainable development challenges. We act on behalf of donors and in partnership with organisations such as civil society, governments and other research institutes. Many of the issues we work on, including poverty eradication, are rooted directly or indirectly in systems of oppression born of the transatlantic trade in enslaved peoples and colonial exploitation. As a research institution working to achieve social and economic justice, this review explores the extent to which we sufficiently acknowledge historic patterns of enslavement, colonial exploitation, present-day racism and coloniality in our content on sustainable development.

This report shares results from a 2020/2021 IIED internal review in which staff explored whether/how our storytelling and narratives reproduce racism through racialised or colonial tropes. We delved into this topic by first better understanding the dimensions of racism currently playing out in IIED storytelling and narratives. Focus groups made up of staff then reviewed four samples of published IIED content to assess whether they reflected these dimensions, leading to fruitful, if uncomfortable discussions.

> **"We wanted to reflect with colleagues on possible racism in ourselves, the institution and the development and aid sectors generally"**

The review was not designed to look for hard and fast truths about our content. Rather, we wanted to reflect with colleagues on possible racism in ourselves, the institution and the development and aid sectors generally by examining what we publish and promote. The review is part of IIED's internal evaluation mechanism for 2020/2021. It is one of many IIED initiatives designed to progress anti-racism institutionally and across our activities, and represents a small step in openly discussing racism both inside and outside the organisation.

This project was an IIED priority for 2021/22 because written and visual communications are a critical part of our practice and culture. Writing and the field of communications more broadly frequently mirror organisational and individual worldviews and belief systems and are a dominant tool of coloniality.

This review was led by a small internal team made up of the advocacy and engagement manager from our communications team and a senior researcher from our strategy, learning and evaluation team. They brought their collective experience in racial representation in communications and internal-review methodology. We worked with anti-racist practitioners Laura Loyola-Hernández and Penny Wangari to deepen our knowledge of the existing academic literature on racism in aid and development practice and storytelling. They also worked with us to develop a framework, validated by IIED colleagues, to facilitate internal discussions on racism and our own narratives.

The framework consists of a set of six dimensions of racism and coloniality, a research question and related prompts to guide review participants' analysis of each narrative. The six dimensions of racism and coloniality in aid and development narratives are as follows (for full definitions of these categories see Table 2 on page 12):

▪ Colour blindness

▪ White gaze

▪ Saviourism

▪ Eurocentrism

▪ Neutrality, and

▪ Exclusion.

The four focus groups used the framework to analyse the narratives found in four samples of content from across IIED's research groups: a blog post, a video, a policy briefing and an IIED strategy document.

We wanted the focus groups to assess each content sample not as a single story, but rather to review the deeper narratives running through each. We defined a single story as standalone content, whereas a narrative is a system of stories shaped both by authors within the system and their audience. Within this definition, the review participants explored whether and how racial bias shaped IIED content as it was produced and received.

Each focus group considered one content sample, identifying and discussing any dimensions of racism therein. Even though the content explicitly communicated progressive agendas, our reviewers found at least one dimension of racism implicitly present in each communications product.

We present the results in two sections.

First, we report on the focus group discussions of each content sample. The groups:

- Used the narrative analysis framework to discuss any dimension of racism in the content

- Explored the internalised, often-unconscious nature of racism and how it unintentionally manifests in data gathering, writing and/or other content-creation processes, and

- Offered insights into how context plays into one's understanding of the nuanced meanings of content when exploring issues such as racism and its intersecting oppressions.

Second, we look at the dimensions of racism identified by the focus groups as most prevalent across the four content samples. And we explore how these prevalent dimensions relate to the three pillars of IIED's mandate: connecting through partnerships, generating new evidence and improving capacities.

Through this content review we found that in communicating IIED's work on sustainable development we do not sufficiently acknowledge historic and present-day patterns of coloniality and racism. Also, some representations of ourselves and others perpetuate racialised ideas linked to power/lack of power; some portrayals centre White voices while marginalising or excluding voices of people of colour.

We conclude the review with a roadmap for change. This sets out the actions we will take based on the findings and the discussions that informed them. We recognise that the review process and the work to follow will require all of us at IIED to reflect on both our personal and professional selves, causing discomfort while also leading us toward great discoveries.

1

Introduction

In 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement sparked the resurgence of an international anti-racist movement that shook the world. Mass protests swept the globe as people rallied to collectively grieve and protest the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and other Black Americans killed by White police officers.

Leaders in the international development and aid sectors began to pay renewed attention to the deepening global discourse on race, equity and injustice. The UK government launched an inquiry into culture and philosophy in the aid sector, with a particular focus on racism.[1] NGOs published landmark reports contributing to discussions about, and action on racism and coloniality (see Box 1) in the UK aid and development sectors, including the following:

- Peace Direct[2] reported on decolonising aid, and

- Bond[3] issued a study on racism, power and truth; in it, Black people and people of colour shared experiences of racism within UK aid and development organisations.

Concern is present in IIED, and the aid and development sectors more generally, that racism, including coloniality and White supremacy are unspoken, veiled issues in sector culture, systems and processes. Yet neither sector has initiated sufficient debate and action to tackle racism, within organisations or in practices, nor to understand how it plays out regionally.

We hope this review will spur internal and sector-wide discourse on racism. However, it was specifically undertaken to help IIED better understand how dimensions of racism play out in our narratives, given that writing and other communications are a critical part of the institute's work.

The review was part of IIED's internal evaluation mechanism for 2020/2021.[4] Within IIED, these discussions have increased space for naming and discussing racism in our organisation and our collective tolerance of racism appears to be significantly reduced. This surge in collective momentum gives us the confidence to share our thinking and learning more openly with others, knowing we can work together for real change.

"Our words can help us question our beliefs more openly."

Due to the subtle nuances in understanding and deconstructing racism, this review does not seek to identify objective truths categorising IIED content into binary good or bad examples of racist or anti-racist content. Instead, the review's value is in opening an organisation-wide discussion about racism in our narratives, storytelling and practice and to demonstrate how our words can help us question our beliefs more openly.

This report is set out in four parts:

- Review methodology

- Theories and a definition of racism in aid and development narratives

- Review results, in two sections:

    a. Focus-group findings from the narrative analysis, and

    b. Trends identified in the analysis and how they relate to the three pillars of IIED's mandate.

- Conclusions and a roadmap of our commitment to change.

BOX 1. COLONIALITY

Coloniality: long-standing structures, practices, and patterns of power that were put in place through colonialism and colonial governance that continue to influence social, political, economic and cultural institutions and relations in the present.

2

Methodology

The team that developed the review process included staff from IIED's Communications Group and monitoring, evaluation and learning team, with support from two external anti-racist practitioners. An internal review process (with external support) was chosen to promote self-reflection as a means of building awareness of the issues of racism in storytelling. In planning the review, we prioritised staff engagement to establish a robust common foundation for our future anti-racist work. We used an adaptive management approach so we could adjust as we moved through the review process.

There were two successive phases to the review.

In the first phase, we reviewed academic literature on racism in the development and aid sectors, with a distinct focus on narratives. We paid particular attention to African and African-diaspora scholars, reflecting the focus of both IIED and the wider aid sector on collaboration across the continent. We then categorised racism and coloniality in aid and development narratives into six predominant dimensions (see Figure 1). These formed a central part of the analytical framework of the review and are detailed in Section 4.

We then shared the review framework across IIED for comment and validation via three 90-minute workshops, which:

a. Established a common theoretical understanding of racism and coloniality and how they show up in internal narratives, and

b. Gave all at IIED the opportunity to shape the framework before it was finalised.

Just under half the organisation attended the workshops, facilitated jointly by the IIED review team and Laura Loyola-Hernández and Penny Wangari. During these workshops, we organised participants and facilitators into racialised groups. These were

created in recognition of the different experiences and needs of Black people, White people and people of colour when discussing race and coloniality. Participants were asked to self-identify as White and we placed them in breakout groups accordingly.

Workshop participants discussed key anti-racist terminology and shared perspectives on whether the six dimensions of racism and coloniality shared with them were the right ones for our narrative analysis process. Staff confirmed they were the right measures for IIED's first attempt at narrative analysis on this topic.

