ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: PERSPECTIVES ON POWER STRUCTURES IN U.S.-FUNDED FOREIGN AID

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This research explores U.S.-funded foreign aid policies and practices from the perspectives of foreign aid professionals, focusing on their views regarding the impact of neocolonialism, obstacles in decolonizing the sector, and power dynamics within crucial aspects of foreign aid practices. Historically, U.S.-funded foreign aid has prioritized national interests, reflected colonial dynamics, and perpetuated neocolonial legacies. Using a decolonial lens as its conceptual framework, the study examines the discursive construction of meanings and relationships within the foreign aid sector. Through a mixed-methods approach involving 91 survey responses, 15 interviews, and post-interview questionnaires conducted one year later, the research gathers diverse perspectives across various foreign aid sectors. The findings underscore neocolonial practices, stressing the importance of local consultation in program design and highlighting challenges in funding allocation and political imperatives. While positive shifts prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement suggest progress toward power redistribution and diversity initiatives, skepticism remains about their depth. The study concludes with a systems approach, advocating for interventions at individual, organizational, and governmental levels to disrupt neocolonial practices, promote anti-racism,

empower local counterparts, and reform policies. This comprehensive approach aims to enhance equity and effectiveness in the foreign aid ecosystem through self-reflection and critical analysis from the perspectives of foreign aid professionals.

Keywords: neocolonialism, decolonization, foreign aid

PERSPECTIVES ON POWER STRUCTURES IN U.S.-FUNDED FOREIGN AID

by

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List of Abbreviations

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

DEI: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

FOA: Foreign Operations Administration

ICA: International Cooperation Administration

IFES: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

IMF: International Monetary Fund

iNGO: International Nongovernmental Organizations

IRI: International Republican Institute

MSA: Mutual Security Agency

NDI: National Democratic Institute

NED: National Endowment for Democracy

NGO: non-governmental organizations

UN: United Nations

USAID: U.S. Agency for International Development

USIP: U.S. Institute of Peace

WTO: World Trade Organization

Chapter One

Introduction

Historically, foreign aid initiatives funded by the United States have primarily been used to promote U.S. foreign policy objectives, advocating for the expansion of democratic governance and U.S. economic interests. However, the historical development of U.S.-based foreign aid has resulted in foreign aid practices deeply rooted in a dichotomous structure that echoes the dynamics of the colonizer and the colonized, thereby reinforcing the old framework with revisions — neocolonialism (Kothari, 2005; Rist, 2014). This study employs a comprehensive data collection approach comprising three distinct phases. It began with a survey sent to foreign aid networks, yielding responses from 91 participants. This initial survey aimed to construct a profile of foreign aid professionals, encompassing details such as their educational backgrounds, language abilities, years of professional experience, and perceptions of shared roles and responsibilities with international partners. Subsequently, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted, targeting participants identified through the survey to delve into their perspectives on neocolonialism within the sector and explore the obstacles to decolonization. Finally, a follow-up anonymous questionnaire was administered to the 15 interviewees one year after their initial interviews to gather insights into the impact of COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter Movement on the foreign aid sector.

The discourse surrounding the legacies of colonialism has permeated all facets of the United States society, and decolonization emerged as a prominent and widely used term across various levels of society. While postcolonial studies and research are not novel, the increasing attention from scholars and practitioners in the Global North has ushered in fresh perspectives, conceptualizations, and critical discourse on the subject. The foreign aid sector is no exception to

this evolving discussion, with a surge in new research applying revised frameworks and practical approaches. However, the contemporary conceptualizations and application of decolonization have become entangled in political and social polarization, further complicating decolonial efforts within foreign aid.

This study utilizes critical discourse analysis (CDA) to dissect and understand the language underpinning the discourse on neocolonialism and decoloniality within foreign aid. Although critical discourse analysis has been employed, often indirectly, as an analytical tool within the foreign aid sector, there is a pressing need for a more in-depth examination of the discourse among foreign aid professionals. Notably, while past applied research on US foreign aid has concentrated on gaining insights on recipients and implementors of foreign aid, or both, but less so with a unique focus on US institutions and power.

Critical discourse analysis informed the researcher on general principles and methods for analyzing language and discourse construct and legitimizing power relations, particularly within the contexts of coloniality and neocolonialism (Faille, 2011; Pieterse, 2011). CDA, a versatile tool, allows for an examination of how language and discourse reflect and shape social realities, including the diversification of the narratives in foreign aid. It also enables an analysis of the historical construction of power structures and social hierarchies through colonialism, their perpetuation through knowledge production and information dissemination channels, and their contemporary role within the foreign aid sector. The first three chapters of the dissertation employ CDA to explore the discourse surrounding the history of foreign aid, the institutionalization and professionalization of the foreign aid sector, and present-day neocolonial and decolonial theories, practices, and policies.

The roots of Critical Discourse Analysis can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s, with scholars like Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, and Michel Foucault laying the foundation (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018; Faille, 2011; Pieterse, 2011). While scholars such as Dimitri della Faille, Nederveen Pieterse, and Simon Koshut have written overviews and critiques of CDA in the foreign aid sector, there remains a difference in perspectives regarding its use. Faille (2011) contends that CDA has not been extensively employed within the foreign aid sector, expressing "hopes to inspire interest for those in the international development sector who, motivated by epistemological curiosity, seek tools to deconstruct, criticize and undermine European and North American discourses that make global societal designs possible and effective" (p. 216). Conversely, Pieterse argues that CDA has been used widely in foreign aid, even though it was not named as the tool for analysis. Pieterse (2011) critiques Faille by saying, "Discourse analysis is a major component of the post-development approach, which has been so influential that until fairly recently for a young generation of students, it was often the only development texts they knew" (p. 237). Pieterse further argues that while not explicitly framing itself as a CDA-based research, studies have drawn on the general principles of discourse analysis prevalent in the work of scholars like Arturo Escobar (1995) and Gilbert Rist (2014), and several other development policy scholars, are extensively cited throughout this dissertation. These principles enable a comprehensive analysis of how language shapes power dynamics and their implications within the foreign aid sector. The principles of CDA enables a comprehensive analysis of how language shapes power dynamics and their implications within the foreign aid sector.

Problem Statement

This research addresses four key issues within the U.S. foreign aid sector and its interactions with colonial legacies, neocolonial practices, and decolonization efforts. The first issue concerns how U.S. foreign aid policies and practices, while not directly involved in colonization in Africa and Asia, which preceded its formation, are deeply entrenched in colonial legacies. These legacies persist through neocolonial practices characterized by indirect control over less developed nations through economics, politics, and culture (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005; Mignolo, 2018; Ziai, 2017). Neocolonialism, defined as the control of less developed nations[1] by more developed nations through indirect means, including economic, political, and cultural domination (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005; Mignolo, 2018; Ziai, 2017), serves as the lens through which I examine this issue. The ongoing legacies of colonialism in post-colonial nations include issues like the ownership of land, indirect control of natural resources, and a significant influence, though often indirect, in the governance of these nations (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005; Mignolo, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Ziai, 2017). While the United States did not play a primary role in colonizing nations[2] in Africa and Asia, particularly in comparison to some European nations, it has emerged as a significant actor in neocolonial practices. This role has allowed at least some groups in the United States to directly benefit from colonial legacies by diplomatically positioning itself during the early stages of the post-colonial era (Kothari, 2005; Moyo, 2009). Following the formal development of foreign aid post-World War II, the U.S. strategically employed development projects as a form of diplomacy, thereby wielding geopolitical power through this mechanism.

The second issue concerns the nuanced elements of neocolonialism within the foreign aid sector, extending beyond high-level policies and funding procedures. U.S. foreign aid

[1] This term will be problematized in the conceptual framework.
[2] The U.S. is considered a settler nation, having been established through settler colonialism.

professionals operating in countries labeled as "underdeveloped" often unconsciously perpetuate colonial sentiments (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005; Rist, 2014). These behaviors are deeply rooted in Western Ways of Knowing,[3] an academic term encompassing Westernized perspectives influenced by scientific thinking, White Christian values, and socially constructed racial hierarchies (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021). Many U.S.-based foreign aid professionals, though not all from the U.S., are products of this educational and societal framework, significantly impacting the foreign aid field and calling for an in-depth analysis. However, these elements of neocolonialism are subtle and more difficult to parse out than high-level government actions and policies. In this study, there will be a strong emphasis on problematizing the positionality of Western Ways of Knowing as superior to other Ways of Knowing, specifically in how Western Ways of Knowing influence how foreign aid professionals conduct their work.

The third issue is concerned with the challenges and complexities related to the terminology, conceptualization, and intersection of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work within foreign aid organizations.

Decolonization is understood by some scholars as the legal term describing the return of land, power, and resources to formerly colonized nations, a critical consideration for societies still striving for independence (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In contrast, decoloniality is used by other scholars as a non-legal term to signify the process of removing colonial legacies, such as indirect ownership of land, resources, power, as well as the eradication of cultural domination and value systems, as defined in the 2021 Peace Direct report on Decolonising Aid (Mignolo, 2018; Peace Direct, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Ziai, 2017). For the purpose of this research the use of these terms is contextual and not an attempt to redefine them. One challenge scholars and activists face

[3] Authorship of Western Ways of Knowing is unidentified but used widely in academic literature.

are the evolving and often buzzword-driven use of decolonial terminology (Tuck & Yang, 2012). There is no universal understanding of decolonization or decoloniality, leading to differences in interpretation and application, as seen in academic, literary, historical, and social media discussions. The differing use of the terms *decolonization* and *decoloniality* is further discussed in the conceptual framework chapter, but please note that *decolonize* is the verb used for both terms.

Additionally, there is a conflation between diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in U.S.-based foreign aid organizations and true decolonial work. This research aims to explore this conflation, highlighting how organizations might be focused on diversifying their U.S.-based staff while overlooking power imbalances in the design, implementation, and evaluation of foreign aid projects. Critical discourse analysis will be employed to examine inequities in neocolonial policies and practices within the foreign aid sector. Furthermore, the decoloniality framework in this study was influenced by critical race theory, feminist theory, disability theory, LGBTQ+ theory, and ecological theory, offering a more comprehensive approach to decolonial work within foreign aid.

The fourth and final issue in this research is the limited impact of decolonial work on foreign aid despite decades of scholarly discussion. Scholars have addressed post-colonial legacies and neocolonialism, but there has been no significant change in the policies and practices of U.S. foreign aid. This study is designed to explore gaps in decolonial research, alternative foreign aid methods, current impacts, challenges, and acknowledge progress in decolonial work.

Research Aims

My dissertation's primary research question is: How does the discourse surrounding U.S. government-funded foreign aid projects shape the understanding and actions of foreign aid professionals involved in funding, staffing, designing, implementation and evaluating foreign aid practices, and what implications does this have for the process of decolonization?

The research is designed with the primary aim to: 1) investigate the presence of neocolonial structures, policies, and practices with the aim to understand how they shape the landscape of foreign aid practices; 2) dissect the intricate power dynamics between US-based foreign aid professionals and their international counterparts, with the aim to understand the US-based professional's perspective of the relationship; 3) explore the experiences of the U.S.-based foreign aid professionals by investigating the challenges they encounter, and their perspectives of the impact of policies and programs on the ground; and 4) gain insight into the most effective ways of providing support to professionals working on decolonial efforts in U.S. foreign aid. The support is aimed at fostering the disruption of neocolonial policies and practices and promoting the broader endeavor of decolonizing foreign aid.

The following questions were used to develop the data collection tools, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the primary research question:

- How do foreign aid professionals working on U.S. government-funded activities/projects describe their role in the funding, staffing, design, implementation, and evaluation of foreign aid practices?
- From the perspectives of foreign aid professionals, what are the neocolonial policies and practices in U.S. foreign aid?
- From the perspectives of foreign aid professionals, what are the approaches to decolonizing foreign aid operations?

Significance of the Study

This research holds significant relevance within foreign aid practices, as it addresses a gap in the existing literature. While numerous studies have explored the dynamics of neocolonialism in the context of foreign aid, there is a notable gap of research that focuses exclusively on the perspectives of foreign aid professionals operating within the neo-colonizer's context. This study bridges this gap by offering a nuanced analysis of the daily experiences and challenges faced by foreign aid professionals in the United States.

The significance of this research extends beyond filling a scholarly gap. The findings of this study have the potential to shape and transform foreign aid policies and practice, contributing to the mitigation of neocolonial structures. By understanding the perspectives of foreign aid professionals, policymakers and practitioners might make more informed decisions, fostering more equitable and decolonial practices in foreign aid operations. Moreover, this research has the capacity to provide foreign aid professionals a critical analysis of their roles and responsibilities. This, in turn, might empower them to reflect on their positions and engage in meaningful discussions within their professional networks.

Ultimately, the insights gained from this research aim to stimulate dialogue and action within foreign aid professional networks. It encourages individuals in the sector to think critically about their roles and responsibilities, fostering a more inclusive and decolonial approach. By engaging foreign aid professionals working within colonizer contexts, this study opens new avenues of analysis and decolonial approaches within the foreign aid industry.

Positionality

As I engage in this research, I confront many questions about my position as a white, middle class, American woman exploring decolonization. This self-reflection serves as a vital tool to critically examine the potential biases I bring into this study. These introspective reflections have gone beyond mere self-examination, serving as a robust foundation for approaching this study. A central aspect of my positionality is the recognition of the socially constructed hierarchies that ascribe value and privilege to individuals based on their racial, gender, and socio-cultural identities. As a white cis-gendered woman, I am acutely aware that historically, and often still today, society mostly assigns a higher value to my life over others because of my identity, with the exception of being a woman. This awareness serves as a cornerstone for understanding the intricacies of neocolonialism, and I am fully committed to examining my role within this context.

My positionality involves more than just acknowledging privilege; it is an ongoing process of self-reflection, conscientious action, and an unwavering commitment to social justice. I seek to identify and challenge instances where I may inadvertently perpetuate hierarchies and inequities through my language and behaviors. This reflexive practice of recognizing and disrupting deeply ingrained mentalities is an essential step in unraveling the imbalances ingrained in society. However, I am also cognizant of the fact that I cannot entirely eliminate the inherent biases of my white, Western, etc. perspective. Therefore, in this research, I do not claim to fully adopt a decolonial mindset, recognizing that it would not be genuine or ethical as a white researcher. Instead, I concentrate on maintaining self-awareness and engaging in critical reflection.

It is also important to clarify that my objective is not to assume the role of a "savior" but to participate in a broader movement for equity and justice. This acknowledgment embraces the

complexity of my intentions, particularly the inherent tension in addressing systemic issues while acknowledging my own complicity in the structures I aim to change. Furthermore, my journey toward a more comprehensive understanding of my positionality extends directly to the context of the research itself. As I explore decolonization in foreign aid, I am not a detached observer; instead, I recognize my role within the research context, and my previous experience in roles similar to my research participants. I worked for several years in various countries, including Myanmar, Israel with non-Jewish African asylum-seekers, and with several organizations that focus on community building in Sudan but are managed by Sudanese diaspora communities in the United States. I can relate to the motivation to be a foreign aid professional and the cyclical ways of knowing and thinking from the Western perspective, even when making attempts to critically reflect on them.

In relation to the participants in this research—foreign aid professionals—it is imperative to acknowledge that my position fluctuates, shifting between being perceived as both an insider and an outsider. While I collaborate with individuals based in international organizations within the United States for this research, I am not a direct funder for their projects. This mitigates certain power dynamics, as participants are esteemed as experts within their field. However, various cultural and identity factors, including my privilege as a white researcher, may influence some power relations during interactions with research participants. My whiteness has potentially afforded me certain unspoken advantages while working in foreign aid, such as having experience of being taken more seriously or given more authority, which can affect how open the research participant might be. They may relate or they may worry about my white fragility, thus changing the dynamics of our interactions. This positionality was actively considered in the data collection phases of the research, an area of utmost importance. Another

aspect of my positionality needs consideration regarding potential bias in data analysis and recommendation formulation. It is important to emphasize that complete elimination of bias in human research is unattainable. As a white researcher, I acknowledge and embrace, though try to reduce, the intrinsic biases associated with my perspective. I approach the research process with humility, fully aware that my analysis is inevitably influenced by my own biases and perspectives.

My positionality in this research is not static either. Rather, it is a dynamic and continuous reflection, enabling me to continually examine my privilege and confront any biases that may emerge throughout the research process. My journey as a researcher is often characterized by complexities, tensions, and contradictions, and I try to embrace these challenges. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the collective work to dismantle systems of oppression, recognizing that the path is not straightforward but a continuous, dynamic process.

In a world free from hierarchies and oppression, the need for discussion on positionality would not be necessary. Until that day comes, likely not in my lifetime, I remain dedicated to supporting the journey towards a more equitable, just, and inclusive world.