Thanks to staff input, we adjusted the framework to include a more detailed discussion of the way that race intersects with other oppressions. We also improved the list of words used as examples of the

Figure 1. Six dimensions of racism and coloniality applied in IIED content review
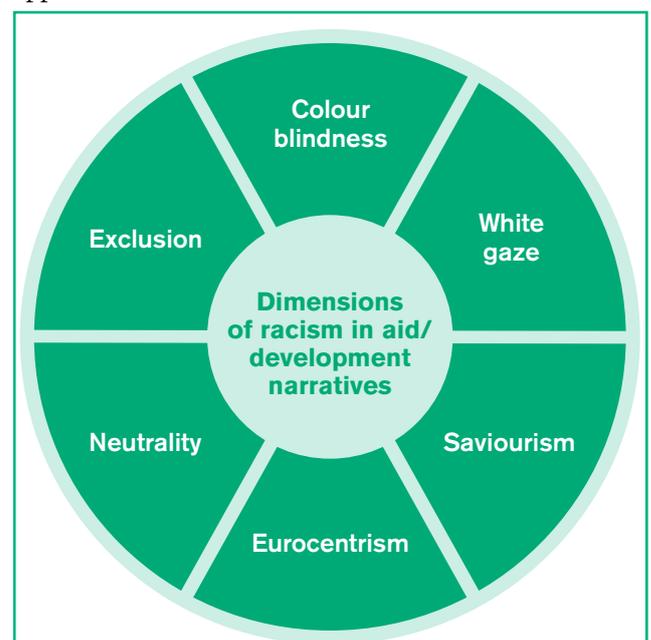
BOX 2. HOW WE ORGANISED CONTENT SAMPLES FOR REVIEW

The content reviewed by the focus groups was produced by UK-based IIED staff or co-produced by IIED and partners from Europe and the global South (see Table 1).

To select the content to be analysed under this review, we invited IIED staff to submit published samples of their work, for analysis. This 'self-selection' by content authors was necessary to ensure their willing participation in the subsequent analysis.

main dimensions of racism and provided a more detailed introduction explaining racism as a hierarchy.

Additionally, there was a strong sense among participants that this review was the start of an ongoing programme of anti-racist work within IIED, and that the framework must be applied flexibly and revised adaptively.

In the second phase, we convened smaller focus groups to apply the framework to the four content samples representing work from three IIED research groups, plus a corporate strategy (see Box 2). Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we held these narrative analysis sessions online.

When participants applied the framework to the selected content, they first scanned and discussed the context of the piece for general meaning, before focusing on shorter sections for detailed analysis.

The research question at the heart of the narrative analysis asked:

- Does the sample of content under review reproduce any of the dimensions of racism in the framework, and how?

We encouraged the groups to explore that main question by using these discussion prompts (see Figure 2):

i. What are the common themes, both implicit and explicit, in the content and how did language, image or data shape the content's meaning?

ii. Who is central or peripheral in the content? What is being said and not said? Is there anyone or any story that is hidden or silenced?

iii. What does the content say about what IIED is and who our staff are? How does it serve us? What does the content say about who other people are? How does it serve them?

iv. Choose two or three words to describe the type of narrative present in the content and share perspectives on the narrative's consequences in relation to racism.

We ensured the discussion spaces were places for open and brave exchange. We encouraged focus group participants to speak honestly, raising and addressing constructive challenges. Participants used the process to explore power relations between those featured in the content, those creating it and those consuming it. They recognised that producing narratives is a political process in which people choose which stories will be told and which will not.

Finally, we sought IIED executive validation of the review findings. We shared review methodology, results and recommendations with IIED's leadership for discussion, validation and an institutional response.

2.1 Limitations and challenges

This review is a first step forward in better understanding how racism plays out in IIED content. We recognise its limitations, including:

- Content selection. Self-selection was useful in capturing some of the diversity of IIED's knowledge and communications products. But it meant all samples came from staff with an existing interest in tackling racism in their own practice.

- Time. We only analysed short sections of the longer-format documents.

- Sample size. While the four content samples reviewed were as widely representative of IIED's work as possible, it was a small pool. We would gain a deeper understanding of where we perpetuate racist tropes by examining more content more deeply.

- Staff-only engagement. Due to time, logistical and budgetary constraints, the focus groups consisted of IIED staff only (see Box 3).

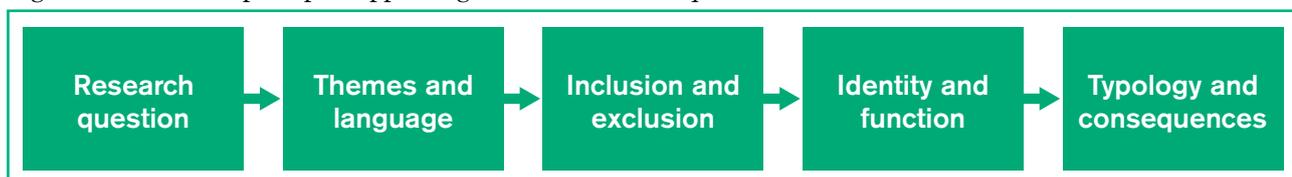Figure 2. Discussion prompts supporting the main research question

| Research question | Themes and language | Inclusion and exclusion | Identity and function | Typology and consequences |

Table 1. Overview of IIED content used for narrative analysis

IIED GROUP	CONTENT	CONTENT DESCRIPTION	INTENDED AUDIENCE
Climate Change Group	Locally led adaptation to climate change: the start of a 10-year learning journey (blog post)	The blog post discusses eight principles for delivering locally led adaptation to climate change. The blog was part of the long-standing work programme, Money Where It Matters, and galvanised support for these principles amongst development institutions and organisations	International and bilateral donors in the climate finance sector; other international NGOs operating in climate finance
Director's Group/ Communications	Make Change Happen (MCH) document (strategy)	The MCH strategy is the corporate communications document that sets out IIED's priorities and vision for 2019–2024. We analysed the introduction	Current, past, prospective donors and partners; peers; general development and aid sector parties
Shaping Sustainable Markets	Life Beyond Maize (video)	The video raises awareness of maize monocropping in Zambia. It was co-created by IIED, HIVOS Southern Africa and a Dutch production company for a four-year programme called Sustainable Diets for All (SD4A)	Food system change specialists in the sustainable development sector; researchers; civil servants; programme leads and staff; advocates; funders
Human Settlements Group	Towards holistic solutions to Nairobi's affordable housing crisis (policy briefing)	The policy brief sets out the main issues of low-quality housing in Nairobi, including barriers to access, and outlines a range of affordable, holistic solutions to the city's housing crisis	Donors in the sustainable settlements sector; peers and practitioners

BOX 3. CREATING 'SAFE ENOUGH' SPACES FOR RACISM DISCUSSIONS

The focus groups consisted of IIED staff only, in line with anti-racist practice which encourages people and organisations to share self-reflection and critique before asking for partner or external contributions. We also took this decision due to time, logistical and budgetary constraints, after considering the importance of taking the time to build and establish 'safe enough' spaces for partner discussion.

As is usually the case in discussions of race, there were instances when Black staff and those of colour expressed frustration while White staff evinced fragility. We anticipated the discomfort, distress and other emotional impacts of this anti-racist work. The facilitators kept the groups' focus on listening and ensuring participants had equal opportunities to engage in discussions. The involvement of experienced anti-racism practitioners was critical in facilitating spaces 'safe enough' for challenging exchanges.

3

Understanding racism and how it is reproduced

This section outlines the theories underpinning the review's definition and understanding of racism within the development and aid sectors, particularly in relation to narratives. Our definitions are drawn from the literature review that preceded this work and narrative analysis theory. Here we also reflect on how racism is reproduced through the process of creating content.