Chapter Two:

Background Context: Foreign Aid Past and Present, and the Foreign Aid Professionals

Historical Background of Foreign Aid

This section presents an overview of the historical development of the foreign aid industry offering insights into the evolution that led to the neocolonial policies and practices currently prevalent among foreign aid professionals today. Throughout its history, the United States government, primarily influenced by political and economic elites, has consistently prioritized distinct political interests overseas, guiding the allocation of foreign aid resources. Notably, these interests have included the propagation of American democratic values, economic investments, and, to a lesser extent, the promotion of human rights, though often only when it is also attached to U.S. political and economic interests (Cole, 2016; Rist, 2014). It is this persistent emphasis on furthering U.S. economic and security objectives that underscores the neocolonial mindset that continues to shape the industry. The historical approach has largely mirrored a top-down framework reminiscent of the colonial era, where the agenda and distribution of resources were primarily orchestrated by the colonial powers (Rist, 2014).

The post-World War II landscape witnessed two transformative events that irrevocably influenced the field of foreign aid. The first was the inception of the Marshall Plan in 1947 under the direction of George C. Marshall, the then U.S. Secretary of State. The vision of this strategy focused on providing financial and technical assistance to rebuild Western Europe, fostering economic stability and reconstructing infrastructure (McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014; USAID, 2020). The spotlight on Europe's reconstruction

relegated the development of other regions to a secondary position (Rist, 2014; USAID, 2020). Building on the Marshall Plan's success, President Harry S. Truman inaugurated a new era in U.S. foreign aid with the landmark Point Four speech, which laid the foundation for the contemporary American concept of foreign aid (Escobar, 1995; Rist, 2014; USAID, 2020). Truman's proposal focused on two primary goals: the reduction of poverty and the expansion of production in developing countries, creating new producers and consumer markets for the United States, with an undertone to propagate democratic values while controlling the threat of communism (McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014; USAID, 2020). The religious undertones of "helping" or "saving" others infused in the Four Point speech, reflecting a discourse deeply resonant with American society (Rist, 2014). Truman ended his speech stating, "With God's help, the future of mankind will be assured in a world of justice, harmony, and peace." Rist discusses this saying,

> Truman's speech was intended first and foremost for his fellow countrymen, who could not be insensitive to such a way of presenting history, and the fact that it corresponded (in a secular mode) to the truth proclaimed by the Church made it sound even more convincing. But the audience went far beyond the United States, and the underlying belief was shared not only by the Christian world but also by everyone who belonged to a salvationist religion. Taking advantage of this structural homology with religious discourse, the new belief in 'development' had its credibility further strengthened by a naturalist metaphor so long part of the Western collective consciousness. (p. 77)

Rist has described the persuasive power of aligning the development narrative with both "secular truth" and religious beliefs. Additionally, the quote underscores how the use of a naturalist

metaphor further bolstered the credibility of the belief in "development." This analysis highlights the deliberate use of certain elements in Truman's speech to appeal to a wide and diverse audience, leveraging shared cultural and religious references to strengthen the message.

The second significant event that laid the groundwork for foreign aid was the creation and establishment of major international institutions: the Bretton Woods system at the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference and the United Nations in 1945 at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference (Escobar 1995, Rist, 2014; USAID, 2020). By the early 1950s, foreign aid had emerged as a key component of U.S. foreign policy. The formation of major agencies like the Foreign Operations Administration, International Cooperation Administration, and the Mutual Security Agency – now absorbed into the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Defense – attested to the growing importance of foreign aid in shaping international relations (Rist, 2014). Once President Kennedy took office, the 1960s were marked as the "decade of development," and U.S. foreign aid incorporated an emphasis on human rights issues (McEwan, 2009; USAID, 2020). In 1961, President Kennedy signed the Foreign Assistance Act into law, leading to the establishment of the United States Agency for Foreign Aid (USAID) (USAID, 2020). The shift away from a narrowly economic focus towards a human rights focus continued into the 1970s, with more foreign aid funding interventions emphasizing basic human needs such as education, health, and food and nutrition, though more in name than practice (Kothari, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Rist 2014). Economic development, emphasizing the capitalist model, and U.S. national security were still the main objectives of development, incorporating fundamental human rights as an incentive to nations seeking development assistance (McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014; USAID, 2022). The United States approached foreign aid with a mindset rooted in scarcity, driven by a belief in modernity defined by Western cultures as the universal goal for all nations. Further

promoting economic aid that can promote development through supplementing the host country's "limited capital and technical resources" as the path to reach modernity. The U.S. also extended this approach to economic development by actively influencing the policies and programs of "underdeveloped" nations (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005; Rist, 2014).

In the 1980s, another transformation took place, with the foreign aid sector shifting its focus from smaller, individually tailored projects to large-scale, standardized, market-oriented initiatives (USAID, 2020). Rist (2014) describes this by saying, "Paradoxically, development is becoming universal, but not transcultural" (p. 44). Essentially, Rist (2014) is describing this as an era when development initiatives adopt a one-size-fits-all program, prioritizing program outputs, such as financial expenditures and the number of implemented programs, above all else. Throughout these changes, the promotion of the capitalist economic model and U.S. security remained central to development efforts, including basic human rights serving as an incentive for nations seeking aid (McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014; USAID, 2022). This market-based approach expanded further in the 1990s, as development projects aimed to meet the economic "needs" of each nation while promoting "democratic" development (McEwan, 2009; USAID, 2020). USAID, in its strategic planning, advocated a tiered funding system, offering integrated assistance to developing countries, crisis support to transitional nations, and aid through non-governmental organizations to countries with limited USAID presence (USAID, 2020).

In the 2000s, U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq led to another shift in the nation's foreign aid strategy. Foreign aid increasingly focused on rebuilding infrastructure, particularly in governance, civil society, health, and education. Government agencies strengthened partnerships with the private sector to enhance their funding and programming (Kothari, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014). To this day, the primary stated goal of foreign aid, outlined by U.S.

government agencies, NGOs, and other private aid organizations, is to foster building democratic nations with free markets and improved living standards. However, it is important to note that, despite the shifts in focus, foreign aid practices have largely reframed the rhetoric of the objectives, rather than making fundamental changes in approach.

The U.S. federal government increasingly financed development projects worldwide, permanently attaching funds to specific conditions that advocated for democratic and capitalistic values (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005; Mignolo, 2018; Moyo, 2009; Ziai, 2017). From the outset, the U.S. foreign aid agenda was deeply intertwined with U.S. foreign policy interests, functioning as a foreign policy tool for advancing national security, economic gain, and geopolitical influence (Foreign Assistance.gov, 2022; Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). Annually, the United States government allocates billions of dollars for foreign aid (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). This aid takes various forms, including funding, resources, training, and support provided to foreign governments, civil society, and other private sector entities through grants or concessional (low-interest) loans (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). While the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) administers the majority of U.S. foreign aid funding, other agencies, such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), U.S. Departments of State, Agriculture (USDA), Treasury, and Defense (DOD), operate with more limited budgets (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). Some U.S. government funding is channeled directly to multilateral organizations like the World Bank or the United Nations (Foreign Assistance.gov, 2022; Morgenstern & Brown, 2022).

U.S. foreign aid projects span from capacity building to supporting “free and fair” elections, building education programs, supporting agricultural development projects, and promoting economic development work. Congress determines the amount of money and overall

thematic focus of foreign aid projects. The federal budget subsequently allocates these funds, along with the associated restrictions, sometimes referred to as conditions. These conditions represent a method of indirectly influencing recipient nations by providing financial assistance, capacity building, and other forms of aid in exchange for the implementation of policies aligned with U.S. democratic and capitalistic values. The underlying interest attached to U.S. foreign aid reinforces control over these developing nations, fostering a disingenuous and neocolonial dynamic in foreign aid.

Institutionalization of Foreign Aid

The institutionalization of foreign aid is a multifaceted process that spans various international bodies, most notably the United Nations, and multilateral development banks. These organizations played pivotal roles in shaping the global foreign aid landscape. The post-World War II era, particularly following the Four Point Speech, marked the inception of modern foreign aid institutions, with the United Nations emerging as a prominent player.

The United Nations, established in the mid-1940s, initially focused on creating political alliances and fostering global peace. Over time, foreign aid became integral to the United Nations' mission. It evolved into a critical tool in achieving the organization's primary objectives (United Nations, 2020). As articulated on its website, the purpose of the United Nations is to "help people build better lives and countries achieve peace and sustainable development" (UN, 2020). The evolution of foreign aid highlights the growing importance of the United Nations in developing institutionalized foreign aid globally; for instance, the UN plays a pivotal role in shaping frameworks and indicators of "success" for foreign aid worldwide. In 2000, the United Nations hosted a Summit with 149 Heads of State and high-ranking government officials from over 40 other countries to unify international goals to eradicate global poverty in the new

millennium (United Nations, 2020). The result of this summit was the creation of the Millennium Development Goals, seemingly a set of goals and indicators for improving education, health, and poverty reduction within 15 years (by 2015) that could be agreed upon by all the great powers of the United Nations. With the creation of the MDGs, the field of foreign aid went from having a loose definition and approach within the field to having universal objectives that would guide projects developed by foreign aid agencies. In 2015 the MDGs were replaced with a revised set of goals called the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2020), yet the underlying neoliberal values of foreign aid remained.

Moreover, the SDGs, akin to the MDGs, bring to the forefront the tension within the development landscape. Notably, they highlight the conflict between two key priorities: environmental sustainability and the capitalist-driven economic development. This tension underscores the changing nature of global development objectives. The environmental challenges posed by a capital-driven approach, including resource extraction for the global market and economic stability, create complexities in achieving both these goals (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014). Therefore, the tension between these aspects demonstrates not only the influence of global institutions like the United Nations in shaping development agendas but also the ongoing adaptation of at least some foreign aid organizations to meet changing objectives and priorities. The SDGs are not just a set of objectives but reflect an evolving global consensus on critical development priorities. As a result, they significantly influence the strategies and priorities of many foreign aid agencies. Their role extends beyond serving as benchmarks; they actively shape the activities and focus of these organizations.

Simultaneously with the establishment of the United Nations, another category of multilateral agencies emerged, multilateral development banks, and the International Monetary

Fund. These institutions, including the World Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, were designed to offer financial and technical assistance to developing nations, aiding them in enhancing economic management and alleviating poverty. Development banks typically extend loans to developing countries at lower interest rates, thereby facilitating the construction of essential infrastructure. While the initial objectives and functions of these development banks have undergone some modifications, their fundamental purpose to integrate 'developing' nations into the global capitalist/market structure has remained consistent from their inception. Some of these banks not only disburse loans but also actively manage development projects, highlighting their expectation for achieving a return on investment, which aligns with their identity as a financial institution rather than a development agency (Rist, 2014). Consequently, the core objectives of development banks are to endorse capitalistic principles, further reinforcing the sway these institutions exert over the economies of post-colonial nations. The United States exemplifies this indirect power over development banks; the website of the U.S. Treasury Department reads,

> America's leadership in these institutions ensures that the United States can help shape the global development agenda, leveraging its investments to ensure effectiveness and on-the-ground impact. For example, due mainly to U.S. pressure, a significant component of a multilateral development bank lending is now in the form of grants, helping to break the lend-and-forgive cycle that previously crippled development in many countries. U.S. leadership has also adopted new lending policies that focus on quantitative results and reward the strongest performers.

The language that speaks of "U.S. pressure" influencing the global agenda illustrates the potency the United States commands within the foreign aid sector. Even the emphasis on "results" underscores that the determinants of success in foreign countries are influenced by U.S. preferences rather than allowing those nations genuine sovereignty over their development.

The United States positioned itself in a leadership role within multilateral organizations during their formative stages of institutional development. Subsequently, in the early 1950s, the United States also formed its own government-based foreign aid agencies. These agencies included the Mutual Security Agency, the Foreign Operations Administration, and the International Cooperation Administration. These agencies concentrated on various aspects, ranging from immigration to military, security, and technical assistance programs, several of which continue to exist today (USAID, 2022). Additionally, other government departments in the United States, like the Department of Labor and Human Rights, integrated foreign aid components into their structures in the late 1940s (Donor Tracker, 2020). Currently, the administration and allocation of U.S. foreign aid funding are primarily managed by USAID, with the State Department receiving a notably smaller budget allocation. The leadership of USAID rests with a politically appointed Administrator, whose role is marked by periodic evaluation and adaptation following changes in U.S. Presidential leadership, occurring every four or eight years. Similarly, the heads of regional bureaus in the State Department and USAID are also politically appointed, introducing pockets of change within the foreign aid agenda. The impact of these changes extends beyond USAID and the programs it supports, encompassing a vast array of government, non-government, and nonprofit international aid organizations. The top-down structure defining U.S. foreign aid has led to bureaucratic barriers that challenge any possibilities of substantive modifications to the system. Thus, the processes of funding, project design,

implementation, and assessment within foreign aid are stuck in ongoing paradigms, characterizing the present landscape in which U.S. foreign aid professionals operate within the United States.

Certain agencies, developed by Congress, possess bipartisan boards, and receive U.S. funding but are categorized as "nongovernmental organizations" or quasi-governmental organizations. Two prominent examples of such entities are the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). The NED is predominantly funded by the U.S. Congress, with funds channeled through USAID, and subsequently allocated to nonprofit organizations abroad or other bipartisan "NGOs" established by the U.S. government, including the National Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the Center for International Private Enterprise, and the American Center for International Labor Solidarity, among others. These NGOs have articulated objectives focused on promoting U.S. “democratic” values and facilitating capacity-building projects. However, it is essential to recognize that these goals are embedded within the broader foreign policy agenda outlined by Congress, which prioritizes U.S. national security, geopolitical influence, and economic prosperity. Similarly, USIP receives U.S. government funding for much of its operational budget and through contracts they bid for against other international organizations. USIP is not considered a U.S. government entity, but it is housed in a building on federal land, though the building itself was constructed solely through donations. Like USIP, most nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations that originate outside government influence have still primarily relied on indirect U.S. government funding through government contracts or through the administration of USAID-granted projects via contractual partnerships. As a result, a substantial proportion of U.S.-based foreign aid initiatives, whether

administered by governmental institutions or non-governmental organizations, are considerably shaped by the U.S. government's foreign aid agenda and priorities (McEwan, 2009).

Foreign Aid Today

The U.S. government's extensive influence across all institutional levels of foreign aid has indirectly, and possibly unintentionally, established a substantial workforce supporting the U.S. government's foreign policy agenda. U.S. foreign aid is a dynamic and evolving field, continuously adapting to changing social, political, financial, and cultural contexts. Regardless of the political party in power, recent U.S. administrations and congresses have consistently prioritized national security (increasingly so since the 9/11 attacks), commercial interests, and, to some extent, humanitarian concerns (Foreignassistance.gov, 2022; Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). Congressional Reports, such as *In Focus*, define national security interests as "Aid" that "may help build stability and counter international threats by promoting global prosperity, public health, environmental protection, democracy and the rule of law, and the military readiness and security of allied nations" (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022, p. 1). Programs aligning with this priority include training and capacity building in elections, women's leadership initiatives, military peace training, and civil society organization capacity building, among others.

The congressional report, *In Focus* (2022), uses a definition for commercial interests that explicitly states how the United States will benefit from the programming, stating, "supporting economic growth and expanding trade capacity in developing countries may expand markets for U.S. exports, creating economic opportunities and jobs [not to mention corporate profits] in the United States" (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022, p.1). Additionally, the report defines the U.S. interest in humanitarian work as "providing food, shelter, and other basic assistance to displaced

persons and other victims of natural disasters and conflict is a reflection of U.S. values and global leadership" (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022, p.1). Foreign aid as a foreign policy tool has never been hidden. Yet, these definitions of U.S. foreign aid priorities highlight a disconnect between the stated U.S. democratic values being "the inclusion of all people" and putting those values into practice, not only in the context of the United States but also in the power dynamics between U.S. foreign aid professionals and local personnel or partner organizations abroad. These three overarching priorities can be further broken down to include promoting economic growth, reducing poverty, improving governance, expanding access to health care and education, facilitating stability in conflict regions, strengthening regional allies, curbing illicit drug production, and trafficking, and promoting human rights (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022).

Each new presidential administration, coupled with the ever-evolving Congressional seats in the United States, ushers in a new set of priorities, budgetary planning, and regional interests in foreign aid. While administration priorities undoubtedly influence foreign assistance initiatives, Congress typically plays a more prominent role in authorizing and allocating aid (Foreignassistance.gov, 2022; Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). Congressional members' specific priorities and regional and sectoral interests can also further shape the administration's foreign aid strategy (Foreignassistance.gov, 2022; Morgenstern & Brown, 2022), a topic that is explored in the next section.

Changes in foreign aid priorities are apparent during different U.S. administrations. For example, the Obama administration (2009 - 2017) emphasized initiatives like the Global Health Initiative, Global Climate Change Initiative, and the Feed the Future Initiative. Conversely, the Trump administration (2017-2021) pursued substantial cuts in foreign aid, with a focus on assisting "friendly" nations (Regilme, 2021). The Trump administration's foreign policy agenda

encompassed divisive approaches. Michael Igoe (2020), a Senior Reporter with Devex, describes the Trump Administration's foreign policy agenda as "aimed to divide the world between friends and enemies, attacks on multilateral institutions, politically-motivated funding cuts to some countries and politically-motivated humanitarian aid to others, emboldened versions of policies against abortion and family planning, and a combination of high-level vacancies and highly-controversial appointments to political positions within U.S. foreign aid agencies" (p. 1).

During the Trump Administration, there was also a transition at USAID from a donor-recipient aid model to a partnership-based model (USAID, 2022). While the exact definition of "partnership" remains unspecified, it is inferred as a more equitable relationship and will be discussed further in the conceptual framework. As a former USAID official pointed out, "People around Trump were able to draw on the president's broad statements and general lack of strategic involvement to make the case for very different policy outcomes — on one hand, a whole-scale cut to foreign aid, and on the other a more nuanced argument for dynamic, evidence-based development partnerships" (Igoe, 2020). This transition was facilitated by individuals like Mark Green, former USAID Administrator, who seized the opportunity created by the disruptive environment (Igoe, 2020; Regline, 2021). The former USAID official remarked, "Enter somebody like Mark Green, who is using that disruption to his advantage by helping create the 'journey to self-reliance'" (Igoe, 2020). Green's "journey to self-reliance" model is closely tied to the current localization initiative, a concept emphasizing the transfer of decision-making power in aid programming to local USAID offices primarily staffed by citizens of partnering countries (USAID, 2022). While it is difficult to precisely assess the extent of Trump's influence on this transition, USAID Administrator Mark Green noted, "Did President Trump personally engage in my work? Not really" (Igoe, 2020). Despite Trump's push to reduce aid funding, Congress

increased funding, particularly to counter the global influence of Russia and China, especially with their infrastructure projects (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022).

The impact of the Trump administration on foreign aid remains a subject of debate, with various articles highlighting the contentious atmosphere that prevailed during that period (Igoe, 2020; Regileme, 2021). The majority of the discourse on foreign aid during the Trump Administration included concerns related to the mental health of foreign aid professionals, shifts in workplace dynamics, and heightened scrutiny of racialized policies and practices within the foreign aid community, such as conditional funding that results in a power dynamic where predominantly white U.S. policymakers dictate terms to predominantly non-white nations.

While discussing the current state of foreign aid, it is essential to consider the evolving priorities of the Biden administration (2021-present) and the impact of recent domestic events. The Biden administration has declared a focus on three "cross-cutting priorities," including addressing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and rising authoritarianism (Foreignassistance.gov, 2022; Morgenstern & Brown, 2022, p.2). Biden appointed Administrator Samantha Powers, who has pushed the localization initiative. Still in the midst of the Biden administration, more time will be needed to determine the true impact this Administration and Congress will have on foreign aid.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has potentially left a lasting impact on the state of foreign aid. In response to the pandemic, U.S. foreign aid significantly increased funding allocated to the health sector, elevating the importance of health sector funding to the second-highest priority, trailing only Peace and Security (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). Several congressional reports have explored the ramifications of COVID-19 on foreign aid. These reports indicate that the pandemic led to a reduction in on-site international program staff and

necessitated a shift towards enabling in-country personnel or partner organizations to assume greater responsibility for implementing and evaluating programs (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). For instance, one report pointed out that, "in countries that are significantly affected, agencies may struggle to monitor programs adequately, which may harm program quality and congressional oversight" (p. 2). This suggests a mentality that there is a reliance on U.S.-based expertise and questions the capacity of in-country personnel to implement programs successfully.

The most recent racial reckoning in the United States, which was ignited by the killing of George Floyd in 2020, and the ongoing Black Lives Matter movement has had a significant impact on the field of foreign aid, influencing the adoption of anti-racist discourse and policy implementation within the field. Stemming from this uprising was a surge for racial equity across the United States prompting individuals to engage in self-reflection about their positionality and privilege in both their personal and professional lives. The movement also prompted many foreign aid organizations to intensify their focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (Bruce-Raeburn, 2019; Nwajiaku-Dahou & Leon-Himmelstine, 2020; The Racial Equity Index, 2021). For some organizations, steps have been taken to diversify their personnel and create internal departments focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Individuals are also interested in personal and professional growth in diversity and inclusion, which increases the likelihood of looking for professional development opportunities that focus on incorporating anti-racist and decolonial practices into their daily work. This critical change in the field has included more dialogue on decolonizing the sector domestically. However, the effectiveness of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives is a subject of ongoing debate. These initiatives have been perceived as performative, primarily limited to implementing superficial changes in the Human Resources departments of foreign aid organizations, occasionally supplemented by infrequent

professional training (Bruce-Raeburn, 2019; Nwajiaku-Dahou & Leon-Himmelstine; The Racial Equity Index, 2021). Moreover, DEI offices within foreign aid tend to prioritize equity within the organization in the United States but lack a clear focus on international decolonial efforts. Scholars and groups argue that decolonial efforts must also include working towards greater equity between the U.S.-based offices and their personnel or partner organizations abroad (Bruce-Raeburn, 2019; Nwajiaku-Dahou & Leon-Himmelstine; The Racial Equity Index, 2021).

Decolonial Efforts in U.S. Foreign Aid

Foreign aid professionals with a front row to the "development show" would acknowledge their works' minimal impact and the apparent changes needed for sustainable change (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005). Paulo Freire (1970) argues for sustainable development through more self-reliance, stating, "True generosity lies in striving so that these hands--whether of individuals or entire people--need be extended less and less in supplication so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world" (p. 19). The argument is not to quickly withdraw all foreign assistance but to shift the current development paradigm to a more equitable and inclusive model.

In recent years, foreign aid practices have undergone critical attacks as some members of the global community increasingly recognizes the need to decolonize the approach, at least rhetorically. Changes in the rhetoric, but also in the approaches to foreign aid, reflect an acknowledgment of the historical injustices perpetuated by colonial powers and a commitment to rectify the disparities embedded within the foreign aid sector. Current decolonial efforts in U.S. foreign aid represent a paradigm shift away from top-down, externally-imposed solutions towards more inclusive, community-driven, and culturally-sensitive approaches. These current decolonial efforts, including community-led capacity building, partnership-based design, a

rights-based approach, and cultural preservation, have gained prominence as practical steps towards achieving more equitable and effective foreign aid. These approaches recognize that development initiatives must be rooted in the self-determination of local communities, the protection of human rights, and the preservation of cultural identity.

Moreover, these decolonial strategies are not just theoretical constructs but are actively shaping the practices of major international organizations, including USAID. The localization initiative promoted by USAID, for instance, underscores the importance of local ownership and leadership in foreign aid programs (USAID, 2022). This initiative aligns with the broader international commitment to reorient foreign aid towards more sustainable and locally driven development. In this context, it is crucial to explore these decolonial approaches in foreign aid, their principles, and their practical implications. Each approach contributes to the broader aim of fostering a more just, equitable, and locally sensitive framework for foreign aid. By empowering communities, respecting human rights, and preserving cultural heritage, these current decolonial efforts aim to break free from the lingering legacies of colonialism and pave the way for a more inclusive and responsive foreign aid landscape, though not without challenges and limitations.

One example of a decolonized approach to foreign aid is *community-led capacity building*. Capacity building is a type of foreign aid that has external support financially and in program design and implementation (Bicker & Sillitoe, 2003). Capacity building is often considered neocolonial since the approach is frequently aligned with “modernization” or neoliberal programs. However, a community-led approach to capacity building emphasizes the community's role in identifying its own needs and priorities, as well as developing and implementing projects to address those needs. Typically, this approach involves a locally led organization receiving funding to implement its own programs without any external conditions

attached to the funding. This paradigm has shifted away from a focus on economic growth as development and more on the development and freedom of human beings, depending solely on the needs of the community. Using development paradigms that focus on human capacity and the dimension of human development could be more sustainable and impactful (Bicker & Sillitoe, 2003; McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014; Varga, 2018).

Another decolonial approach is *partnership-based design*, which emphasizes collaboration with local organizations and communities. This approach is in line with the concept of "Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting" (CLA) promoted by USAID. The CLA approach recognizes that working in partnership with local organizations and communities and being responsive to their needs and changing circumstances leads to more effective and sustainable outcomes. It involves close collaboration with local entities to co-create solutions rather than imposing externally devised plans. The main difference between this approach and the community-led capacity building is the local and external collaboration element, with partnership-based designs incorporating some external technical support. This approach has been implemented in various countries and sectors, such as health, education, and economic development. It, too, is part of the broader localization initiative in foreign aid pushed forward by USAID, promoting local engagement and ownership.

The third approach, *rights-based approach*, is a decolonial strategy that emphasizes the protection of human rights and the empowerment of marginalized groups. This approach can be seen in practice in Guatemala, where organizations like "Rights Action" support indigenous communities in their struggle for land rights, autonomy, and self-determination. It provides essential support to human rights defenders and legal assistance to communities facing eviction or harassment. The rights-based approach aligns with the contemporary emphasis on addressing

social inequalities and respecting the rights of marginalized communities, making it a relevant and vital part of decolonizing foreign aid. However, this approach does not necessarily address "who" is providing the support or service, but rather focuses on "what" type of support is being provided.

Cultural preservation is a decolonial approach that emphasizes the safeguarding of cultural heritage, identity, and traditional knowledge and practices. As of today, this approach remains the greatest challenge to implement fully due to globalization and the cultural domination of some nations. Additionally, cultural preservation does not always align well with how the community desires development, and therefore it is an ongoing learning process to understand and implement cultural preservation. However, it is still recognized as a crucial aspect of decolonizing foreign aid. Protecting cultural heritage and acknowledging the significance of traditional knowledge respects the diversity of the communities receiving foreign aid and reinforces the value of their own cultural identity.

Funding Trends in Foreign Aid

Understanding the complexities of foreign aid not only includes the historical context but also an exploration of its funding trends. This section is essential in understanding one of the most significant barriers to decolonizing foreign aid. It offers insight into the fiscal parameters within which foreign aid professionals operate and the intricate mechanisms by which the United States wields financial control over foreign aid communities beyond its borders. Control is critical in comprehending the neocolonial elements embedded in foreign aid. Given the intricacies of the U.S. government's financial processes, it is difficult to thoroughly dissect the funding processes. Nonetheless, providing a general overview will paint a picture of the

complexities faced by the foreign aid community during program design, implementation, and evaluation.

In fiscal year (FY) 2019, approximately 1% of the U.S. federal budget, totaling $48.1 billion, was allocated to foreign aid (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). It is crucial to note that the U.S. federal defense budget is distinct from the foreign aid budget (Foreignassistance.gov, 2022). Yet, a certain percentage of the foreign aid budget (around $9 billion/year) is allocated for security assistance. While $33.4 billion is specifically directed toward foreign aid and humanitarian assistance, most programs also emphasize peace and security. In FY2019, over 180 countries received U.S. assistance, with 55 nations receiving more than $100 million and 118 nations receiving more than $10 million. Notably, regional alliances receive the majority of foreign assistance funding. Currently, the United States stands as the largest official development assistance (ODA) donor (Morgenstern & Brown, 2022; Foreign Assistance.gov, 2022; OECD, 2018). However, in terms of economic size, the per capita spending by the United States ranks 23rd among the 30 members of the OECD (Donor Tracker, 2020; OECD, 2018).

The U.S. government maintains a dedicated website for tracking and documenting the foreign assistance funding process (Foreign Assistance, 2020; Interaction, 2019). As per the Foreign Assistance (2020) website, each year, 22 U.S. government agencies submit budget requests outlining spending strategies for the previous fiscal year, the current year, and at least one year ahead. The request entails the rationale for the money requested and any changes in the budget from the initial proposal, emphasizing the long-term impacts of the budget decisions (Foreign Assistance, 2020; Interaction, 2019).

The U.S. government's fiscal year starts on October 1 and concludes on September 30. Budget proposals are generally submitted to the White House’s Office of Management and

Budget (OMB) in September, two years before the commencement of the fiscal year (Foreign Assistance, 2020; Interaction, 2019). The OMB then assesses each agency's proposed budget against the overall federal budget from mid-September to late November. If specific issues or concerns arise, the OMB may hold hearings as part of the analysis. Once the review process is completed, the OMB provides each agency with a recommended level of funding to request from Congress (Foreign Assistance, 2020; Interaction, 2019). After the budget has been settled between the OMB and each agency, the President forwards the requests to Congress on the first Monday in February (Foreign Assistance, 2020). In addition to the President's budget, each agency submits a Congressional Budget Justification (CBJ) that meticulously explains its budget request. Once the CBJ is submitted, agencies appear before congressional subcommittees to defend their budget requests. The Congressional committees then provide a Congressional Budget Resolution providing 5-year “fiscal blueprints” that are “non-binding” annual discretionary spending guides for the Appropriation Committees in determining the final federal budget for the next fiscal year. At this point, the process is narrowed down to focusing only on the annual budgets that Congress must approve. With 12 distinct appropriation committees, one from each of the 12 House and Senate appropriations subcommittees, the process of finalizing versions for the President's signature is laborious and ideally concluded by the end of the fiscal year, on September 30. Nevertheless, bills are infrequently approved by the deadline, necessitating Continuing Resolutions to fund agencies based on the previous year's budget until final congressional approval (Foreign Assistance, 2020).

Although Congress approves the final budget, the OMB allocates the specific amount of funds that an agency must distribute to designated regions or thematic projects and prescribes the timeframe for fund disbursement (Foreign Assistance, 2020). These funds are called obligations

since the agencies obligate the federal government to disperse this money. The actual amount spent on foreign aid activities is the sum distributed by the OMB in one of three ways: 1) contracts, which involve direct purchases of goods or services by the federal government, 2) grants, where funds are transferred to another party for program implementation, or 3) cooperative agreements, which represent partnerships between government agencies and other entities (e.g., private businesses, NGOs, multilateral organizations) involved in foreign aid activities (Foreign Assistance, 2020).

Understanding these financial processes is crucial to understanding the complexities and the priorities in foreign aid activities and how to improve the process. As discussed in the earlier section, budget priorities are somewhat influenced by the President's or Congress' perspectives on U.S. national security concerns, economic interests, and political positioning (McEwan, 2009). Agencies create budgets that loosely align with the priorities of the President, Congressional interests, USAID strategy, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to gain approval and secure the highest funding possible. These priorities are then trickled down to the implementing organizations through the grant proposal processes and cooperative agreements. The multitude of steps through which funding and goal setting must pass to implement programming, projects, and activities make reform exceedingly challenging. The severe separation of the federal funding process from the process (or lack of process) taken to identify genuine requests of support from recipient countries and communities creates ineffective and unsustainable practices in development (Rist, 2014). Furthermore, the funding processes reinforce U.S. neocolonial values, including the promotion of the U.S. conception of democracy, indirect ownership of foreign economies, and U.S. national security interests.

While this context characterizes the environment within which foreign aid professionals operate, it is crucial to acknowledge that individuals can exert some influence on the decisions within these systems, even though that influence is quite limited. As a result, the next section explores how the perspective of foreign aid professionals plays a critical role in understanding the neocolonial practices within the foreign aid landscape.

Overview of the Foreign Aid Professional

This section examines the world of foreign aid professionals with a focus on three key areas: a) the history of the foreign aid profession, b) the relationships between local experts/staff and U.S.-based foreign aid professionals, and c) the impact of current events on the foreign aid profession. Though not new, the academic literature on foreign aid professionals is limited. However, there is a plethora of information on the profession in government or organizational reports and newspaper articles. Also, numerous pieces of fictional literature have been published mocking or describing foreign aid professionals, such as the poem “Development Set” by Ross Coggins (1976) and the book *The Ugly American* by William Lederer and Eugene Burdick (1958). The academic literature, reports, and fictional literature are all represented in this dissertation's literature review on the foreign aid professional.

To understand the existing colonial legacies within foreign aid, specifically the neocolonial influences, and to explore the prospects of decolonization, a foundational understanding of the background context and knowledge production associated with foreign aid professionals is critical. The term "professional" has been chosen in this research to emphasize the increasing professionalization of the foreign aid sector. Pursuing a professional career in this field often entails majoring in disciplines like international relations and security, among other

relevant subjects. The professionalization of the field in the United States is why the term professional will be used for this research. While the term "expert" is also occasionally used in this dissertation, with intentional purpose, it is often used in foreign aid discourse. However, the term sparks debates surrounding the definition of 'the expert'—is it the local individual with lived experiences and localized knowledge, often with higher education training, or is it the seemingly highly trained Western professional? The terminology and language used to reinforce power hierarchies in foreign aid will be explored in subsequent sections.

History of the Foreign Aid Professional

The foreign aid profession took shape in the 1940s after World War II and expanded exponentially towards the end of widespread colonialism in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Inside Geneva, 2020). Inside Geneva (2020), a podcast based in Switzerland discusses how Colonial Officers, originally tasked by the UK government with spreading democracy globally during the fight against communism, stayed in their host countries during the fall of colonialism while simply changing their job title to Technical Development Officers. Many of these individuals eventually became leaders in the IMF, World Bank, and UN Agencies and started their INGOs and consultancy firms, while others became professors in emerging international affairs programs (Inside Geneva, 2020; Kothari, 2005). These individuals created the architecture for the field of foreign aid based on colonial policies and procedures (Inside Geneva, 2020; Kothari, 2005).