3.1 What is racism?

In our review, we defined racism as a social, economic and political hierarchy positioning White people at the top and Black people and people of colour at the bottom. This racial hierarchy underpinned European-led enslavement and colonisation, resulting in multiple forms of exploitation and brutality across geographies. Ndlovu-Gatsheni describes this hierarchy: "In this

Figure 3. Racism's social, political and economic hierarchies
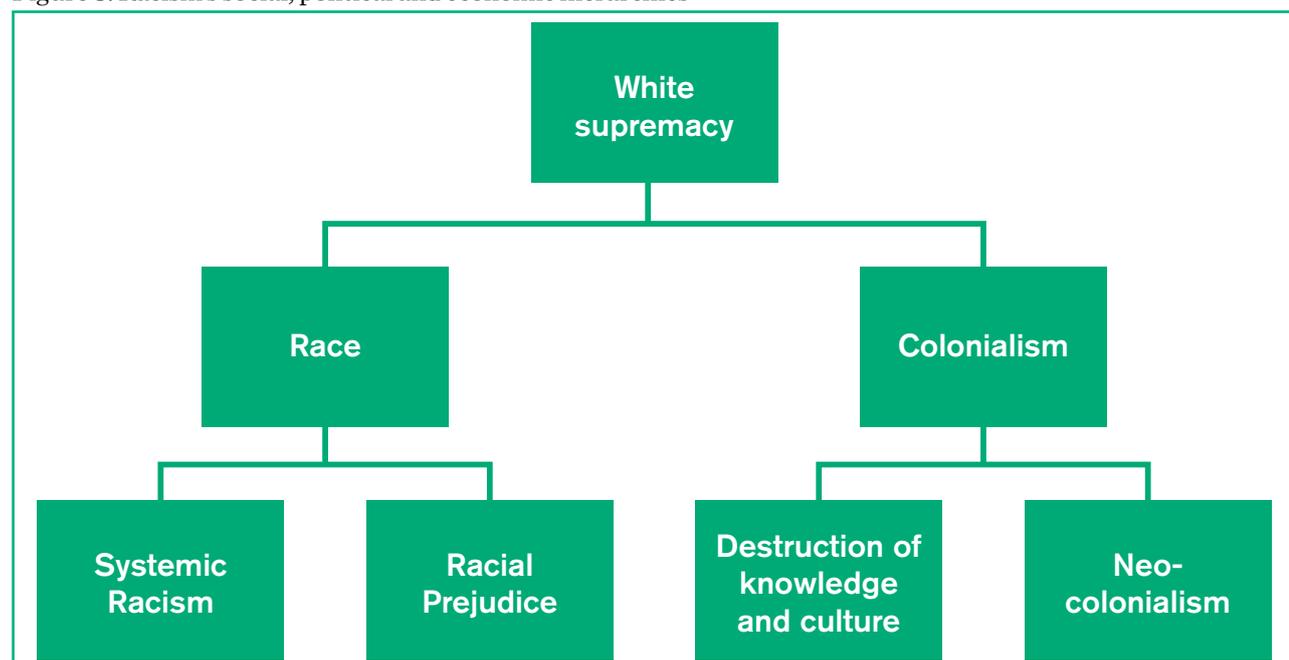
scheme of things, those people with Black pigmentation were pushed to the lowest echelons of the invented pyramid of the human species" (see Figure 3).[5]

Our review did not explore all forms of slavery and colonialism; this background is indicative rather than comprehensive. The review team focused on developing a robust understanding of the origins of racism, in particular the transatlantic trade in enslaved peoples spanning Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and South America.

History and theory underpinning our definition

The trade in enslaved peoples categorised Black people and people of colour into racial groups that dictated rights, labour roles and social, economic and political access. Lavalley and Robinson Johnson state that anti-Blackness that systemically and continuously dehumanises and marginalises Black people today is a product of the racism and hierarchies that dominated the 'slave trade' and colonisation.[6]

The transatlantic trade in enslaved people, and European colonial rule, heralded a militarised and violent exploitation of sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, lasting hundreds of years. While colonialism and slavery went hand-in-hand in many places for centuries, colonialism persisted long after the official end of the transatlantic trade in enslaved people. Strategies that created wealth by trafficking enslaved people who produced crops and goods slowly came to an end. They were replaced by policies that colonised regions in order to control the land, labour and resources needed for the same production. Rodney states, "It was economics that determined that Europe should invest in Africa and control the continent's raw materials and labor. It was racism which confirmed the decision that the form of control should be direct colonial rule."[7]

Alongside economic exploitation, colonial rule repressed and destroyed the knowledge and culture of the colonised, again systematically damaging Black people and people of colour. De Sousa Santos, who coined the term 'epistemicide', argues the erasure and disruption of knowledge and practices meant losing languages and ways of building societies and economies.[8] It destroyed spiritual practices that governed ways of relating to and living in harmony with nature. Tuck and Yang note that this relegation of land and sea to exploitable economic commodities is particularly relevant to international development practice.[9]

Epistemicide (see Box 4) set the scene for the dominant depiction of South American, Caribbean and African people as lacking civilisation, as the 'other' or 'inferior', and European society as 'ideal'.[10] Said explains how European colonisers maintained and grew their control over colonised countries by perpetuating negative and

BOX 4. EPISTEMICIDE

Epistemicide is the destruction of Indigenous knowledge around the world.

It is used within the context of colonisation which, through oppressive laws, policy and practice eradicated the routine use of Indigenous ways of living with natural world.

inaccurate portrayals of the people of these regions in TV, film and literature, while elevating the position of White people.

The privileged 'normative' position that White people enjoy today is, Mingolo states, based on two paradigms critical to maintaining racism:

1. Knowledge systems that centre European and Western beliefs and prejudices, and

2. European and Western cultures that deem themselves the dominant measure of who is human, civilised, knowledgeable, developed and modern.[11]

These paradigms – which may be evident in IIED's work – position Black people and people of colour as the other or inferior so that Whiteness is the norm and White people are perceived as being without race. These ideas inform how our review understands 'White supremacy' — not as an extremist viewpoint but as a widespread positioning of White people at the top of racial hierarchies.

3.2 Origins of aid and development, and legacies of racism

International development and aid emerged at the end of World War II as European colonialism fell and the era of independence emerged, characterised by neo-colonialism. The United Nations formed in 1945 to maintain peace and "achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian nature".[12] It established specialised agencies to look at various development issues and later in the 1980s created the World Bank to tackle the specific goal of solving poverty.[13] Development and aid approaches were very much based on European and Western paradigms and were dominated by White practitioners.

Arguably, the distinct field of international development arose from the spoils of war, the colonial era and the resulting power imbalances. Escobar describes this moment in history as one when, "at a stroke much of the world (mostly Black, Brown, Asian and Latino peoples) was framed as 'underdeveloped' or somehow inferior to its 'developed' counterpart dominated by White people.[14]

The very terms 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' that underpin our sector imply superiority and inferiority. Rodney states, "The association of wealth with Whites and poverty with Blacks is not accidental. It is the nature of the imperialist relationship that enriches the metropolis at the expense of the colony, namely it makes the Whites richer and the Blacks poorer."[15]

Yet within the Northern development and aid sectors, this vital link is rarely made. Rodney suggests this problematic denial is linked to language: the use of 'development' as an economic term without appropriate context. Partnered with the use of metrics such as gross domestic product to ascribe value,[7] development language suggests numbers are neutral and universal, without addressing the systemic world orders impacting northern and southern economies.

Critique of the development sector, which began in the sector's early days, often focused on the perceived 'natural' order of progression from 'underdeveloped' to 'developed'. It ignored the particular geopolitical circumstances that resulted in the oft-cited economic transformation of, for example, Singapore and South Korea to high-income nations. There was little critique of racism in development until the 1950s and 1960s when Fanon[16] and Thiong'o[17] began linking racism, global wealth and poverty, followed by Rodney.

Today, female scholars and activists who lead discussion of the racialised and racist nature of development are on the rise. In 2020, Neajai Pailey coined the term the 'White gaze' of development — measuring Black people and people of colour against a perceived higher standard of Whiteness and finding them severely wanting.[18] Pailey describes our continued use of binary language as routinely communicating the White gaze. This includes using juxtapositions such as developing versus developed, industrial versus agrarian, local versus global, and global South versus global North, where racially polarised global inequalities are implicit in all.