In the case of U.S. foreign aid, it has long served as a tool of foreign policy. Historically, its primary mission was to promote Western ideals of democracy and capitalism, with an emphasis on projects related to “good governance,” economic development, and some humanitarian aid (USAID, 2022). At the core of this profession, economists play a significant

role in shaping the discipline, often being regarded as the technical experts in foreign policy. Economists are mainly the ones who formalized the "ways of knowing" through the lens of institutional economics and law (Mosse, 2001). The dominant neoliberal economic model emerged, fostering a universal concept of development based on economic growth (Harriss, 2005; Kothari, 2006; Mosse, 2011). Mosse describes the institutionalization of the profession, saying,

> The combination of formalism and internationalization allows a technicalization of policy and the centralization of expertise. This enhances the status of a specific transnational class of experts entrenched at the national level in ways that involve unprecedented convergence. Development policy trends of the 1980s, in particular, demanded high levels of expertise and produced economic models that were rapidly internationalized, often in the context of crisis or uncertainty. As a result, economics retained its pre-eminence as the diagnostic and rulemaking discipline of Aidland. (p. 4)

This meant that to become a foreign aid professional, one needed to have a background in economics or political science. However, as foreign aid broadened its scope to encompass humanitarian efforts, including peacebuilding and emergency response, the sector welcomed professionals with a focus on humanitarian-centered projects and programs (Mosse, 2011; USAID, 2022). These individuals often possessed degrees in anthropology or social sciences. The introduction of area studies brought fresh perspectives to the field, shifting the focus towards social practices specific to geographical regions, countries, and localities (Mosse, 2011). This ethnographic perspective complemented the more formal economic models and helped identify cultural norms and social practices, further informing the design of interventions (Mosse, 2011).

Consequently, foreign aid professionals specializing in humanitarian work frequently held backgrounds in health and population planning, human resource development, or education. Now, the foreign aid sector includes a myriad of specialty tracks that include tech experts, gender equality specialists, peacebuilding and mediation facilitators, training specialists, entrepreneurial leaders, and more. This history of the foreign aid sector has profoundly influenced the initial and still dominant theories taught in higher education programs.

Education for the Foreign Aid Profession

The foreign aid profession has grown exponentially in the last two decades, becoming a sought-after degree in higher education. The first institutions to offer degrees in international relations were the University of Wales and Georgetown University in 1919. The Graduate Institute of International Studies, based in the U.S. and Europe, developed the first graduate program in international relations in 1927, quickly followed by the University of Chicago in 1928. Today, international relations programs are available in nearly 300 universities or colleges across the United States (DataUSA, 2021). In 2020, there were nearly 20,000 international relations or related degrees awarded, including both bachelor's and master's degrees (DataUSA, 2021). Washington, DC, and Baltimore, Maryland, hold the highest concentration of students majoring in this field, with New York County, NY, following close behind (Census Bureau, 2021; DataUSA, 2021). Although it seems inherent to have diversity in a student body preparing for international work, white students earn most of the degrees with this major, with white women receiving 32% of the degrees and white men receiving 20% (Census Bureau, 2021). However, considering the population of Caucasians in the United States is 71%, the foreign aid community is quite diverse.

The advancement of the profession of foreign aid means increased significance put on the ‘technical knowledge’ to be qualified for a job in the sector (Kothari, 2006; Mosse, 2011; USAID, 2022). Technical knowledge includes various tangible skills, such as project management, training expertise, financial acumen, or other forms of practical expertise. In times of increasing globalization, undergraduate and graduate programs focusing on foreign aid have appeared in even the smallest liberal arts schools and community colleges. Furthermore, the dominant international relations theories that inform U.S. foreign aid have turned the development field into a 'science,' grounded in paradigms, models, and institutionalized Western/Eurocentric ways of understanding.

Understanding the educational context within which foreign aid professionals are trained is essential, as it heavily influences their perceptions of policies, systems, and behaviors. While this overview cannot encompass the entirety of the educational landscape for individuals in foreign aid, it offers a general understanding of the prevailing schools of thought in the foreign aid sector relevant to this research. Moreover, it's worth noting that the field is evolving, with an increasing number of professionals entering from STEM backgrounds and other diverse disciplines, bringing different frameworks and transferable knowledge to the sector (DataUSA, 2021). This dynamic educational context provides insight into the diversity of perspectives and approaches within the foreign aid sector, a critical understanding for this research.

Relationships in the Field: The U.S.-based Professional and the Local Actor

In 2021, Samantha Powers assumed the politically appointed role of Administrator for USAID, the highest position within the Agency, reporting directly to the Secretary of State. Powers introduced a strategic plan aimed at expanding locally led development programs over

the next four years. At the time, only 6% of USAID funding was directed to local organizations, and Powers' objective was to increase this direct funding to 21% within four years (DAI, 2022; USAID, 2022). The strategy is designed to boost the allocation of direct funding, departing from the conventional top-down development approach, and ostensibly fostering a more equitable and collaborative partnership between local and external actors.

Historically, U.S.-based foreign aid professionals have occupied leadership positions in development projects. Although they serve as the primary point of contact with local actors, this structure is inherently a hierarchical system. The U.S.-based professionals must work within the parameters of a program contract, usually parameters set by funders such as USAID or an intermediary organization (McEwan, 2009). Consequently, the relationship between the U.S.-based foreign aid professionals and local actors is not inherently equal or horizontal (Benzanon & Isenman, 2012; Billing, 2010; Severino & Ray, 2010). The structures and procedures of foreign aid projects are imposed on local actors and organizations, even if different internal structures previously worked well for them. As a result, the partnership between local personnel or local partner organizations and U.S.-based foreign aid professionals can inadvertently perpetuate a colonizer-colonized hierarchy, potentially reinforcing existing inequalities (Billing, 2010; Eyben, 2014).

Recent efforts by Administrator Powers to promote locally led projects have reshaped the role of foreign aid professionals. Traditionally, partners had to meet specific criteria to qualify for international aid, including being an English-speaking organization, having connections to individuals in international organizations, adopting the organizational structure used by U.S.-based organizations, and agreeing to develop projects based mainly on U.S.-identified needs (Bicker & Sillitoe, 2003; McEwan, 2009). Locally led initiatives flip the system, making space

for local actors to take ownership of projects from inception to completion (USAID, 2022). While these locally led initiatives represent a step toward a more equal partnership, the United States still retains control over funding allocation and the types of partnerships they seek in each country.

Current Context of the Job: Impacts of the Recent Racial Reckoning (in the US) and COVID-19

It is essential to mention the impact of recent events on the foreign aid sector, such as COVID-19 and the racial reckoning demanded by the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. The global impact of COVID-19 touched nearly every individual, community, nation, and society in various adverse ways. The foreign aid community, like many other professional sectors, experienced challenges, such as job loss, the transition to remote work, halted international travel, and the transformation of partnerships. The existing projects faced postponed deadlines or shifted their focus to address the ramifications of COVID-19. However, job losses in the foreign aid sector were often short-lived, thanks to a substantial increase in funding for foreign aid programs supporting economic growth and global health to assist communities grappling with the effects of COVID-19. This influx of funding came with greater flexibility in terms of project timelines. Additionally, there was a rise in local consultancy positions, and more funding being streamed directly to local actors as international travel remained largely restricted. While COVID-19 had a profound impact on the foreign aid sector at the height of the pandemic, the duration, and potential lasting structural changes remain uncertain.

Fierce in-person and social media protests were calling to end police brutality against Black Americans and for racial justice began after the killing of George Floyd in 2020. The foreign aid sector, which dedicates substantial resources to addressing global inequalities, found

itself confronted with calls to confront racial biases and stereotypes, both within its own ranks and within the policies and practices of its organizations. For example, foreign aid organizations started designing new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion offices that train, hire, and discuss policy changes (International Rescue Committee, 2021; Peace Direct, 2021; Weisenfeld, 2020). While these DEI offices have primarily focused on addressing racial injustices in the US-based workplaces, there is still a need to expand their focus to include racial injustices and power dynamics across borders (Peace Direct, 2021). This particular era of the racial reckoning left a lasting impact on individuals desiring to be more reflexive and work towards removing their own biases (Weisenfeld, 2020). This research seeks to understand how foreign aid professionals perceive neocolonial practices in their work, including racial injustices, both domestically and globally. Therefore, the racial reckoning has undoubtedly impacted the research results, though it is hard to know precisely how.

Chapter Three:

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this dissertation employs a decolonial lens, which guides the analysis from the literature review to the discussions, aiming to identify and dismantle colonial legacies and neocolonial practices within the foreign aid sector. Decolonial theory is applied systematically to uncover and critique the power structures that perpetuate inequalities and reinforce dominant narratives in foreign aid discourse. By applying a decolonial framework, this study seeks to challenge Eurocentric perspectives, ultimately striving for a more equitable and just approach to foreign aid. Throughout the analysis and discussions, the decolonial lens illuminates how historical power imbalances continue to shape contemporary foreign aid practices, and it serves as a tool for advocating for transformative change within the sector.

The concepts and theories used in this study deeply intersect, impacting the meaning that foreign aid professionals use in discourse within the foreign aid sector. This section uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to understand the larger societal context in which meaning is produced. CDA provides a framework for identifying the social actors involved in the discourse, their relationships with one another, and the impact of the discourse surrounding neocolonialism and decoloniality (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018; Dijk, 2001). For the purposes of this literature review, a critical analysis will be conducted on various types of literature, involving a systematic examination of existing scholarship and discourse related to neocolonialism and decoloniality in the context of foreign aid.

In the earlier chapters, there was an analysis of the historical power dynamics that existed through colonialism and how that historical context underpins the existing power dynamics in foreign aid (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018). That examination laid the groundwork for

understanding how colonial legacies continue to shape the current foreign aid sector, particularly the perpetuation of neocolonial practices. The CDA conceptual framework will build on that historical context by providing a comprehensive understanding of how concepts surrounding coloniality and decoloniality have been discussed and examined within the academic and non-academic sectors/literatures, with a focus on the differences, commonalities, and gaps in the narratives. The discourse being analyzed in this study is derived from multiple perspectives to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of neocolonialism and decoloniality within the foreign aid sector. Typically, a literature review focuses on scholarly sources, but limiting the analysis to scholarly literature alone would inadvertently reinforce existing power imbalances in foreign aid discourse. Academic literature, even if produced by those from post-colonial nations, is still often grounded in a colonial education system. Therefore, it is critical to use literature outside of the academic world, such as novels, poetry, art, and more.

Furthermore, this section will examine if and how theories most often taught in higher education programs on foreign aid are further reproducing a colonial mentality or contributing to decoloniality. This knowledge taught in educational institutions at all levels extends beyond academic settings and infiltrates various aspects of society, including family structures, religious beliefs, and social media interactions. The significance of considering these different perspectives/sources lies in the commitment to providing a more holistic view of the issues at hand and to recognizing that the discourse surrounding neocolonialism and decoloniality in the foreign aid sector is multifaceted. By drawing from diverse perspectives, this study aims to challenge and expand the boundaries of conventional discourse, highlighting the nuances and perspectives that are often underrepresented. In the following sections, we will provide concrete

examples to illustrate how these concepts and theories are manifested in foreign aid discourse, making our framework more tangible and relatable to readers.

Conceptualizations of Power and Dominance

The concepts of colonialism, coloniality, and neocolonialism are often used interchangeably in discussions, both in informal settings like social media, as well as in academia, but these concepts carry different nuanced meanings beyond mere definitions. These terms are deeply intertwined with emotions that represent disempowerment and oppression (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Many scholars have provided works surrounding these distinctly unique and nuanced concepts. However, to gain a more accurate understanding, it is essential to turn to the narratives of those who have lived under colonial rule.

The academic definition of colonialism can be summarized as the establishment of a settlement or colony controlled by a foreign power (McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). For example, the Berlin Conference of 1884 – 1885 involved European colonial powers coming together to decide how to divide the African continent into territories aimed at avoiding inter-European country conflicts over African resources. As Thant Myint-U's (2008) highlights in his narrative of the British colonization in Burma, “But Churchill had to be careful. The last thing he (or anyone else in the British government) wanted was a war with Burma that would lead unwittingly to a war with France" (p. 11). This practice involved people from the colonizing power, typically Western nations, primarily European but also including Japan, settling in the territories, and imposing their economic systems, language, and culture (Rist, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Consequently, it typically resulted in the settlement of citizens of the colonizing

country in the colonized territory and the exploitation of the colonized territory's resources and labor for the colonizing country's benefit.

Digging deeper into the complexities of colonialism and power, it is important to recognize that the understanding of colonialism and power previously discussed in this section is derived from invaluable scholarly work that provides a structured analysis. However, now I turn to the narratives of those closer to the lived experiences—authors from post-colonial nations—who evoke a deep emotional and human understanding of these concepts (Fanon, 1963; Memmi, 1965). These novels allow us to truly connect with the experiences of the colonized. Rooted deeply in the historical and cultural contexts of Nigeria and Kenya, they offer unique perspectives that scholarly literature may sometimes overlook, enabling us to grasp the profound depth of suffering and resilience experienced by the colonized.

In Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel "Things Fall Apart," set in a small Nigerian community, we are offered a profound insight into the gradual process of cultural domination through religion as a means to achieve colonization. Achebe's narrative portrays the violent confrontations between British soldiers and the local communities who resisted the construction of Christian churches, bringing to life the raw emotions and struggles of the colonized. Through the lens of this emotionally charged narrative, readers can deeply empathize with the local population and understand the profound impact of religious and cultural domination. Achebe's work, rooted in the historical context and storytelling tradition of Nigeria, offers a unique perspective that scholarly literature often cannot capture, allowing us to grasp the depth of the suffering and resilience of the colonized.

Similarly, in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o's (1977) works, including "Petals of Blood," the slow imposition of a new governing mentality, religion, and values is narrated with a vividness that

engages readers on an emotional level. The experiences of characters in his novels, who grapple with the challenges posed by colonialization, provide a more nuanced understanding of the effects of cultural domination that goes beyond scholarly analysis. By witnessing the resistance to the church, often manifesting in violence, and the subsequent British intervention in the name of peace, we gain a profound appreciation for the emotions and complexities underlying these historical events.

These novels portray historical contexts, following the storytelling traditions of their respective cultures, rather than adhering to the Western way of scientific writing. Scholarly work has usually aimed to stay distant from emotions and biases. Nonetheless, the aim of this research is to strive to understand the perspectives of foreign aid professionals regarding the neocolonial and decolonial aspects of foreign aid. These professionals are humans first, and some of them come from postcolonial nations or have strong connections with those who have been affected by colonial legacies in their home countries. Therefore, this research does not intend to detach from these narratives. It values the nuanced portrayal of the colonial process found in various types of literature. This contrast emphasizes the need to approach these concepts with a comprehensive understanding, going beyond simple labels and trendy buzzwords. Fictional literature allows us to truly sense the racist attitudes and beliefs that were used to justify colonial rule and the enduring structures of power that persist today. For instance, during the colonial period, European colonizers frequently used ideas that they were racially superior to legitimize their exploitation of colonized peoples and their resources (Fanon, 1963, Memmi, A. 1965). The discussions around these justifications have left a lasting impact, affecting present-day power dynamics and hierarchies.

Another significant challenge in defining these concepts is reducing the influence of academics and Western scholars in shaping their definitions. It is crucial for these terms to have a flexible meaning that allows for their application across diverse national and regional contexts. Such flexibility serves to prevent the development of universal definitions rooted in a colonial framework.

Postcolonialism, Coloniality, and Neocolonialism

The postcolonial era signifies the removal of most colonial powers and the establishment of sovereign nations (Kothari, 2005; Muiu, 2010). Although sovereign nations are now predominantly recognized, a system of power and control persists, defined as coloniality (Quijano, 2000). Scholars such as Anibel Quijano (2000) and Walter Mignolo (2020) define coloniality as the system of power and control that stemmed from the time of colonialism, perpetuating structures of dominance and dependence. The enduring systems of power and hierarchy in postcolonial nations refer to internal governing structures and economic systems. It is important to distinguish these internal dynamics from the indirect power foreign nations still exert over postcolonial nations (Mignolo, 2018; Quijano, 2000). These structures were arguably able to exist because local elites in post-colonial countries reiterated the structures that existed during the colonial era, essentially perpetuating a form of internal colonialism (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005; Quijano, 2000). This practice has led to the creation of new hierarchies in governments and economies resembling colonial power dynamics (Kothari, 2005). Therefore, instead of developing governing structures that represented the local ways of knowing and doing, post-colonial nations were left with the legacies of colonialism. In many instances, these systems were supported and funded by their previous colonizers. Therefore, the imprint of colonialism

has become nearly impossible to erase entirely, and the post-colonial nations continue to grapple with the repercussions of colonialism (Kothari, 2005; Quijano, 2000).

While coloniality describes the continued presence of colonial legacies, neocolonialism, as described by Rist (2014), represents a significant aspect of indirect control by foreign powers over postcolonial nations. Neocolonialism reproduces indirect forms of economic and governing hierarchies as well as cultural domination (Moyo, 2009). This form of control can manifest in multiple ways, including establishing military bases, manipulating elections and political processes, imposing trade policies that benefit the neocolonial power at the expense of the local country, and exploiting natural resources ((Moyo, 2009; Rist 2014). Neocolonialism is often perceived as a more subtle and insidious form of control due to its reliance on indirect methods rather than direct rule. An example of such indirect control is the numerous foreign-owned private companies that oversee the natural resources of post-colonial nations. This control of natural resources enables foreign nations to manage the wealth of a country, and even transfers much of that wealth to foreign ownership (Moyo, 2009).

Governments in the countries where these private companies are based support and advocate for them, arguing that these companies stimulate local economies by providing jobs to their citizens. Yet, this colonial mindset results in many of these companies exploiting the local labor with low wages and inhumane working conditions (Moyo, 2009; Sen 1999). These governments also argue that these companies contribute to the integration of postcolonial nations into the modern global economy, which, they believe, will foster the economic development of their own nation (Moyo, 2009; Sen 1999). The U.S. government often bolsters these private companies by imposing sanctions on individuals or countries that enact policies or laws challenging the interests of foreign corporations (Meyer et al., 2023). These sanctions are

frequently justified in the name of human rights (Meyer et al., 2023). Consequently, those who engage in the human rights sector must exercise caution to ensure their actions genuinely align with human rights values rather than supporting the economic interests of the U.S. government (Rist, 2014).

The economic interests and support for private companies by postcolonial or recipient governments often resonate with the principles of foreign aid initiatives, which frequently prioritize economic development as a means to promote progress in postcolonial nations (Escobar, 1995; Moyo, 2009). There is also a significant body of literature on neocolonialism in foreign aid, with some scholars arguing that it is a pervasive and ongoing problem (Escobar, 1995; Mignolo, 2018). Critics of foreign aid argue that it is often used as a tool of neocolonialism, saying that foreign aid can be used to influence countries, particularly in cases where the aid is provided with strings attached, such as requirements for policy changes or privatization of specific sectors. Foreign aid is frequently offered with conditions attached rather than being responsive to the needs and priorities of the recipient countries. This leads to a loss of sovereignty and undermines recipient countries' ability to decide or pursue their own development initiatives. Additionally, research has highlighted that foreign aid can perpetuate existing power imbalances rather than challenging or addressing them.

Power imbalances in partnerships are among the top ways foreign aid contributes to neocolonial practices. Especially in U.S.-government-funded aid programs, the donor (USAID) has complete control over decision-making and resource allocation, despite the rhetoric on moving towards more locally-led initiatives. The U.S.-based aid programs impose Western models of what is considered “development” projects, such as economic development, “democracy” building, or human rights programs that reflect U.S. values and interpretation of

human rights (Escobar, 1995; Moyo, 2009; Rist, 2014). Often, these programs are developed without considering the historical implications and legacies of colonialism within the nation (Kothari, 2005). Furthermore, there is rarely an emphasis on cultural preservation within the design of foreign aid programs. The U.S.-based professionals, whether from the U.S. or not, must work within the context of the U.S. foreign aid system, which emphasizes the belief that nations receiving foreign aid need "development" (Escobar, 1995; Kothari 2005). This mentality, though, can lead to a lack of genuine understanding of or respect for the culture and customs of nations receiving U.S. foreign aid, leading to inappropriate or insensitive practices.

Conceptualizations of Power and Dominance Exuded by Foreign Aid Professionals

While the primary focus of this research was to understand the perspectives of the colonizers in the foreign aid field, in this research, referring to U.S.-based individuals, organizations, and government – and devise strategies to problematize and disrupt their behaviors, practices, and policies, it is important to acknowledge the complex and multifaceted psychological frameworks of the colonizer and the colonized. These frameworks are shaped by a myriad of historical, sociocultural, and economic factors. The experiences of individuals within colonized societies are diverse, influenced by cultural nuances, contextual variations, and personal circumstances. However, certain psychological frameworks and dynamics can be observed.

One such framework is the potential internalization of an inferiority complex (Fanon, 2008). The experience of colonization often leads to the imposition of Western values, cultural dominance, and the denigration of local knowledge and traditions, which can result in the internalization of feelings of inferiority among the colonized. This is also known as the deficit mentality, which is deeply embedded in foreign aid (REFERENCE). Acknowledging the

existence of this mentality is crucial, as failing to recognize it and its pervasive influence misses the opportunity to disrupt it. This internalized belief system perpetuates the notion that their own culture, language, and ways of knowing are inherently inferior to those of the colonizers.

Another important dynamic is subaltern resistance. The subaltern refers to marginalized individuals or groups who have been socially, politically, and economically dominated (Spivak, 1988). In response to this subjugation, the colonized engage in various forms of resistance to challenge oppressive structures and assert their agency and identity. This resistance can manifest through cultural revitalization movements, the reclamation of indigenous knowledge systems, or political activism aimed at reclaiming autonomy and dismantling neocolonial power dynamics.

Power imbalances and dependence play a significant role in the foreign aid context. Despite the intentions of providing assistance, foreign aid often perpetuates power imbalances and imposes conditions from donor countries or international institutions.

Conceptualizing Knowledge Production

Before discussing how to interrupt systems of oppression, it is essential to have a better understanding of the intricacies of knowledge production. Scholars, such as Bobbie Harro (1986), have explored how socialization cycles influence different knowledge production worldwide. Knowledge production is a process of how one produces knowledge, how one manages and processes information, and how one disseminates that knowledge. Language, as highlighted by Thiong'O (2005), is one way an individual processes information and learns to construct meaning. Knowledge production directly influences one's way of knowing oneself, society, and the world. Knowledge production also influences one's "way of knowing," by leading to paradigm shifts and challenging one's belief systems. The knowledge we produce is disseminated and shapes our understanding and perceptions of the world. On the other hand, our

"ways of knowing" can shape the questions we ask and how we interpret information, ultimately shaping the knowledge we generate. The prominent "ways of knowing" that are discussed in academia are Indigenous ways of knowing, Eastern ways of knowing, and Western ways of knowing. There is no one way to describe Indigenous or Western ways of knowing; however, it is vital to acknowledge the influence of knowledge production on a person's behavior and perceptions of life. For the purpose of this research, the concept "Western ways of knowing" refers to the dominant knowledge production systems, epistemologies, and ways of understanding the world that have historically been associated with Western, particularly European, cultures. It is not attributed to a single individual who coined the term but is used in discussions of postcolonialism, cultural studies, and similar fields to explore the influence and impact of Western knowledge and worldviews on other societies and cultures. The term is used to analyze how Western knowledge systems have been imposed on or influenced other cultures during the colonial era and in ongoing neocolonial relationships.

Culture, societal and familial norms, education, and human nature are deeply intertwined, making humans complex. The complexity of an individual is furthered by socially constructed identities and social environments, creating cycles of socialization (Haro, 1982). The most discussed socially constructed identities are race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, ability, religion/spirituality, nationality, and socioeconomic status. These identities often determine an individual's social circles and influence one's understanding of self and society. These socially constructed identities also trigger forms of experiencing oppression and reproducing oppressive behaviors. Haro (1982), who coined the concept of cycles of socialization, states, "social identities predispose us to unequal roles in the dynamic system of oppression. Powerful sources in our worlds then socialize us to play the roles prescribed by an inequitable social system. bell

hooks (1997) says that this socialization process is “pervasive (coming from all sides and sources), consistent (patterned and predictable), circular (self-supporting), self-perpetuating (interdependent), and often invisible (unconscious and unnamed)” (p. 1). The strength of this statement makes it feel we have no ownership over our thoughts, and inevitably our thoughts and behaviors are predestined. Yet, Haro created the cycle of socialization to include disruptions to the cycle that can invoke change.

The production of knowledge on foreign aid occurs when there is an exchange of ideas and innovations, shaping foreign aid programming (Escobar, 1995; McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014). It is increasingly understood that foreign aid has been a field of uneven power relations, and that the production of knowledge from a Western dominant framework contributes to perpetuating neocolonialism (McEwan, 2009). McEwan (2009) defines development as including the making of ideologies, stating,

> Development is about ideology and the production and transmission of policies and discourses. It is not simply about financial and material flows, such as aid and investment, but is also about the flow of ideas. Of particular concern here are how the key players in foreign aid acquire dominance for their ideologies, how alternatives are de-legitimized and filtered out by global development organizations and agencies, and how this is resisted. (p. 166)

Standew Hira, who led a session at the Posner Center Symposium in October 2022 on decolonizing aid, stated, “The Euro-American centric knowledge production is based on the concept of superiority of the West and inferiority of the rest.” In the United States, religion, mainstream news and social media, and the education system have heavily influenced knowledge production. Although the United States has a constitution that demands the separation of church

and state, this has been nearly impossible to enact. Consequently, saviorism, a behavior and mentality taught through the religious belief that you must 'save' others who are perceived to be less fortunate than yourself, has created a hierarchy/power is a fundamental underpinning of Western imperialism (Bhambra et al., 2020; Dickinson, 2023).

Influence of Mainstream News and Social Media

The influence of movies and entertainment further contributes to knowledge production. With sophisticated forms of mass media and the increasing prevalence of social media, global issues are rapidly broadcast to the world, often without a critical lens or a local perspective. Everything, from movies like "Blood Diamond" (2006) to fundraising ads on social media for international organizations, often portrays haunting images and creates narratives of "primitive" conflicts throughout the post-colonial nations. Photographers capture images of half-naked, emaciated children begging for food, which are then used to create posters, commercials, and webpages for raising "sympathy funds" and to encourage a perspective in which the viewer assumes a position of superiority (Cohen, 2001). Through this approach, agencies dehumanize people and evoke a sense of pity in the name of providing foreign aid (Bhati & Eikenberry, 2016).

Considerable research has been conducted on the psychological impacts of fear and sadness on donation behavior (Bhati & Eikenberry, 2016). These findings shape societies' understanding of developed nations, and by encountering these incomplete images, people create one narrative of a situation leading to dangerous stereotypes (Dolinar & Sitar, 2013). This type of fundraising fosters an unrealistic belief held by both those in the United States and nations receiving foreign aid, particularly, that resolving these issues will occur solely through reliance

on developed nations. These beliefs instill a sense of inferiority in nations receiving aid and a sense of superiority in societies providing aid.

Pity, guilt, and shame are easily provoked for fundraising purposes, but worse, the societal mindset created is detrimental. By providing these misleading images, the agencies instill the society of the United States with a sense of responsibility for solving this issue of poverty simply through monetary donations without having to change their participation in the world economic system or mobilize efforts to change their government's policies and practices. With humanitarian agencies broadly recognized as having credibility and knowledge regarding global humanitarian issues, these fundraising images are quickly accepted as truth and shape the perception of those who do not further educate themselves on the topic.

White Saviorism

This mental framework, often referred to as white saviorism, contributes to the social acceptance and reproduction of the colonizer and colonized power dynamics in society and, therefore, in foreign aid (Kakura, 2023; Sturges, 2015). The white savior complex is rooted in the deeply racist history of the West, specifically in the United States. White saviorism is a phenomenon described as individuals with a strong desire to "help" others or "fix" the problems of others (Kakura, 2023; Sturges, 2015). Often, saviorism is compounded with white saviorism when white individuals try to solve the problems of Black, Indigenous, or other People of Color (BIPOC). It is an ideology that explains individual, cultural, and systemic oppression directly linked to racism and the dehumanization of the BIPOC population (Wearing et al., 2017; Willer-Kherbaoui, 2019). A white savior is a white person who, mostly unintentionally, maintains white supremacy and Western imperialism through the intention of 'doing good' (Cole, 2021; Wearing et al., 2017; Willer-Kherbaoui, 2019). Despite the possibly good intentions of the white saviors,

their actions are harmful and oppressive because their assistance has become a part of a broader system that institutionalized inequality and dehumanization.

Decades later, these issues are still being discussed in various forums to highlight the uninvited 'help' from outsiders in communities around the world, specifically in nations considered underdeveloped. Teju Cole (2012), a Nigerian American writer, started a debate on social media, stating, "From Sachs to Kristof to Invisible Children to TED, the fastest growing industry in the US is the White Savior Industrial Complex" (Cole, 2012).

Individuals who have chosen a profession in the field of foreign aid usually have good intentions and genuinely want to improve other people's lives. An online search for reasons to join the field of foreign aid returned phrases such as to "make a positive impact," "inspire positive change against inequality," "travel around the world," "meet new people," "learn about global issues," "learn about new cultures," "join a diverse community," and "it's an exciting career." There is variety in these phrases, but they mostly share the same message: that the individuals who join this field want to make a positive impact where they work. In the words of activist Lila Watson, [4]"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us work together" (Aboriginal activists group Queensland, 1970s).

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" (Author unknown). This quote has been used for inspiration to motivate active citizenship and volunteer work around the world. Initially, volunteering sounds noble, selfless, and courageous, especially outside of one's community. However, such volunteering can negatively impact the community volunteers intend to help. In

[4] Dr Watson has always said that she was not comfortable being credited for something that had been born of a collective process. She prefers that the words be credited "***Aboriginal activists group Queensland, 1970s".***

1968 Ivan Illich, a Mexican philosopher who openly opposed American voluntourism in Mexico, was invited to speak at the Conference on InterAmerican Student Projects (CIASP) - a conference specifically for Americans volunteering in Mexico. During Illich's speech, he insisted there was hypocrisy in being critical of their program and inviting someone so critical of their program to speak at their conference yet still being a participant. He advised that in no way should his presence at the conference appease their guilt for participating in the program. The overall sentiment of the speech aimed at provoking self-reflection in the American volunteers on why they believed Mexicans needed to be saved by them. Illich stated (1968), "I am here to entreat you to use your money, your status, and your education to travel in Latin America. Come to look, climb our mountains, and enjoy our flowers. Come to study. But do not come to help."

Often, these good intentions are either uninformed, or the institution and system in place need to be constructed in a way that leads to sustainable and genuine change. This mentality simplifies the issues the communities face and does not question the situation's root causes. Within the media, "what bleeds, leads," meaning that the most shocking and traumatic stories are the ones most read, leaving an impression on society about these otherwise unknown places. This is exacerbated in entertainment when movies tell a single story of nations in the global South, usually featuring a narrative about terrorism, conflict, or poverty in other countries. The lead characters are almost always American or European, usually white, and they swoop in and "save" the country's people. This is the informal education of citizens in the United States.

Western Knowledge as the Domination Framework

Understanding the complex interplay between knowledge production, Western ways of knowing, and the pervasive white savior complex are crucial to examining how these paradigms

shape the individuals within the foreign aid sector. Foreign aid professionals, influenced by these Western paradigms, often approach their work with good intentions but carry with them the baggage of colonial legacies. These frameworks then influence their understanding of “helping,” perpetuating a top-down, ethnocentric approach that underestimates the local knowledge, traditions, and needs of aid-receiving communities. In turn, Western Ways of Knowing, representing the collective knowledge and belief systems of Western societies, have exerted significant influence within the foreign aid sector.

As these foreign aid professionals attempt to enact change, they unintentionally become instruments of a system that reinforces Western values and interpretations, particularly through elements like Christianity, racial and ethnic disparities, and the U.S.-centric vision of democracy and capitalism (Achebe, 1994; Moyo, 2009; Thiong'o, 1977; Thiong’o 1986). The slow process of Christian proselytization in developing nations during the colonial era still has repercussions worldwide (Achebe, 1994; Thiong'o, 1977; Thiong’o 1986). Governing structures and ethical standards of the Christian faith, foundational to many Western nations, were forcefully imposed during colonization. Furthermore, the whitewashed history of African slavery and indigenous tribes' land theft have been narrated from the perspectives of white colonialists, perpetuating a narrative that the West represents the "ideal" model of progress and a developed society (Bandopadhyaya, 1977; Bhambra et al., 2020).

These altered narratives, not confined to a specific U.S. context, highlight the intersection of capitalistic values, Christian ideologies, and “democratic” governance structures, which have consistently held a prominent position in our formal education systems and curricula. The formal education system in the United States, and worldwide, originated in religious institutions and religious ideas continue to play an underlying role in the structure of our schools and curriculum.

Schools were initially only provided to the male, white, land-owning/prosperous population in the United States and the American Indian Boarding Schools. It is important to recognize that while the structures have evolved, many colonial legacies persist, often concealed within Western Ways of Knowing. Many U.S.-based foreign aid professionals are born and raised in this education system and societal structures. It is equally important to note that individuals, whether from Western cultures or postcolonial nations, often receive education and work within the structures, policies, and systems of the U.S. context.