Pailey also spotlights development-sector language terming Indigenous, non-colonial institutions as 'informal' and compares them with 'formal', Western institutions. Many fail to realise those so-called informal institutions often wield more power and clout than the formal ones.[18]

Arnall is another female scholar contributing to sector discussions on racism. She states that the development and aid sectors' largely exclusive dependence on scientific solutions to development represents an economic, social and political asymmetry that generates "one-size-fits-all development recipes". These focus on concepts everyone can ostensibly agree on. While they help tackle intractable issues, they also "deflect attention from the economic and political reforms needed for lasting structural change."[19]

This reliance on hard science and avoidance of political and economic reform shapes who is seen as an expert in tackling imbalances in wealth and poverty — a front-and-centre concern in our review of racism and coloniality in development. All affect who gets funding, who delivers development and aid programmes and, ultimately, who leads the process of development. From this starting point, White people, Black people and people of colour have bought into the idea of White saviourism. It is the belief that White people have the capacity to end poverty, tackle climate change and 'save' Black women and children from desperate hunger, conflict and violence.[20]

Kothari's writing on the professionalisation of the development sector touches on this challenge, very much at the heart of our review, of deciding who is a development 'expert'. She discusses how many actors in the sector use their status as expert to sidestep scholars who have documented the colonial root causes of poverty. Kothari states this happens "often because of who experts are and where they come from. Their heritage allows them to legitimise their interventions by valuing their particular technical skills and reinforcing classifications of difference between the 'developed' and 'developing' worlds".[21]

Each scholar cited in this section highlights a common problem, that of 'Whitewashing' at best, and denial at worst of the racism and colonial legacies at the root of poverty and global inequality. We have discussed the systemic, structural nature of racism and coloniality and the ways racist and colonial tropes have filtered into the development and aid sectors. The following section looks at the role of development narratives in perpetuating these tropes.

3.3 Racism and anti-racism in narratives

We asked the focus groups to assess each content sample not as a single story, but rather to review the deeper narratives running through each. The distinction between narratives and single stories is important. Ruston defines narratives as a system of stories that hang together and provide a coherent worldview. He argues that people use narratives to understand themselves, other people and how the world works. Ruston characterises single stories as self-contained, having a beginning, middle and end, with a single thread linking storyteller and subject, but — crucially — the audience plays no part. He also argues the power that narratives hold to shape beliefs and actions stems from two connected components:

▪ The stories/what is told (the data), and

▪ How the stories are told (the pattern).

The process of mapping the data to the patterns happens repeatedly, often unconsciously, and continuously. For example, a story includes an event, people and a series of actions that resonate universally, but it can be told in many ways. The pattern, which is how stories are told, is informed by the storyteller's upbringing, culture, education and experience (see also Figure 4).[22]

One story included in this review describes efforts by IIED and partners to get international climate finance to communities in the global South. But within that individual story, the author may unconsciously convey — and the audience may absorb and later act upon — hidden narratives such as that Western NGOs must save local communities (saviourism).

Our racialised ideas about ourselves, others and how the world works also affect how stories are told and drive narratives told again and again using different story details (data) each time. Kendi states that over the last several hundred years, through to the present day, Western society has created narratives that we receive in our upbringing, education and life experiences that justify and uphold harmful and racist systems and

structures. He argues that to be anti-racist we must replace narratives that perpetuate racist and colonial tropes with narratives that name and explain structural and systemic racism. This is particularly important because most racism is hidden, unmentioned or expressed in explicitly discriminatory practice.[23]

We used both our theoretical understanding of racism and colonialisation and our understanding of how narratives forge beliefs to develop the review framework. Content producers can use the framework to better understand whether or how racism is woven into their existing work and to ensure future work is actively anti-racist. The framework includes six dimensions of racism and coloniality that evidence suggests are common to aid and development narratives. Each dimension is distinct but all are interrelated (see Figure 1 in Section 2 on methodology).

Table 2 describes the dimensions and provides examples of language and framing found in narratives that reproduce each one.

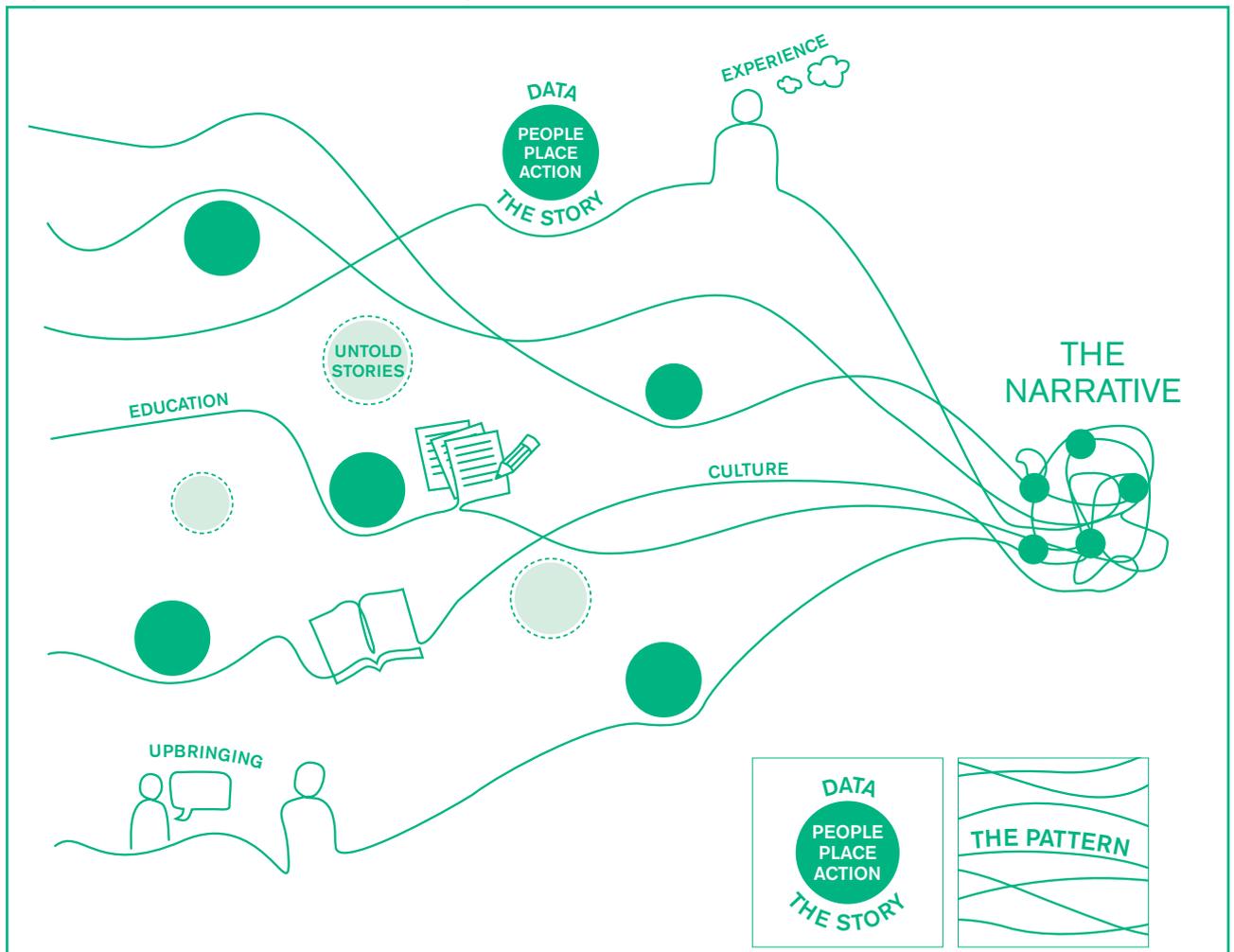Figure 4. How hidden narratives run through stories