For example, in various countries, including the Philippines, U.S. influence has left a lasting mark, with English often serving as the medium for teaching and learning. This colonial legacy requires individuals born into these nations to learn the colonizer's language in school, thereby potentially shifting their identity to align with the colonizer's culture and values. A colonized mind experiences “colonial alienation,” which Wa Thiong’o (1986) describes as “the disassociation of the sensibility of that child from his natural and social environment” (p. 17). In terms of children of colonized nations, the imposed language of the colonizer created social, economic, and political splinters within their society (Wa Thiong’o, 1986). Wa Thiong’o states, “To control a people’s culture is to control their tools of self-definition about others” (p. 16). Learning one’s history in the language of another creates a new narrative and reality that cannot wholly capture the reality of those who experienced it (Fanon, 1963, Memmi, A. 1965). “How can it be justified to make a country’s school language or country language a foreign one?” Wa Thiong’o (1986) asks and responds to his own questions, saying, “I do not want to see Kenyan children growing up in that imperialist-imposed tradition of contempt for the tools of communication developed by their communities and history. I want them to transcend colonial alienation” (p. 28).

As discussed in the context of neocolonial economic and governing power in the previous section, the United States also employs sanctions that influence religious beliefs in post-colonial nations. One example is the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, a government agency that provides the State Department with analyses and recommendations related to religious freedom, with a predominant focus on Christianity (USCIRF, 2023). This approach often results in countries with laws that restrict proselytization receiving higher levels of travel restrictions and economic trade and aid restrictions. However, anti-proselytizing laws are often implemented to protect a nation's citizens from being pressured to convert their religion or belief system. Forms of aid and promises of schools are sometimes used to promote these religions, which some nations find as a threat to their local culture (Achebe, 1994).

These policies by the United States can be viewed as discriminatory and serve to justify economic and political control, often leading to the marginalization of people of color and non-Christian religions within post-colonial nations. Consequently, these policies exacerbate issues like racism, gender inequality, and a lack of respect for indigenous cultures. It is imperative to recognize that these issues continue to have a significant impact on the world today, making it crucial to address the intersection of racism and neocolonialism to achieve genuine social and economic justice globally. This highlights the importance of considering these dynamics within the context of foreign aid professionals and programs to promote equitable and just policies in the foreign aid sector.

Conceptualizing Development of Postcolonial Nations

Immanuel Wallerstein's world system theory delineates the global economy's division into core, semi-periphery, and periphery countries (Sorinel, 2010; Wallerstein, 2004). Core

countries are those situated at the center of the global economy, with high levels of industrialization, economic growth, and political power. They dominate the global economy and disseminate some of the capital and technology to other countries. Semi-periphery countries, as the term implies, are between the core and periphery countries; they are considered less developed and industrialized by Western standards but possess more economic and political power than periphery countries (Sorinel, 2010). Periphery countries, in contrast, experience significant economic and political marginalization, serving as both the primary recipients of foreign aid and the primary sources of raw materials and labor for core (and semi-peripheral) nations (Sorinel, 2010). The distribution of aid reflects this economic divide between core, semi-periphery, and periphery countries. This economic divide has effectively created a dependency system, with peripheral nations being forced into relying on foreign aid from core countries (Taush, 2010). Consequently, this system perpetuates existing global power imbalances and threatens the genuine sovereignty of peripheral nations. The efficacy of foreign aid in realizing its intended objectives of poverty reduction and economic development, as well as the practices and policies, such as foreign aid attached to conditions, warrant a thorough reevaluation.

The emergence of this new form of imperialism created opportunities for new and expanded “free” markets but still created a hierarchy in world order, reinforcing the previous colonizer and colonized relationship (Kothari, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014). This is an indication that the reality of the world system did not fundamentally change (Rist, 2014: Kothari, 2005). The technical form of colonization, having one nation governing over another nation, has mostly ended globally. Although the era of colonialism is technically over, foreign aid contributes to enabling the Global North to exert control over the Global South indirectly.

Therefore, in practice, the dominant theories of foreign aid in relation to economics have had minimal changes over the years (Arat, 1988; Skocpol, 1977; Tipps, 1973).

The concern of losing influence over countries, especially those considered periphery and semi-periphery, to communism, played a significant role in motivating scholars based in the U.S. to devise a capitalist development model, that is known as the modernization theory. Modernization theory suggested that so-called "underdeveloped" nations needed to modernize in order to integrate into the global economy. The idea of ‘underdeveloped’ nations was aimed at getting support from the U.S. public, especially its elites, for the economic development of other nations (Rist, 2014). Underdevelopment signified a call to action that was intended to free nations from poverty and injustices (Rist, 2014). Pieterse (2001) defines development as "organized intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement," implying that development work done by the United States and Western European nations often follows culturally determined standards based on Western perspectives. In the quest to "develop" nations, modernization theory had two critical elements: 1) an explanation for why nations remain impoverished and 2) an approach to alleviate poverty (Arat, 1988; Tipps, 1973; Skocpol, 1977).

Modernization theory has characterized poverty as deeply rooted in traditional values and culture. This suggests that numerous traditional values must be eradicated and substituted with "modern" values (Crocker, 2004; Jacobs, 2020; Tipps, 1973). As Western nations progressed, and adopted capitalistic values, and moved away from traditional values, it was deemed that this model should be universally applied to development across the globe. This belief system justified the imposition of Western development approaches worldwide (Tipps, 1973). Unfortunately, this approach overlooks the close relationship between traditional values and the environment, as well as the potential for such values to coexist with technology (Escobar, 1991). Japan is an

example of how traditional values can persist, even amid technological and economic advancement (Chirot & Hall, 1982; Tipps, 1973). Modernization theory further promotes Western values, creating a narrative where these values equate to liberation from poverty. In reality, local culture, or "traditional" values, ought to be preserved and guide the design of development efforts. If the current approach to development persists, it will further erode communities, weaken their sense of identity, and result in continued exploitation of nations.

The approach to poverty alleviation through the lens of the modernization theory requires foreign aid, capacity building, and technology to be dispersed from Western nations, with a capitalist economy at the core (Arat, 1988; Black, 1979; Jacobs, 2020; Skocpol, 1977; Tipps, 1973). The modernization process includes formalized education, accessible transportation, privatization of property, individualist orientations, and advanced forms of communication, including mass media and democratic political institutions' development. In practice, the World Bank is recognized for making market systems more appealing, or even obligatory, for developing nations. This is achieved by encouraging international development activities to address concerns raised by marginalized nations, thereby incentivizing their participation in the global market and capitalist system (Kothari, 2005; McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014). The development goals imposed by the U.S. center around capitalistic values that supposedly align with democracy, closing off economic partnerships with countries that aligned themselves with socialist (especially USSR) values (Arat, 1988; Crocker, 2004; McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014; Skocpol, 1977). Development programming is thus not only economically focused but also stresses good governance training for political leaders and support for countries transitioning toward democracy and free and fair elections following decolonization (Escobar, 1995; Rist, 2014).

In the process of modernization, the individual became the nucleus of economic and social life, leading to urbanization and increased mobility of populations, and yet, the importance of community life declined (Crocker, 2004; Escobar, 1995; Rist, 2014). Some critics of modernization theory argue that systemic poverty emerged as market economies disrupted community ties, and powerful global players redirected natural resources away from 'underdeveloped' countries (Crocker, 2004; Escobar, 1995). Critiques of modernization theory directly led to dependency theory. The dependency theory was derived from Marxism, believing that underdevelopment resulted from the exploitation of countries, with the global North creating developing nations' dependency on richer countries as part of the international economy. Critiques of modernization theory also note that this approach to development pushed many nations towards a more socialist government, relying less on foreign support for development (McEwan, 2009; Rist, 2014). This mass implementation of foreign aid across the globe marked the shift from the traditional colonizer-colonized dynamic to the current relationship between the global North and the global South, highlighting once again, neocolonialism in foreign aid (Rist, 2014).

The term and meaning of development have evolved along with the conditions under which it occurs. Willis (2005) argues, "Theories have not evolved linearly, with one emerging from the last without any contestation or conflict. Rather, numerous competing notions about development have co-existed, with certain ideologies or theories becoming dominant because they are advocated by more powerful actors" (p. 28). One of the main arguments made by those who see neocolonialism in foreign aid is that it can lead to dependence and undermine local development efforts (Escobar, 1995). Some scholars argue that foreign aid can create a cycle of dependence, where recipient countries become reliant on external resources and cannot generate

economic growth or address their development challenges. This can lead to a lack of local ownership and accountability and may discourage post-colonial nations from pursuing their own development agendas.

Conceptualizing Decoloniality and Decolonization

Decolonization often refers to the process by which a colony or dependent territory achieves independence and self-governance (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). It is a predominantly historical process that included negotiations between the colonizing power and the colonized territory, armed struggle, and diplomatic pressure. Typically, decolonization results in the transfer of political power from the colonizing power to the colonized territory, leading to the establishment of a new government and political system. Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasize that "Decolonization in the settler context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically" (p. 7). However, decolonization has evolved from its initial focus on dismantling colonized nations to encompass the deconstruction of neocolonial actions. Unfortunately, similar to colonialism and neocolonialism, the term "decolonization" has become a buzzword, at times used interchangeably with anti-racism, anti-capitalism, and anti-patriarchy, which, as argued by Tuck and Yang, can diminish the essence of the decolonization struggle.

Conversely, decoloniality represents a critical perspective and approach that seeks to challenge and disassemble various forms of power and oppression stemming from colonialism. Discourse on decoloniality offers a working framework to disrupt the persistent legacies of colonialism and imperialism. This includes an examination of cultural, economic, and political

systems and structures, along with the production and dissemination of knowledge and understanding. Decoloniality entails recognizing the enduring impacts of colonialism and committing to the challenge of transforming these systems and structures to establish a more just and equitable society. This process involves the dismantling of systems and institutions that perpetuate racism, including laws, policies, and cultural practices. Moreover, it entails individual actions aimed at challenging and resisting racism.

The call for decoloniality extends beyond the mere removal of former colonial powers from colonized nations. It embodies the pursuit of racial justice for countries that have endured racial oppression for decades, ending the exploitation of nations in the global South for the benefit of the global North, and fostering equal respect for the cultural, political, and social values of each nation (Escobar, 1995; Kothari, 2005). Therefore, decoloniality serves as a broader term encompassing efforts to challenge and dismantle various forms of power and oppression resulting from colonialism. This includes addressing racial inequality, racism, as well as other forms of oppression such as patriarchy, ableism, and classism.

Decoloniality involves critically examining how colonial power and knowledge have shaped and continue to shape societies and a commitment to transforming these systems and structures to create a more just and equitable world. Decolonial thinking strives to delink itself from the imposed dynamics of the colonizer and colonized articulated in the West: the knower and the known, the subject and the object, as well as theory and praxis/practice. This suggests that decolonial thinking operates in a space outside the established Western frameworks, yet it is deliberately crafted from within these systems. The intention is to challenge and transform existing norms, positioning decolonial thinking not as an external force but as an integral and valid part of the broader intellectual and societal landscape (Mignolo, 2017; Mignolo and Walsh,

2018). Decoloniality is a journey towards removing neocolonial practices and policies that support indirect ownership of land, resources, and money (Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Decoloniality also includes removing cultural domination and the force of values and behaviors on others (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018).

The term “decolonize” can function as a verb for both ‘decolonization’ and ‘decoloniality.’ However, this interchangeability of ‘decolonize’ often leads to misusing the noun 'decolonization.' ‘Decolonization’ is frequently employed when “decoloniality” would be more accurate. As discussed earlier in this chapter, decolonization is often referred to as an umbrella term for the legal repatriation of land and resources, and decoloniality is the removal of colonial legacies such as cultural domination. The overuse of these terms has led to the politicization and misuse of the terminology, provoking both a numbing to its call to action and anger with its use (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that decolonization is NOT a metaphor, stating, “The easy adoption of decolonizing discourse by educational advocacy and scholarship, evidenced by the increasing number of calls to “decolonize our schools,” or use “decolonizing methods,” or, “decolonize student thinking”, turns decolonization into a metaphor. As important as their goals may be, social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches that decenter settler perspectives have objectives that may be incommensurable with decolonization” (p. 1). This differentiation in meaning can also prompt discussions on academics defining terminology in ways that are inaccessible for everyday use, thereby exacerbating linguistic elitism. These terms are widely discussed in English, which in itself poses a barrier to some joining the conversation, but the varying contexts, both historical and current, also ascribe different meanings to the terminology. Using any of these terms in a context outside of the United States would yield an entirely different meaning and discussion. Furthermore, any

universal usage of these terms is likely to perpetuate the meaning derived from a colonial academic context. Therefore, the meanings of these concepts presented in this study are intended for use only within the context of this research.

Chapter Four:

Methodology

This research uses qualitative research methods to gain insight into the U.S.-based foreign aid professionals' perceptions of neocolonialism and the decolonial efforts within the sector. General qualitative research was chosen as the most suitable methodology for this study due to its ability to explore intricate and nuanced subjects, such as the landscape of foreign aid practices. The research explores the lived experiences, perspectives, and decision-making processes of foreign aid professionals. General qualitative research enables the flexibility to have a more participant-centered approach to data analysis, placing the experiences, stories, and narratives of foreign aid professionals at the heart of the study. To achieve this, open-ended data collection methods allowed for extensive interviews with foreign aid professionals along with both descriptive statistics and open-ended questions in surveys. The open-ended and conversational approach to collecting data encouraged participants to provide comprehensive, context-rich information from their unique perspectives, insights, and viewpoints based on their experiences. Furthermore, the nature of general qualitative research seeks a thick description, incorporating the unspoken context surrounding each interviewee, such as the type of workplace, region or thematic focus of their work, level of experience, and much more.

In addition, qualitative data analysis in foreign aid research is often characterized by an iterative process, with data being repeatedly reviewed, coded, and interpreted. This iterative approach enables the gradual emergence of themes and patterns. The flexibility of general qualitative research also allows for the examination of socio-cultural, historical, and environmental factors that influence foreign aid efforts. The capacity to consider any element or subject as an influence on the field of foreign aid fosters an openness to uncover various insights

in the findings. This research genuinely strives to understand the world from the participants' perspectives, and general qualitative research allows for this, unveiling a depth and complexity in the research. The qualitative nature of this research fosters a comprehensive comprehension of the foreign aid sector. Moreover, qualitative research acknowledges the significance of unique experiences. The outlying information in this research offers valuable insights that may challenge prevailing assumptions or highlight overlooked aspects of the foreign aid sector. Every perspective and experience, even if expressed by a single individual, contributes to understanding the foreign aid landscape. By valuing and considering such information as important and valid, this research seeks to ensure a more inclusive and comprehensive analysis of the complexities inherent in foreign aid practices.

This methodology chapter begins by stating the primary research question and sub-questions that guide the study, examining how the discourse surrounding U.S. government-funded foreign aid practices influences foreign aid professionals and decolonization. It introduces the research site and participants, including their diverse backgrounds, and the transition to online data collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter further discusses the recruitment of research participants and data collection procedures, including surveys, individual interviews, and a follow-up questionnaire. The chapter goes into the topic of trustworthiness and research integrity via transparency, external peer reviews, and recognizing the complexity, and therefore the limitations, of the research topic. It elaborates on the data analysis methods, highlighting the utilization of critical discourse analysis, inductive coding, and the examination of qualitative data. Ethical considerations, strengths, and limitations are explored, and a security plan is outlined to ensure the privacy of participants.

Research Questions

Primary Question

The primary question posed by this research is: How does the discourse surrounding foreign aid practices constructed by U.S. government-funded activities/projects shape the understanding and actions of foreign aid professionals involved in fundings, staffing, designing, implementation, and evaluation of foreign aid practices, and what implications does this have for decolonial efforts?

Sub-questions:

The sub-questions entail the following:

- How do foreign aid professionals understand their role in the process of foreign assistance?
- In what ways do Western Ways of Knowing influence the role of foreign aid professionals in the funding, staffing, design, implementation, and evaluation stage of the U.S. foreign assistance process?
- How comfortable are foreign aid professionals with such influence or, more generally with their work?
- What type of relationship do the foreign aid professionals have with their in-country counterparts, and how much influence do they believe their partners have in designing the program?
- How do these foreign aid professionals initially or subsequently understand to constitute "decolonizing foreign assistance"?

- What do these foreign aid professionals see as the significant challenges towards decolonizing U.S. foreign assistance?
- What changes (incremental or significant reforms) do foreign aid professionals perceive are feasible for foreign aid professionals to make within their positions that would enable movement toward the decolonization of the U.S. foreign assistance system?

Research Site and Participants

This study explores the experiences and perspectives of the U.S.-based foreign aid professionals engaged in the planning and executing of foreign aid initiatives. The research encompasses individuals working within federal government agencies as well as INGOs, multilateral institutions, and private organizations in Washington, D.C., who have been actively involved in projects or programs funded by U.S. government foreign aid. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research was conducted entirely online, enabling the participation of foreign aid professionals residing outside Washington, D.C., while still considering it their home base. These criteria were explicitly communicated and confirmed with each interview and survey participant during the data collection phase.