Table 2. Descriptions of the dimensions of racism in aid/development narratives

DIMENSION	DEFINITION	CHARACTERISTICS	LANGUAGE OR FRAMES
Colour blindness	Fails to acknowledge racism and racial difference	• Avoids or fails to reference racism or people's race or ethnicity • Does not routinely include racial injustice within intersectional approaches • Avoids or fails to racialise White people and their perspectives • Avoids or fails to pro-actively use anti-racist language.	• Avoids talking about the racialised nature of global patterns of poverty and wealth. • Avoids use of racial descriptors and the terms 'racism' and 'racial injustice'.
White gaze	Sets Whiteness, Europe and the West as the standard of the modern world, separating 'others' from that	• Uses the West/Europe as the aspirational standard of progress and civilisation • Routinely juxtaposes ideas of wealth and poverty, using one to define the other (promotes binary thinking) • Homogenises or 'others' countries, continents and communities.	• Developed and developing • Global South and global North • Expert, participant • World's poorest, or poor/vulnerable people.
Saviourism	Categorises some people as in need of saving, others as having the capacity to save them	• Overly focused on saving, helping, supporting others, often women/girls of colour, at the expense of men/boys of colour • Uses images aligning Whiteness with powerfulness, Blackness with powerlessness • Describes work, staff and relationships in ways that undermine agency and capability.	• Aid • Empower, help, support • Beneficiaries, recipients • Capacity building.
Eurocentrism	Imposition of European/Western thought and leadership as the universal norm to benefit all.	• Presents as universal the voice, policies and approaches of White people • Thinking, speaking or acting on behalf of others • Presents Whiteness/Europe/the West as places/people most knowledgeable in aid and development.	• International community when referring to the Western powers • Global leader/superpower • Frames human rights and democratic abuses as issues outside Western society.
Neutrality	Discusses development and poverty as if they are politically, socially and economically neutral.	• Applies Western economic or scientific targets/data/measures to all countries as if all contexts are the same • Describes poverty as natural and having no cause • Avoids/fails to discuss poverty causes such as exploitative/extractive industry, and historical systems, structures of colonialism and slavery • Fails to recognise, or minimises power asymmetries.	• Frequent use of the words 'partner', 'partnership' without acknowledging power imbalances.
Exclusion	Exclusion, erasure of multiple ways Black, Indigenous and people of colour protect environment, create jobs, improve health care, etc.	• Selective storytelling primarily features aid and development organisations and actors • Relies on frames/language excluding historical, current contributions of Black, Indigenous and people of colour.	• Regularly over-emphasises poverty, corruption, poor leadership, conflict and disease • Excludes solutions/positives.

4

Results

Focus groups of five to eight participants each used the framework developed for this review to assess whether dimensions of racism were evident in four content samples submitted for their consideration. (For more detail on methodology, see Section 3.)

This results section is in two parts. The first compiles some of the central focus-group findings for each content sample. In the second, we look at the prevalence of any of the six dimensions of racism across the four content samples and explore how these prevalent dimensions relate to the three pillars of IIED's mandate: connecting through partnerships, generating new evidence and improving capacities.

4.1 Results from analysing each content sample

Content sample 1: locally led adaptation principles (blog post)

1. Content context

The locally led adaptation (LLA) principles, developed by IIED and partners, set out ways donors, global funds and financial intermediaries can transform the climate finance system and start to put Money Where It Matters (MWIM), as a related IIED programme is named. The focus groups analysed a blog post about the LLA principles, written by an IIED researcher in support of the MWIM programme.

MWIM investigates climate finance flows. It argues that to successfully tackle the climate emergency, money must be available to local actors such as district authorities, small and medium-sized businesses, and communities. Financial access would enable local actors to deal with the sharp end of the climate emergency threatening their current reality and immediate futures.

While the blog post is presented online as a sole-author piece, several international organisations developed the messaging and principles together, as is evident in the links to external videos and other institutions. IIED published the blog post with the launch of the LLA principles at the Climate Adaptation Summit in January 2021. This post primarily targeted an audience of high-level decision makers and donors who, it was hoped, would endorse or otherwise support the principles. Brevity is important in blogging: IIED content guidelines restrict their length to 700–900 words.

2. Dimensions of racism discussed

The focus group found the blog post perpetuated three dimensions of racism: colour blindness, saviourism and, to a lesser degree, Eurocentrism.

Colour blindness: the group discussed how the blog post avoided any discussion of racism, racial equality or injustice. For example, MWIM regularly communicates that only 18% of climate finance reaches low-income countries and just 10% reaches authorities, business and communities working at the district level. But the blog post does not refer to the racialised nature of international finance, which flows primarily from global North to global South, nor to the role structural racism plays in restricting funds reaching authorities, institutions, businesses and communities in majority-Black countries. The latter are experiencing the most dangerous impacts of climate change.

Saviourism: participants discussed the post's references to empowerment. In several places, it describes the LLA principles as helping and empowering local communities. This aspect of saviourism provoked discomfort as participants recognised how they could support the racialised ideas that people of colour need saving and that those presented as having the solutions are mostly White. They cited these statements from the blog copy:

> "Eight principles for locally led adaptation have been developed to help ensure that local

communities are empowered to lead sustainable and effective adaptation to climate change at the local level".

"Empowering local stakeholders to lead in adapting to climate change gives communities on the frontline of climate impacts a voice in decisions that directly affect their lives and livelihoods."

Some interpreted this empowerment language and framing as institutional arrogance, others as saviourism, and others recognised the link between saviourism and the White gaze. In addition to this language, the group noted the absence of content or quotes from people of colour facing the immediate impacts of climate change.

The discussion also explored the challenge — and importance — of differentiating between self-empowerment, and empowerment as something provided by another. The group recognised the problematic idea that a relatively small programme or policy can, in isolation, empower someone. Without reaching a concrete outcome, participants discussed how writing with a saviourism lens makes it all too easy to use words like 'empowerment'.

Eurocentrism: participants discussed the origins of, and the process for developing the LLA principles, particularly who identified the principles, and how. They reached no conclusion on this point, despite the explicit description of researchers and practitioners coming together from all parts of the world to create the principles. Staff discussed the blog post from the standpoint that the principles conveyed Western values and concepts. They said this was reinforced by the view that global leaders produced the principles and that Europe-based White men promoted them in accompanying videos.

3. Process themes

The participants suggested that just changing the wording that had reproduced saviourism and Eurocentrism would not change practices in the development sector. The group pondered the depth of change needed across different stages of the research and content-creation process to prevent replication of racist narratives.

The group discussed how shorthand terminology, such as 'partners' and 'empowering', were often used without appropriate definitions in blog posts due to the word limit for this type of content. They suggested including hyperlinks to more information sources to counter this.

Content sample 2: Make Change Happen (strategy)

1. Content context

The Make Change Happen publication captures IIED's vision, mission and strategy for 2019–2024. It is our

response to what IIED sees as the critical challenges of our time:

- Rising inequality

- The crisis of climate change, felt around the world but most strongly by majority Black countries and communities

- An increasing assault on the natural world

- Rising risks from rapidly growing cities, and

- Markets that are not delivering benefits for people and the environment.

The document defines IIED's institutional role and contribution, alongside that of organisations IIED partner with and other stakeholders. Rather than a document that presents research findings or evidence, this is a communications and strategy product that helps market IIED in the crowded development sector. It also helps to guide IIED's engagement with policy and practice at all levels. Adopting inequality as an explicit guiding narrative aimed to enable IIED to build momentum in the area of social justice in new ways, a key new direction for IIED.

The focus groups reviewed the strategy's first chapter. It was prepared by a group of staff including IIED's corporate communications team, senior leadership and strategy and learning group. It is based on consultations with our four research groups and global partners.

2. Dimensions of racism discussed

The focus groups identified and explored four dimensions of racism in the document: neutrality, saviourism, colour blindness and the White gaze. The issue of representation dominated the discussion, particularly how the strategy portrays IIED in relation to organisations that the groups partner with and the people who live with the impacts of poverty and environmental damage.

The group discussed how differences in the visibility and agency afforded by the publication to IIED and partner organisations were linked to racialised ideas of importance, knowledge and authority.

Saviourism: participants registered discomfort when they noticed the content frequently referenced IIED as empowering others. They discussed references to raising up people's voices, empowering and helping vulnerable communities in delivering change. The group shared thoughts on whether or how empowering other people truly takes place, and whether we too readily identify ourselves as able to empower others. IIED's frequent use of words linked to the empowerment of others as a form of saviourism was explored. Some in the group discussion recognised that while the content naturally centres on IIED, as this is our strategy document, partners were too easily 'othered' or marginalised in the narrative.

Participants particularly noted these passages:

> "From now to 2024, we will play our part to make change happen. We will help vulnerable communities achieve climate resilience and development, simultaneously pushing hard for global action to restrict planetary warming to 1.5°C. We will promote biodiversity alongside social justice, ensuring the women and men closest to the land, ocean and natural resources are heard."

> "To 2024, we will strengthen our partnerships for change at three levels: working 'bottom up' to enhance sustainability and inclusion, in partnerships that mobilise action; we will amplify marginalised voices and represent missing realities." [Two other points followed].