The participants in the study displayed diversity across various dimensions, including race, sex, citizenship, country of origin, and religion. The research does not seek to establish correlations between social identity and perspectives, nor is social identity a determining factor in the research approach. Given that racism is an inherent component of neocolonial systems, it is crucial to acknowledge and consider multiple perspectives. This recognition is essential because racism operates systemically, permeating various aspects of society and shaping individuals' experiences and interactions within the foreign aid sector. Therefore, embracing

diverse viewpoints allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play and facilitates the identification and dismantling of discriminatory practices within the sector. Additionally, the foreign aid professionals that participated in the survey and interviews worked in a variety of regions worldwide, including Northern Canada with Indigenous populations, Israel and surrounding Middle East nations, Brazil, Paraguay, Tunisia, Sudan, Uganda, India, and many more. Some interviewees had a thematic focus in their work, such as gender inclusion and educational development, rather than a regional focus. Those with a regional focus also incorporated thematic areas like election integrity, youth development, civil society strengthening, economic development, and democracy building.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection Instruments

The data collection process consisted of three phases: surveys, individual interviews, and a final questionnaire sent to the initial interviewees one year after their initial interview. The data collection process spanned a total of three months, excluding the final questionnaire one year later, with ongoing data analysis during collection. The following section provides a detailed description of the data collection procedures.

Surveys

The initial data collection method involved a 19-question survey, which gathered both quantitative and qualitative data (see Appendix). The quantitative section of the survey collected descriptive statistics regarding the backgrounds and characteristics of foreign aid professionals, as well as information about foreign aid projects and institutions. The qualitative section of the survey collected data on self-reported attitudes, behaviors, and lived experiences. The survey played a crucial role in understanding participants' education levels, current and previous job

titles, types of organizations worked for, sectors and countries/regions involved in, professional identity, and knowledge of the discourse of decolonization in the foreign aid sector. The survey was distributed through targeted emails and specific social media sites for foreign aid experts, such as LinkedIn, the Fifty Shades of Aid Facebook Group, and the researcher's professional network. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, with the initial purpose being to recruit interview participants and collect descriptive data on them. Due to a relatively high response rate, the survey yielded rich information for analysis, with a total of 91 responses collected.

Interviews

The last question of the survey inquired whether participants were interested in being interviewed. While there were more than 20 affirmative responses, scheduling constraints permitted only 15 interviews. The interviews were conducted for approximately 45 minutes to one hour and were designed to elicit information regarding the participants' daily tasks, perspectives on the impact of their work, relationships with international partners, higher education, and knowledge of decolonial theory and practices. The participants were provided with a secure and confidential environment to express their views on the field of foreign aid. The interviews were audio-recorded for 15 participants. Detailed notes were also taken during the interviews to ensure the accuracy of the information collected.

Follow-up Questionnaire to Interviewees

One year after the initial interviews, a final questionnaire comprising ten open-ended questions was distributed to the interview participants. This questionnaire was designed to build upon the insights gained from the previous interviews while taking into consideration the recent changes that had taken place in the foreign aid sector due to COVID-19 pandemic, changes in

the U.S. Presidential Administration, and the recent racial reckoning. The questions posed were more pointed, addressing topics such as white saviorism, racism, and the discourse surrounding decolonization in the foreign aid sector. However, there were only four responses and the information collected basically repeated what was already stated in the interviews.

Data Analysis Procedures

In this study, the data collection process aimed to address the overarching research question, filling gaps in research on neocolonial and decolonial discourse within the foreign aid community. To achieve this, the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) were used as a tool to explore how language constructs and legitimizes power relations. CDA is a flexible tool that enables identifying themes of power structures through discourse while critical knowledge is also being applied universally. Given the study's focus on power structures rooted in colonialism, CDA provided steps to dissect the language used by the foreign aid professionals when answering their open-ended questions, specifically when asked about their perspectives of neocolonial elements in their work as well as how they or others might work to decolonialize U.S. foreign aid policies and practices. Faille's (2011) endorsement of discourse analysis as a means to counter universalistic and ethnocentric discourses underscores its relevance. The study's application of CDA to survey and interview data helps shed light on how foreign aid professionals shape their perceptions of the foreign aid sector, influence international partners, inform policies, and contribute to strategies aimed at disrupting neocolonialism in foreign aid. In the case of this study, the CDA process included multiple coding stages, emphasizing inductive reasoning, specifically looking for undertones that emphasized power dynamics.

The initial coding of the qualitative data collected through the surveys emphasized word and phrase repetition. Inductive coding was used to eliminate any presumptive outcomes, and a process for analysis was used to identify repetitious thematic codes in the data (Elliot, 2018). As suggested by Charmaz (2006), "avoid imposing a forced framework" and instead create the coding as they emerge (p. 66). To do this, I conducted the analysis using line-by-line coding in NVivo, a software program designed for qualitative research. NVivo was used to code and categorize data and identify themes and patterns using frequency searches for words and phrases. Once clear categories were developed, core categories were selected and used to continue coding, with exceptions when new and essential categories emerged. All codes focused on drawing connections between the professionals and neocolonial and decolonial discourse (Creswell, 2018). In addition, categories did not necessarily reflect specific theoretical terminology or phrases but rather professional jargon.

Here is the step-by-step process that was used to complete the analysis of the data:

1. Transcribe the interview data: The data was transcribed using Otter.AI, it was read through for any major errors while listening to the original audio, and then the text was uploaded to NVivo. AI transcription was mostly accurate, but there were some abnormalities that were missed and corrected after review.
2. Coding across data sources: Each transcript underwent an inquiry to find common terminology and phrases. There was some language pre-determined to search based on the literature review. However, frequency queries were the most useful in finding relevant themes. There was also a list of words used that did not connect to foreign aid that were removed from the list of relevant codes.

3. Identifying themes: The coded data were analyzed to identify patterns and themes in the language and discourse used by the interviewees. This included neocolonial practices and decolonial policies, how they position themselves, and their role in these issues.
4. Interpreting the data: I interpreted the data by concluding how the language and discourse used by the participants construct their perceptions of neocolonial practices and decolonial policies and how it positions their role and responsibilities concerning these issues. The conceptual framework chapter offered a structure for interpreting the themes

Two levels of discourse analysis were used, the micro level of analysis using language use, discourse, and communication, and the macro level of analysis referring to power, dominance, and inequality (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018; Dijk, 2001). This research analyzes foreign aid discourse to understand the perceptions of social and power relations in the field. In addition, language and discourse revealed both the explicit and implicit perceptions and ideologies of foreign aid professionals on the social and power hierarchies in the foreign aid sector.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations played a pivotal role in the planning and execution of this research. At every stage, I sought to adhere to a rigorous code of ethics to ensure the well-being and privacy of the participants. This process went through a rigorous evaluation of the University of Maryland IRB unit, and I only collected data after receiving its approval. Prior to data collection, participants were provided with comprehensive information about the research's objectives, potential risks, and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with the assurance that their names and any identifying

information would remain confidential. The names of organizations nor the names of research participants are used in writing in order to protect the research participants' privacy. Additionally, this study recognized the importance of sensitivity in discussing topics like neocolonialism, which could evoke discomfort. There was an intention with every interaction to be respectful and empathetic when addressing these subjects during data collection and analysis. I observed ethical guidelines to ensure that the study upheld the principles of transparency, respect, and privacy throughout its execution.

Trustworthiness

The positivist approach that emphasizes quantitative research is considered, by some, to be the gold standard, assuming there is a scientific element that proves validity (Creswell, 2018). Positivist inquiry emphasizes the removal of bias and predetermined outcomes, but it also removes the ability to consider culture and context. The validity of this study will not come from proving a lack of bias but instead from admitting to innate researcher bias and achieving validity through other modes of analysis. Rather than this study using the traditional modes of positivist inquiry, other modes of data collection and analysis were employed to include more qualitative data, adding a compelling element that thoroughly examines the research questions (Lubet, 2018). As stated by Tracy (2010), this “is not to provide researchers with a more valid singular truth, but to open a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue” (p. 844). There is a deeply layered and complex mode of knowing that is being analyzed in this study. The professionals' voices should not be considered static but instead evolving.

The study will instead use the following approach to ensure validity.

- This study has clear and well-defined research questions. Additionally, the data analysis design is focused and relevant to the question being asked.
- External peer reviews were conducted by individuals who were identified through a social media call for assistance. These reviewers listened to an oral synopsis of the analysis and provided valuable feedback on potential biases. Their insights played a crucial role in the work towards removing explicit biases.
- The perspectives of every research participant, even when confronted with outlier information, were included. This was done to emphasize the respect for the research participants by reflecting on their reality and verifying epistemological authenticity.
- This study reiterates the research questions throughout the study, drawing connections to the literature, background context, conceptual and theoretical framework, data collection, and data analysis, providing a map to be replicated by other researchers who want to expand on this study.
- Transparency and clarity on the data analysis methods are also critical to ensuring the findings are based on a clear and consistent framework.
- There is transparency on the researcher's positionality and bias, clarifying the study's limitations.
- Built into a dissertation is an ethical research trial conducted by the dissertation committee reading the study and panelists proposing questions that challenge the researcher (Lubet, 2018). The ethical trial, or dissertation panel, challenges the "typical" behavior observed and recorded as repetitive behavior and provides a higher level of validity (Lubet, 2018).

Limitations

This study, while valuable, also comes with many inherent limitations that require careful consideration. The first limitation pertains to biases and the limited research experience of the researcher. Acknowledging that researchers, even with the best intentions, can unintentionally introduce biases into their studies, the researcher has made a concerted effort to remain aware of her own biases and actively mitigate them. This involves reflecting on personal perspectives, staying open to alternative viewpoints, and engaging in rigorous self-assessment throughout the research process. To further address this limitation, the research included peer reviews and the dissertation panel.

The second limitation is related to limited time and access to research participants. In response, the study employed a structured and efficient data collection process that maximized the available time. The researcher actively sought to ensure accessibility and accommodate participants' schedules. Additionally, the decision to conduct the study entirely online allowed for wider participation, alleviating some constraints related to geographical access.

The third limitation involves the rapidly evolving context within the foreign aid sector, a factor outside the researcher's control. To mitigate this, the researcher sought to continuously adapt by staying informed about the latest developments and taking a dynamic approach to data collection and analysis.

Lastly, the fourth limitation considers the societal stresses on research participants. The study prioritizes the well-being of participants by minimizing the demands on their time and ensuring that their involvement is not exacerbating any stress in their work life. These strategies are an attempt to uphold the study's ethical commitment to the research participants while recognizing there is still risk.

Security Plan

The surveys were created using Google Forms and only required identifying information for those interested in participating in an interview. Those interested in participating in an interview were required to sign a confidentiality form stating that the names of individuals and details of the conversations would not be shared outside of the interview. Though personal emails were required and shared with the researcher for logistical purposes, once the data collection process concluded, all personal emails associated with the study were erased, leaving no personal identifiers of the participants in the study. The notes from the unrecorded interviews were typed on the researcher's personal computer and saved in a folder that requires a security password. The notes were also saved on a backup disk that required a security access code. The data analysis, discussion, and other sections in this study that use quotes or interview information will use pseudonyms to protect participants' privacy.

Systems-based Approach to Organizing Findings

The subsequent chapters are structured around a systems-based approach aimed at comprehensively evaluating and analyzing the foreign aid landscape. This method facilitates the dissection of the foreign aid landscape into interconnected components, seeking to provide a holistic understanding of its functioning. This comprehensive overview treats foreign aid as an ecosystem involving diverse actors, including the U.S. government, foreign aid agencies, NGOs, foreign aid professionals, local partnering agencies, and the communities they serve.

The first findings chapter covers the perceptions of impact of foreign aid professionals. These professionals within aid agencies wield "expertise" and decision-making authority across

the spectrum of designing, implementing, and evaluating foreign aid initiatives. The second findings chapter explores the institutional-level decision-making processes, examining the extent of responsibility and decision-making authority interviewees possess, and their roles in perpetuating neocolonial policies and practices within the foreign aid landscape, as well as opportunities for these organizations to engage in decolonial efforts. Both governmental and non-governmental foreign aid agencies function as implementing bodies and intermediaries, tasked with executing aid programs and initiatives while bridging the gap between funders and local communities. Lastly, the final findings chapter explores government-level decision-making processes, focusing on their restrictive funding policies, top-down decision-making tendencies, and overarching influence on the foreign aid landscape. The policies and funding decisions of the U.S. government significantly shape the direction and priorities of foreign aid efforts.

While the chapters break down into the different layers of decision-makers in foreign aid, the research still cross-examines the system as a whole rather than in isolation. This facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics at play. It recognizes the interdependencies between these actors and the complex relationships between them. This approach also identifies leverage points for change in each layer of operations. A systems-based approach can ultimately facilitate the development of impactful strategies to address neocolonial practices and work towards a more equitable foreign aid system. By disrupting these feedback loops and interdependencies, it becomes possible to challenge and dismantle neocolonial structures in foreign aid.

Chapter Five:

Exploring the Coloniality of Self: Knowledge, Skills, and Impact of Foreign Aid through the Perspectives of Foreign Aid Professionals

This chapter explores the foreign aid sector from the perspective of the foreign aid professional, presenting data captured from a survey of 91 individuals, 15 in-depth interviews, and 4 follow-up questionnaire respondents. This chapter provides detailed demographics of the individuals who self-identified as US-government-funded foreign aid professionals, including information on their educational backgrounds, language abilities, years of experience in the sector, and more. The data capture participants' perspectives on their roles versus the roles of their local partners in program design, implementation, and evaluation. The data presented in this chapter directly answer, and provide additional context to understand, the following two research sub-questions:

1. How do foreign aid professionals working on US government-funded activities/projects describe their role in funding, staffing, designing, implementing, and evaluating foreign aid practices?
2. From the perspectives of foreign aid professionals, what are the neocolonial policies and practices in foreign aid?

By examining foreign aid professionals' educational backgrounds, language abilities, geographical distribution, and power-sharing practices, this chapter reveals underlying neocolonial elements presented in foreign aid efforts. Understanding these characteristics is crucial for uncovering power imbalances stemming from the valuing of Western knowledge and skillsets over local and Indigenous Ways of Knowing and doing. By analyzing the data on the education levels of foreign aid professionals, the number of languages they speak, and their

geographical distribution, it becomes possible to discern specific patterns and dynamics that may have implications on neocolonialism in foreign aid. Overall, the importance of this section lies in its ability to visualize the descriptive statistical insights that highlight the existence of neocolonial elements within foreign aid, setting the stage for understanding the personal knowledge, experiences, and education that shape the perspectives of foreign aid professionals.

Moreover, there is a growing discourse on individuals' involvement in perpetuating neocolonial practices. The criticism that surrounds individuals in foreign aid often revolves around white saviorism and/or racism within the U.S.-based organizations, as well as the rigid funding and government structures creating obstacles to sustainable and impactful foreign aid initiatives. However, often when neocolonial issues in foreign aid are addressed, the issues are delinked from the foreign aid ecosystem, addressing issues in a silo. This chapter focuses on the individual working in the foreign aid sector drawing a connection between the individuals and their perceived impact of their work within foreign aid organizations and government structures.

Profile of the Foreign Aid Professional

Demographics

The survey and interview participants represent diverse backgrounds and life experiences, including individuals born inside and outside of the United States, some holding dual citizenship, some pursuing their undergraduate or graduate studies internationally, and a few individuals born in the U.S. with parents from another country. Although these demographic details were not explicitly solicited, the research participants voluntarily provided this information, indicating that they believe that their backgrounds may shape their perceptions of foreign aid. It is important to note that while these identities are disclosed, they should not be

seen as the sole determinants of a particular perspective but rather as factors that can influence behaviors and attitudes. Therefore, these self-identified characteristics are shared to highlight the diversity within the foreign aid sector and the institutions that drive it.

As seen in the pie chart below, among the 91 survey participants 12.1% are classified as entry-level professionals with 0-5 years of experience in the field. The plurality of respondents, 28.6%, have 6-10 years of experience, while 23.1% have 11-15 years of professional experience. There are 9.9% of respondents that have 16-20 years of experience, and 26.4% have accumulated 20 or more years of experience in the field of foreign aid.

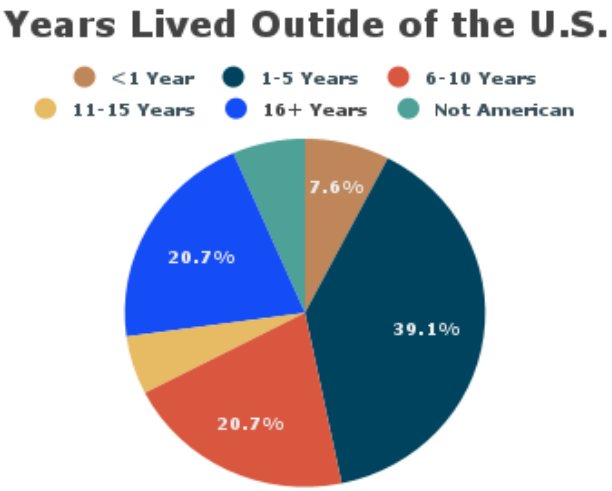
Figure 1

The experience level is an essential factor to consider when understanding perspectives in the foreign aid sector. Individuals with fewer years of experience may not have traveled as much or worked with their partnering communities, nor have they had to deal with as much of the high-level bureaucratic processes that their managers or supervisors have experienced. The value of the data collected in this question lies in the depth of understanding and perceptions the individual has of the foreign aid field.