Colour blindness: participants noted the content does not mention race, racism or colonialism and their impacts. They added this is a common issue in IIED contextual analysis and its portrayal of global poverty issues. Some said this must change. Others highlighted that racism was mostly absent from IIED intersectional analysis, although it is central to most intersecting oppressions.

Group members said the failure to include in the content a discussion of racism and its role in poverty was more noticeable because it did outline other, similarly important oppressive factors driving the need to act against poverty, as the example below shows.

> "Increasing nationalism and xenophobia mask destructive interests that threaten both planet and people, eroding the solidarity needed for effective global action. And time is short: from the climate crisis to biodiversity loss, any delay in reaction is potentially catastrophic."

White gaze: even though organisations we partner with were mentioned often in the content, participants noted, there was no detail about them and their contribution to IIED's work. While the sample content could not name all our partners, the words 'partner' and 'partnership' were "used as a blanket term that disguises who partners are, a term that mentions them but renders them invisible", as one participant said. Some noted that the invisibility of global South partners is harmful in the context of broader narratives within the international development and aid sectors that position and profile White Western organisations and their staff as thought and practice leaders in these sectors.

Group members questioned the phrase "local to global" used in the text and how the juxtaposition of those two plays out in the reproduction of racism in our narratives. They noticed how partners in the global South are often associated with the word 'local' even though all people are local to somewhere. Participants explored how this association may insinuate that partners are 'small' or

their 'local voices' less important in contrast with IIED when it appears to present itself as a global actor, which sounds more 'important' and powerful.

Neutrality: group members discussed the frequent use of the words 'partner' and 'partnership' as though power relations between the organisations in question are equal which, they reflected, is rarely the case.

3. Process themes

Some staff in the focus groups considered how they could tackle the various issues discussed. A number said they felt "stuck", noting the development sector itself determines, to some degree, what is missing or harmful about the language and framings used in the content. Some expressed frustration in recognising that if IIED alone — and not the rest of the sectors — changed its language and framing, we would struggle to remain part of a "common, sector-wide language" we all need and use to communicate.

Content sample 3: Life Beyond Maize (video)

1. Content context

IIED's Sustainable Diets for All (SD4A) programme produced the video Life Beyond Maize to explore monocropping in Zambia, conveying voices of people working in and using local and national food systems. Delivered in collaboration with civil society organisations and citizen groups, SD4A explored how the lived experience of people who grow, buy and sell food can shape food policy.

IIED co-produced the video with the Dutch INGO HIVOS and the production company Brand Out Loud. The production team intentionally featured three Black Zambians working at different points in the agricultural and food production chain. The rationale was to celebrate the work of Black people tackling monocropping and dietary-diversity issues in Zambia and to move away from the perpetuation of a saviour narrative. The video was shown nationally at community meetings and in policy forums to influence decision makers and parliament. It was also shown at international food and nutrition conferences.

2. Dimensions of racism discussed

Colour blindness: the group reviewing identified colour blindness as a dimension of racism in the video, as colonialism was only briefly mentioned despite its significant role in monocropping nationally, but reached no consensus on the degree of the problem. They reflected on the importance of how and where all people — but particularly White staff — are positioned (or not) in a story. They discussed whether stories that are mostly, or only about Black people avoid racism altogether.

The group used this idea to explore whether, due to the learned and internalised nature of racism, Black people and people of colour can also reproduce it. One participant said single words and images in the development and aid sectors can instantly convey a particular dimension of racism, making it very easy to reproduce racism regardless of your ethnicity.

The discussion moved on to the video's mention of the colonial legacy of maize. The group concluded that the video producers succeeded in their intention of tackling racism by creating content that moved away from saviourist narratives. But they said more could have been done to expose and discuss colonisation's impact on food systems, hunger and diets in Zambia. Some in the group also felt that the music in the video portrayed a stereotypical or romanticised idea of Zambian life.

Content sample 4: towards holistic solutions to Nairobi's housing crisis (briefing)

1. Content context

This briefing was produced under an IIED programme called Shelter provision in East African cities: understanding transformative politics for inclusive cities, which ran from 2017-2020. The UK's Department for International Development (DFID), as it was known at the time, funded the project. IIED and partners from the UK, Denmark, Ethiopia and Kenya analysed systems of shelter provision in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia to inform more inclusive, affordable shelter interventions.

The briefing's target audience was donors. In particular, DFID was seeking to inform local advocacy for improved shelter as well as conceptual insights into shelter politics and housing-market dynamics. DFID had an interest in gender-related barriers to shelter access, and the project considered how ethnicity, migration status, age, gender and tenure status influenced access to shelter.

Besides the briefing, the project produced lengthier working papers analysing these themes in depth. For example, one covered the history of housing, including colonial-era racial segregation in Nairobi and its legacies. However, this policy brief did not discuss racial segregation or colonial dynamics.

2. Dimensions of racism discussed

Colour blindness: focus group members identified colour blindness in the briefing. Even though the aim of the project was to investigate how planning legacies affect today's provision of informal shelter, the narrative did not recognise the role of colonialism therein. The participants agreed that given the briefing's historical scope, and the fact that the longer working papers did address colonial dynamics, there was a "missed opportunity to discuss colonialism" in this sample. The group also discussed how IIED works in solidarity with alliances and groups exploring narrative change in relation to development and its colonial legacies — noting that opportunities to learn are available.

Neutrality: the focus group sought to better understand the dimension of neutrality in the framework by first discussing whether the development sector is depoliticised. They discussed depoliticisation as akin to the dimension of neutrality and said the traits common to the two are:

- A need to protect or prevent development from becoming a political issue, and

- Silencing or masking deeply political aspects of development work.

The group agreed depoliticisation is discussed in academic circles but rarely by practitioners and that development language itself is a tool for maintaining a sense of neutrality and masking the political nature of development work. Participants explored the language used in the sample and also noted it provided insights directly from interviewees by using quotes from them and partners.

One perspective centred on language in the briefing that was geared towards a donor audience, which understandably influenced how the story was told and framed. Some felt it privileged the interests of a more conservative audience. Others noticed the use of political language such as that supporting self-definition by communities. For example, the briefing used the term 'structure-owner' to describe people who own their own houses in the informal housing sector.

Conversely, participants felt language used to describe Kenyan businesses and government was uncomfortable in some places. They were concerned the choice of what was said and unsaid perpetuated racialised ideas, which fed into the prevailing development and aid narratives that African leaders are corrupt and uncaring. For example, the briefing referenced the Kenyan government in relation to unresponsive governance, and business in relation to corruption.

Without reaching a conclusion, participants explored whether the sample had failed to provide details to elaborate on the role corruption played and who was involved, or to consider the range of reasons and power dynamics that led to governments' poor response. Examples of the content discussed in more detail were:

> "Nairobi's inadequate shelter and land provision are rooted in the city's corruption, unresponsive governance, and lack of urban planning."

> "The directive from Nairobi city council needs reform."

3. Process themes

Staff discussed the tension built into writing about global South contexts for Western donors. They reflected on the fact that specific types of knowledge construction are used with different audiences, and that language in a working paper would differ significantly from an academic paper coming out of the same project. For example, the academic outputs from the housing project used more politically challenging language than that employed in the working papers aimed at a donor audience. This also includes the use of less politically challenging wording to create a narrative easily understood by donors.

Members of the group raised the conundrum that they must write in a politically neutral way to get their work funded, and that using neutral language masks power asymmetries. Participants discussed the need to use neutral 'development' language (including measures and concepts) entrenched in the sector. At the same time, they saw the need to challenge these realities because they silence or reduce space for discussing race-based inequalities that must be acknowledged and reconciled in development narratives.

The group raised the issue of power dynamics and expectations in partner consortiums, which often regard IIED staff as the research writers. Participants felt some partners would be disappointed if IIED attempted to shift this role and might take the view IIED was imposing an additional burden on them. Some wondered whether this was all based on IIED staff assumptions, and if or how IIED should renegotiate partner relationships, both in the North and South. Some said this would enable a more diverse set of viewpoints to emerge as research is written up, and broaden the target audience.

Lastly, the group discussed how lead writers and communications specialists negotiate language, when finalising content with editors. Participants said the editing process can feel like a compromise between:

▪ Using language that appropriately captures context and intricate power dynamics, and

▪ Language that echoes IIED's institutional messaging.

Participants said that each stage of revision involves negotiating language and provides opportunities both to reproduce racist narratives and to improve language and address dimensions of racism. The group agreed both authors and editors must be very sensitive and nuanced in selecting language, especially when faced with short timelines and limited resources for publishing content.

4.2 Trends and IIED mandate analysis

Of all six dimensions of racism and coloniality considered in focus group discussions, participants identified colour blindness and saviourism as recurring themes. Colour blindness was evident through the absence of content on racism and coloniality and their role in creating extreme inequality. The discussion related to saviourism is reviewed in more detail in the section Connecting through partnerships (below).

Participants discussed neutrality largely in relation to the way language is used to depoliticise poverty and present it as a neutral phenomenon rather than a consequence of the trade in enslaved people, colonialism and contemporary exploitative and extractive practices. In addition, 'partner' and 'partnership' were discussed in relation to their use in relationships where power relations between organisations were imbalanced. They noted all these forces operate within the hierarchies of White supremacy and anti-Blackness.

Exclusion was explored in focus group discussions either in relation to some samples' failure to tell stories of change — told solely by people of colour, about people of colour, from their cultural perspective. Or in the case of the video Life Beyond Maize, when celebrating this approach but noting its difference and usual absence. Some staff termed this "selective storytelling". Participants discussed Eurocentrism in relation to the centering of White Western values when conceptualising development.

In the remainder of this section we relate some of the dominant content trends identified by the focus groups to the three pillars of IIED's mandate: connecting through partnerships, generating new evidence and improving capacities.

Connecting through partnerships

Focus group participants noticed that much of the content centred on IIED, whether explicitly or implicitly, with narratives prioritising IIED knowledge and voice. Conversely, the voices of partner organisations, the majority-Black staff and staff of colour from global South institutes and organisations were peripheral. This was the case even when Black staff and staff of colour in global South organisations were co-authors. The Money Where It Matters blog post exemplified this, with statements such as, "IIED was among those leading the way", while local actors are referred to as "local stakeholders [to be empowered]".

Participants discussed the umbrella term 'partner' used frequently in the sampled content. One stated it was used in a homogenous way, contributing to partner invisibility. Focus group members criticised the shorthand term, 'global South', which refers to an incredibly varied set of countries and regions where our partners work. However, the content presented this diverse grouping as a homogenous bloc.

The focus groups each explored ways that communities living in the global South are often presented in the

margins of IIED's narratives. They discussed how the sampled content failed to adequately position Black people and people of colour as sources of knowledge or people with solutions to the experiences of poverty they live with. Instead the content centred on IIED, a Western institution. Participants considered this marginalisation in relation to imagery. In some cases they wondered whether it might be related to IIED image-use guidelines instituted in the name of privacy and ethics to prevent community contributors from being recognised.

Participants acknowledged that some narrative styles and image selection could help improve the visibility of partners. One example would be to use quotes from people interviewed by researchers. They suggested that content creators explicitly name partners and otherwise make space for their representation to help counter the centering of some stakeholders in the development process, and the marginalisation of others.

Some staff in the focus groups reflected on whether IIED's central position in narratives was tied to the perceived necessity of reinforcing the institution's role and contribution in projects with regards to donors; there was no conclusion on this. Ultimately, several acknowledged that decolonising aid means rethinking Western development institutions' role and how to connect with other actors in ways that centre them.

Improving capacities

Participants reflected on the dynamics of content production, particularly asking who is well served in the process, and whose capacities are developed. They discussed the concern that some content failed to acknowledge and increase visibility of global South research institutes and their staff.

Some noted that Black researchers from the global South were not specifically named when they contributed to data collection, analysis and, in some instances, to writing the content under review. Participants recognised that this challenge connects into wider issues of research design and allocating authorship. They discussed whether it means global South researchers do not get sufficient profile or other recognition of their contributions to IIED's products and in the wider development field in general. Some participants said the sampled content served IIED and White authors more than Black authors and those of colour who participated in its creation.

One group talked about the practice of development work generally and its resulting narratives as being of disservice to all involved. Participants explored challenging questions about their own roles and the recurring question of how they conceive of themselves in content creation, wondering whether they are there to help, learn, broker or gain knowledge then brought to international forums. They considered the extractive nature of the content creation process through the lens of racism, which is rarely part of similar discussions in other spaces.

Focus group members identified some practices to improve the visibility of partners alongside IIED, with equal access to influencing spaces, thus redressing the potential disservice done through IIED's work. For example, staff could relinquish lead and externally facing roles (for example, lead researcher, presenter, content writer) to their peers in institutes in the global South.

The group also noted that their content sample did not reflect the diverse people and activities in IIED work, so did not do us sufficient justice. Participants discussed how IIED builds alliances with researchers, legal negotiators, youth groups and solidarity movements across many countries. Yet, they said, IIED did not communicate this in the content sample, nor in our communications more broadly.

Generating evidence and content

In several of the group discussions participants said the reproduction of racism can happen at all or any stages of IIED's knowledge and communications production processes: writing proposals; securing funding; gathering data and images; data analysis and write up; content editing; branding and marketing.

In relation to proposal writing and research, some recognised the systemic challenge in the fact that IIED researchers, managers and bid writers often define the topics and language used when writing research methodologies, despite data being collected by researchers in partner organisations, or in collaboration with them. Some participants discussed the tension and discomfort felt when 'packaging' or 'translating' partner agendas for donors, yielding funding on one hand and a level of post-colonial power to reshape discussions on the other.

Conversely, some participants noticed that partners experience a similar tension when IIED acts as an intermediary between them and donors and they thus 'give away' some of their power in shaping the discussion.

In relation to content creation IIED routinely uses development sector language so staff can understand and collectively buy into a set of common ideas, which many participants saw as problematic. For example, employing the word 'poverty' and its associated meanings can be, on one hand, useful in some situations as a blanket term. However, participants noted that despite the many definitions and levels of 'poverty', it is often used indiscriminately to label entire communities, countries and to describe the continent of Africa as 'lacking' or 'deficient'. They said this undermines human dignity and hides important cultural, political and social wealth that is not monetised.

Focus group members noticed that when leading or contributing to data write-up, IIED researchers hold power in the choice of language and worldview presented. The discussion went on to explore how many words in the sampled content could evoke different meanings depending on who said them, to whom and in what forums. For example, 'empowerment' could take on a one meaning when discussed amongst majority-Black development leaders and practitioners, and another in a majority-White international meeting on capacity development. Participants said there are no quick fixes such as using a new vocabulary to create anti-racist narratives in the development and aid sectors.

Even though a common development language is needed to enable discussion and action, some participants felt more effort is required to define and use words outside of those normally employed by the dominant White culture and in Western sets of ideas. Participants noted this was an important issue for ongoing discussion.

BOX 5. FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS REFLECT ON THE REVIEW PROCESS

Participants noted the importance of carving time out of busy schedules for anti-racist work and expressed willingness to learn about racism. Some had already been part of anti-racist training. Others had little to no experience with it and, as a result, experienced some anxiety and discomfort in the sessions when faced with the enormity of the task of creating anti-racist narratives. At times, they acknowledged this anxiety made them want fast solutions to resolve racism within IIED and encouraged the perception of racism as an external problem rather than an issue linked to internal beliefs.

In general, it was difficult for White staff to really see themselves as participating in racism. At times, they understood racism in terms of people being good or bad, rather than it being a nuanced system in which all people are complicit in systematic racism. In time and despite discomfort, some White staff discussed their racial privilege, and Black staff and those of colour shared experiences of racism in their work and personal lives. They explored how Black people, people of colour and Indigenous people internalise and collude with racism.

In the review process White staff, in the main, recognised their own racial identity. Some staff shared experiences of working in global South countries where they felt their Whiteness uncomfortably increased their authority and access. This discussion was extremely useful as it encouraged others to reflect on how they also have participated in racist dynamics.

Overall, staff wanted to fundamentally understand antiracist practices and engage more in them, particularly in relation to storytelling. As a response to the narrative analysis process, the majority of participants want to change the way they write, finding new and better language and frames to use in their work.

Some were discomfited by the lack of immediate answers to the question of how to write differently. Others were pleased to know that naming and discussing racism as it showed up in content was an important first step. This was particularly useful for those staff who said they felt "trapped" by development language and concepts.

Staff spoke positively about the narrative analysis process and are keen to continue using it to deconstruct internal narratives and practice. They said it has the potential to move IIED toward more radical, progressive narrative framing and voice.

5

Conclusions

The review revealed important insights into the nature of racism and coloniality. It also reminded us that single stories work together to make up a narrative, an open-ended system of stories, that can and often do have the power to shape racist ideas about ourselves and others.

When looking at the four content samples together, we started to understand how they work as a system of stories — a narrative — and contribute to it. We found colour blindness consistently in all the content. This is important given that racism and coloniality have historically caused and continue to cause global poverty and wealth. By pointing out that there was no discussion of racism or coloniality in the content, participants took what for many may be a first step in practising anti-racism: exposing and then tackling systems, processes and ideas that negatively impact Black people and people of colour.

In the vacuum created by the colour-blind nature of the content reviewed, staff noticed both saviourism and the White gaze, two dimensions of racism that frequently reinforce each other. As we see in earlier parts of this review, the White gaze projects ideas of global North countries, peoples and cultures as the standard that others must meet. If and when people of the global South are found in some way lacking in relation to the standard, saviourism positions White Western stakeholders as rescuers ready to save, help, support and empower.

While discussed to lesser degrees, participants also noted the dimensions of Eurocentrism, exclusion and neutrality in the samples, particularly in relation to descriptions of IIED and our partnerships with civic and research organisations in global South countries.

In this review we have been starkly reminded that language and narratives emerge from beliefs and practice from the internal and external communities in which we work. Changes to our language will be meaningful only if we also change our practice and challenge our assumptions and biases. To work towards truly anti-racist narratives, our content must also explicitly recognise that racism, including coloniality, are root causes of current patterns of global wealth and poverty and global challenges such as the climate crisis. Progress means changing our system of stories and other ways we portray and represent ourselves, our donors, partners and the diverse communities we work alongside.

So how will this change take place?

This review has focused on narrative analysis only, which could suggest that individual authors and other content producers bear primary responsibility for leading the transformation. But organisational culture is set by the decisions and actions of our leaders, who review and endorse the standards, approaches and ideas that IIED as a collective institution communicates and perpetuates. We must achieve a difficult balance: being part of the development sector while seeking to change those aspects of it bound up with the changes we plan to make as an institute.

There are many things IIED can change on its own and in collaboration with close partners and donors who share our vision. For example, the review revealed that many in our organisation want to write differently to avoid reproducing racism and to create new anti-racist narratives. This requires that we first think differently, unlearning deeply ingrained beliefs from our upbringing and life experiences.

5.1 Roadmap for change

The review team developed the roadmap for change in collaboration with our strategy and management team. Our roadmap is written with the awareness that narrative change evolves over time and is linked to professional and personal changes amongst ourselves as staff and organisational leaders. After all, it is not

the narrative by itself that is undergoing a process of transformation; it is us and our worldviews. We have seen from our colleagues in the focus groups the power of approaching this journey with a willingness to be honest and the capacity to take risks and be vulnerable.

Delivering our roadmap will not always be straightforward. It requires reflection and introspection at a deep level, without the pressure of coming up with immediate solutions. Instead, we recommend a richer process whereby insights from the review are shared and considered carefully.

In closing, it is worth circling back to the section on racism and anti-racism in narratives on page 12. To be anti-racist, we must replace narratives that perpetuate racist and colonial tropes with others that call out, explain and help remedy structural and systemic racism. The analysis conducted in this review suggests that anti-racist narratives require a range of components that are not as yet sufficiently represented in most of IIED's work. These elements include:

- Recognition that the 'slave trade', colonialism, and modern extractive industries are root causes of extremes in wealth in majority-White countries, and poverty in majority-Black countries.

- Honest and open exploration of the impact that racism and colonialism have had on the development and aid sectors.

- Acknowledgement of the role of Black people and people of colour, past and future, in driving social, environmental, economic and political development around the world.

- Shifting the White gaze of development away from the binary framing of development challenges that position White people as superior and Black people as inferior.

The roadmap below sets out several actions that must be closely monitored if we are to achieve longer-term change. The roadmap's success will require IIED leadership and staff to differentiate between performative change and strategic cultural transformation. As such, this roadmap will be introduced in ways that ensure staff understand why change is needed and why it is relevant to each person's role. Everyone at IIED must be able to recognise the impact changes will have and the new and different ways of working required of them.

Our roadmap will be assessed and monitored over time by the communications and strategy and learning groups.

Step 1: foreground issues of racism in a review of organisational culture and values

This content review recognises the role that IIED organisational and development-sector culture more broadly play in reproducing racism in our overarching narrative. It will inform our upcoming review of organisational values and culture. We aim to create a culture and ways of working that actively align our core values with our anti-racist ambitions.

Step 2: continued narrative analysis and stakeholder discussion

This narrative analysis report will be shared with our key stakeholders. We will follow up with them to continue our process of reflection and explore the consequences of the findings in this review. These conversations will take place with our staff, partner organisations, board, donors and peer organisations. We will continue to use the narrative analysis framework with staff.

Step 3: commission additional content written by authors of colour

In relation to each research group, IIED will commission new content that discusses the links between our research priorities, racism, colonialism, the trade in enslaved people and exploitive industrial practice. We commit to working with more authors of colour to create new material that provides a starting point from which we grow the anti-racist content in our system of stories and overall narrative. In this we aspire to break new ground from an analytic, research and storytelling perspective.

Step 4: improve guidance on research design and delivery

The reproduction of racist narratives occurs across all stages of knowledge and evidence production. IIED commits to exploring concrete ways to integrate anti-racism in our guidance on research design and delivery. This will be led by the research strategy team, addressing processes including the peer review process, research ethics and our research excellence framework.

Step 5: improve guidance on content creation

We will review our brand guidelines, style guide and content portfolio to offer improved anti-racist guidance on communicating our work. Using insights gained from the narrative analysis framework, we will review IIED's core descriptors and revise them as needed. New or revised guidelines for content development will enable current and future staff to learn about anti-racist content production.

Step 6: continue anti-racist training

We will work with external advisors to develop an anti-racism training programme for our staff and senior leadership team. This will address learning needs identified through the race and racism working group, such as improving guidance for the programme design, delivery and content creation.

Step 7: measure the volume and impact of new anti-racist content

To embed anti-racist practice firmly within the IIED content-creation process and our culture more broadly, staff must understand more about the impact of their contributions to IIED's work in creating anti-racist content. We will devise measures for authors and other content creators to help assess their progress in addressing racism in our communications.

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In 2020/21, IIED conducted an internal review to better understand whether and how dimensions of racism play out in the narratives that it writes and publishes. With this exercise, IIED focused on exploring how far its written content acknowledges or omits historic patterns of enslavement, colonial exploitation, present day racism, and coloniality. The exercise is relevant to the wider discourse on racism in the aid and sustainable development sectors, particularly for organisations considering how internal discourse and external communications influence strategy, values and culture. The authors worked alongside experienced anti-racist practitioners to design a two-step methodology: having reviewed relevant academic literature, they developed a framework to facilitate discussions with IIED colleagues around the narratives in four communications products, including the organisational strategy. The framework identifies six dimensions of racism and coloniality that are dominant in aid and development storytelling: colour blindness, White gaze, saviourism, eurocentrism, neutrality, and exclusion. This evaluation shares findings from those discussions, exploring which dimensions participants found most prevalent in the communications they analysed. The review succeeded in starting a valuable process of reflection; it also revealed that the narratives IIED uses to communicate its work do not sufficiently acknowledge how patterns of coloniality and racism impact on the sustainable development challenges that the organisation works on. This evaluation concludes with a roadmap for change that sets out the actions IIED will take based on the review.

IIED is a policy and action research organisation. We promote sustainable development to improve livelihoods and protect the environments on which these livelihoods are built. We specialise in linking local priorities to global challenges. IIED is based in London and works in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific, with some of the world's most vulnerable people. We work with them to strengthen their voice in the decision-making arenas that affect them — from village councils to international conventions.

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