It is important to note that since this survey was conducted in 2021, the provided data may no longer accurately represent their current perspectives, as their situation may have changed. One notable aspect of this chart is the higher percentage of experienced foreign aid professionals participating in the survey. One reason for this could be that this research's recruitment process targeted networks primarily consisting of experienced foreign aid professionals seeking to share information and provide feedback. However, there are likely more reasons behind why entry- or mid-level professionals chose not to participate in the survey. One possibility is that they may have felt insecure about offering their opinions or insights on the field, feeling they have limited experience and not realizing their perspectives added value to the field.

The pie chart below details the number of years the 91 survey respondents have lived outside of the United States. Approximately 10% of the respondents indicated living abroad for less than one year, with most attributing it to their study abroad experiences. The plurality of survey participants, comprising 39.3%, resided outside the United States for a period ranging from one to five years. These two figures alone result in nearly half of the survey respondents living outside of the U.S. for less than five years, even though the majority of the survey respondents have been in the field for over 10 years. The remaining respondents were composed of 21.3% having lived outside of the U.S. for 6-10 years, 5.6% lived outside of the U.S. for 11-15 years, and the remaining 21.3% lived outside the United States for 15 years or more.

Figure 2



It should be emphasized that not all survey participants were born in the United States, implying that some of the years spent outside the country may have occurred during their childhood. Additionally, when considering time spent in study abroad programs, it is crucial to acknowledge that it may not necessarily reflect deep immersion in the local culture. The duration spent abroad does not solely indicate the quality of immersion or the effort invested in learning and understanding the local language and culture. Therefore, without additional information regarding the duration and nature of time spent outside of the United States, the analysis of this question is limited.

The two pie charts below show the languages spoken by the survey respondents and how frequently those professionals use that language.

Figure 3

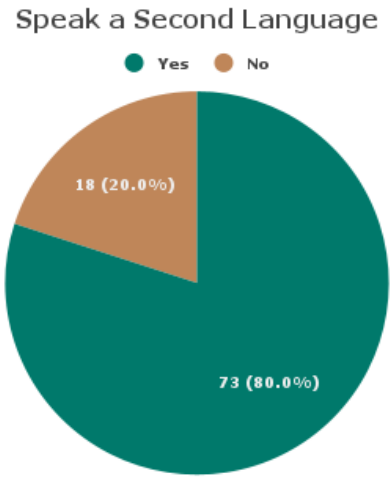
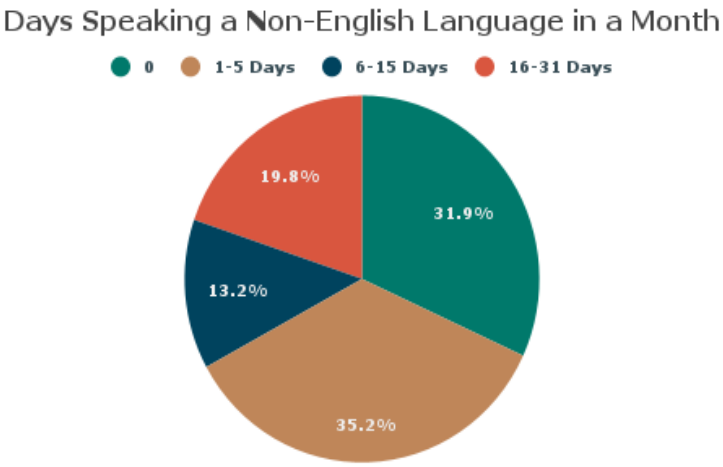


Figure 4



A significant 82% of the survey respondents reported being able to speak a second language in addition to English. When asked about their frequency of using a non-English second language per month, at least 68% indicated they use a language other than English for at least one day a month. However, the majority of survey respondents, over 50%, reported using a language other than English for less than six days a month. The respondents also specified the countries and regions where they work, and it is evident that most of these locations do not have English as one of their official languages (see discussion below).

The high percentage (82%) of survey respondents reporting proficiency/some level of competence in a second language is indicative of the linguistic diversity within the foreign aid sector. However, the disparity between the frequency of using a non-English second language per month suggests that while many individuals possess language skills, they do not often engage with communities or individuals that do not speak English. This discrepancy could reflect underlying power dynamics, where proficiency in a second language may be valued for accessing certain contexts or communities, but not necessarily prioritized in day-to-day interactions given they are likely to be interacting with other US-based professionals. Moreover, the reliance on English as the primary language of communication within foreign aid organizations may perpetuate linguistic hegemony, marginalizing voices and perspectives from non-English-speaking regions. The lack of language proficiency in areas where English is not an official language is one example of a neocolonial framework in which the foreign aid sector operates. This highlights the linguistic imperialism reinforcing asymmetrical power structures within the global aid landscape. Thus, while linguistic diversity may be acknowledged during application processes for hiring individuals at foreign aid organizations, the actual integration and utilization of diverse languages in daily operations and decision-making processes is only a surface-level consideration.

Analyzing this question can be subject to various assumptions, which presents a limitation. One assumption is that the individuals hired or considered as in-country partners are fluent in both English and the local language. Consequently, U.S.-based foreign aid professionals may not necessarily need to speak the local language. Additionally, the U.S.-based work revolves around designing and evaluating the programs, not necessarily implementing the programs, and therefore they do not need to use the language often.

The information provided by these data helps us understand the relevance of the survey participants' responses to their work. For instance, if a foreign aid professional has lived in a country where a non-English language is spoken, it indicates their level of exposure to and understanding of the local culture. Similarly, if professionals conduct their work in a region where they haven't lived previously but still speak the language, this may demonstrate their ability to comprehend the culture and effectively communicate with their partners. Such insights can shed light on the foreign aid professionals' intrinsic control over their work, particularly when it comes to the design, implementation, or evaluation of foreign aid programs. The lack of language skills for the region in which a foreign aid professional is working can impact their awareness of how program design, implementation or evaluation can affect the preservation of local culture.

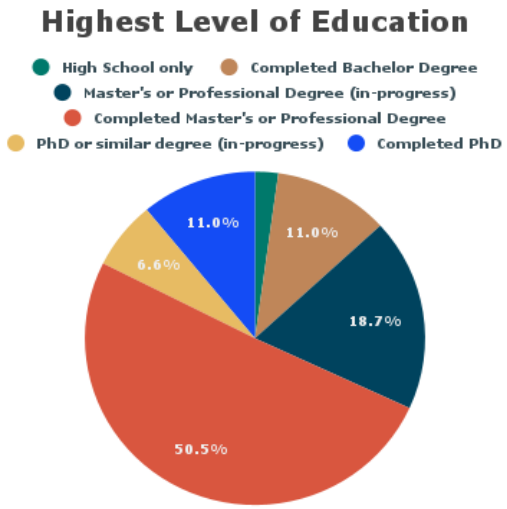
Moreover, demanding English proficiency from a local individual, instead of utilizing a U.S.-based professional who speaks the local language, affects the access communities have to receive foreign aid funding, and more significantly, to genuinely participate in decision-making processes regarding foreign aid initiatives impacting their community.

Educational Background

The pie chart below describes the educational background of the survey respondents. The educational profile of the survey participants reveals a highly educated foreign aid sector, with less than 1% holding only a high school diploma and 11% only possessing a bachelor's degree. Notably, 69% of the participants have either completed their master's degree or are currently pursuing it, not including the Ph.D. holders who also hold a master’s degree. Furthermore, 11% of the survey participants hold a Ph.D., indicating the same percentage of Ph.D. holders as those

who have only a bachelor's degree. As a result, a significant 87% of the foreign aid professionals who took part in the survey have obtained or are pursuing a graduate degree.

Figure 5



This finding holds critical information for this study, as it highlights the potential influence of individuals' education, particularly their graduate education, on shaping their perspectives and behaviors in their work, while also highlighting the hiring practices of aid agencies. Higher education programs play an important role in shaping the mindset and knowledge base of professionals in the sector. Given the substantial percentage of foreign aid professionals with graduate degrees, higher education programs potentially present an accessible, sustainable, and influential avenue, at least for those near the beginning of their careers, for challenging neocolonial policies and practices and working toward decolonization in the field.

A potential challenge associated with a highly educated workforce in the foreign aid sector is the risk of academic or theoretical approaches learned through their graduate programs overshadowing practical, on-the-ground knowledge, depending on the time during their career that they pursued their graduate education. While advanced degrees provide a strong theoretical foundation, they might sometimes detach professionals from the complex realities faced by local

communities. This detachment could hinder the effectiveness of aid efforts, as well-intentioned but overly academic approaches may not adequately address the nuanced, context-specific challenges that arise in diverse cultural and socioeconomic settings. Striking a balance between academic knowledge and practical, real-world experience is vital for foreign aid professionals, as it ensures that interventions remain responsive and contextually relevant. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the theoretical frameworks taught in graduate programs, as discussed in the literature review, can inadvertently reinforce neocolonial perspectives. Despite this risk, recognizing and valuing higher education programs, especially during the hiring process, offers an opportunity for intervention. By actively promoting critical frameworks taught in graduate (and undergraduate) degree programs, professionals can contribute to disrupting neocolonial practices and fostering a more equitable and culturally sensitive approach to foreign aid.

It is important to also acknowledge the limitations of this survey question. The survey does not provide information on where the foreign aid professionals obtained their degrees or the thematic or regional focus of their graduate programs. While this information may not directly align with the research questions in this study, it would be valuable to compare the thematic and regional foci of their degrees with their current work. The absence of this information represents a limitation in fully assessing the relationship between educational background and professional practice within the foreign aid sector. Additionally, the theoretical or practical approach of each graduate program can influence the foreign aid professionals' framework and perspectives in which they apply to their daily work; therefore, there is a limitation in fully understanding the insight provided in the data from this question.

Motivation to Join the Field

The survey and interview processes included a set of open-ended questions seeking to understand the driving factors behind foreign aid professionals' choice of a career in foreign aid. The interview responses revealed three primary categories of motivation: 1) familial influence, 2) cultural and intellectual curiosity coupled with a sense of service, and 3) unexpected life experiences. While these motivations share commonalities and were identified by the interviewees, it is essential to recognize that individuals may also be influenced by unconscious factors that shape their career choices. Uncovering and understanding these deeper, unconscious motivations is a nuanced process that involves digging into the intricacies of an individual's cultural and psychological backgrounds. Furthermore, cultural, and psychological shifts take time to manifest and evolve, requiring in-depth and ongoing discussions over an extended period of time. Uncovering these unconscious motivations is not a one-time event; it necessitates a longitudinal study that spans several years which was not in the scope of this research.

The first motivation identified for one to pursue a career in international affairs is the influence of familial factors, as revealed by interviews with five individuals. These interviewees shared stories highlighting the impact of their families on their career paths, showcasing how diverse backgrounds, personal experiences, and family narratives shaped their perspectives and professional aspirations. One interviewee's family had a deep involvement in local politics, which served as a catalyst for their interest in international relations and politics. This initial engagement with political dynamics nurtured the interviewee's passion for gender equality, propelling the interviewee toward a career in democracy, governance, and elections. The interviewee's family influence sparked the interviewee's dedication to democratic principles and motivated the interviewee's involvement in the field of international relations, saying,

> So, growing up, I was always very interested in domestic politics, just because of my family. So, I think once I started getting interested in international affairs, this kind of democracy, governance, and elections are a combination of all of my life experiences. And I kind of feel like I can use some of the knowledge I gained growing up and some of those interests about the importance of, you know, citizen participation, and elections.

Another interviewee, who self-identified as biracial, emphasized the significant role of their own diverse background and family story played in shaping their global perspective. With roots in the Philippines and Germany, the interviewee's family history inspired their interest in global affairs. Furthermore, the interviewee described how the family history in the Philippines exposed them to the issue of human trafficking prevalent in the country. This awareness led them to engage in anti-trafficking advocacy and eventually sparked an interest in peacebuilding and conflict prevention in humanitarian settings. The interviewee's family's connection to the Philippines and their personal experiences fueled a commitment to making a positive impact on global issues. The interviewee describes the familial influences by saying,

> It just made me think about how different my life could have been, or even my dad's life could have been if he had stayed [in the Philippines]. That has been guiding me and the choices I make, because I'm constantly looking at the world with a lens of a global citizen, and also, you know, a responsibility that I feel to give back because I have been very privileged in my life and my upbringing.

Similarly, another interviewee with family ties to the Philippines developed a fascination with foreign cultures and diplomacy. The interviewee's father was born in Manila, and an uncle who still resides in the Philippines would frequently visit them in the United States. During his

uncle’s visits, he would tell stories about the customs and traditions of the family and life in the Philippines, peaking the interviewee’s interest in global studies. These interactions and the multicultural environment created by the interviewee’s family's presence in the United States sparked an interest in foreign affairs and diplomacy. The interviewee describes this by saying,

> There were two goals I had as a child, one was to be a teacher and the other was to be a diplomat. I was teaching in a school in Colorado, and in the summers, I would go places - like I studied in the Soviet Union, I studied in Greece, I studied in India, I studied in different places under Fulbright's or whatever. And so, the passion for looking outwardly grew from there.

Another story about familial influence is how an interviewee's family relocated from the United States to Spain while the interviewee was in high school. Therefore, the interviewee had an early exposure to international experiences that influenced their motivation to join the foreign aid sector. This transformative life event ignited the interviewee’s curiosity to explore diverse cultures and societies worldwide saying, “I had lived outside the West for chunks of time, you know, years.” The international environment in which the interviewee grew up inspired her/his desire to engage in international affairs and contributed to her/his developing a global perspective.

These interviews demonstrate that familial influence can play a substantial role in shaping individuals' decisions to pursue careers in international affairs. Family backgrounds involving politics, foreign aid, and exposure to diverse cultures, languages, and countries can ignite interest and motivation from a young age. The stories shared by the interviewees also highlight how family narratives, personal experiences, and inherited knowledge contribute to the interviewees’ understanding of world issues, contributing to the understanding of the

socialization process of foreign aid professionals, and what shapes their worldviews and perspectives in foreign aid.

The second motivation identified as driving interviewees to pursue a career in foreign aid is rooted in cultural and intellectual curiosity, coupled with a sense of service. Several interviewees attributed their career choices to a combination of factors, including a deep-seated curiosity about different cultures and a thirst for knowledge, among others, acknowledging the potential for varied motivations among individuals. To illustrate this, one interviewee fondly recalls her/his experiences in ninth grade when she/he witnessed the United States' involvement in the Kosovo conflict and the successful independence movement in East Timor. The interviewee explained, “As a young high schooler in America, I was fascinated by the idea that the United States could go to war, which was outside my lived experience. The international response that facilitated the victory of the little guy or the big guy was really fascinating to me.” This shows evidence that at that point of this interviewees life she/he already adopted a perspective promoted by the U.S. government. Similarly, two other interviewees also pointed to the significant impact of personal experiences, particularly the events of 9/11, on their interest in foreign aid and national security. One interviewee emphasized their Lebanese heritage as having influenced their strong pull to contribute to the national security field in light of those events.

In contrast to the previous experiences, one interviewee from Darfur, Sudan, personally experienced conflict as a young child. The interviewee said, “Sudan is a country where there's violent conflict, corruption, massive atrocities, and human rights abuses.” This experience drove this interviewee to engage in local politics during the years attending university. In turn, the interviewee’s involvement in student politics led to circumstances where she/he was forced to flee their home country. The experiences the interviewee encountered were instrumental in

shaping their decision to pursue a career in foreign aid once living outside the home nation. Driven by a desire to work towards peace within her/his homeland, the interviewee's family narrative and personal encounters with conflict served as a profound motivator. As the interviewee shared, "I didn't come to school just to study, and graduate, and go to work. I came to resist. So, after I had to leave Sudan, mostly, I've been able to work outside on the same issues, human rights, governance, and peacebuilding." This journey highlights how personal experiences and the determination to enact change within one's homeland can drive individuals to enter the foreign aid profession. These stories highlight how a combination of intellectual curiosity, cultural intrigue, personal experiences, and a desire to address societal disparities or conflicts have shaped individuals' journeys into the realm of foreign aid.

The final motivation for entering the foreign aid profession indicated in the interview data is an unexpected life experience. These stories are particularly noteworthy since two of the stories emphasize how education programs and/or university campus life can shape one's professional trajectory. An interviewee's participation in Model UN during middle school sparked a profound interest in diplomacy, subsequently leading them to pursue studies in international relations with a focus on Latin America. The interviewee stated,

> I joined Model UN when I was in middle school, and loved it and thought – 'Oh, I want to do diplomacy.' And from age 12 on that's kind of what really led my whole academic focus and my interests, which again, is kind of crazy to think, at 30 that something I did at age 12 has influenced my whole life. But that really was the impetus.

Although several interviewees participated in the Peace Corps as a way to build experience, only one interviewee said they were influenced by her/his Peace Corps experience to join the field.

The interviewee unexpectedly encountered a Peace Corps volunteer at a booth on their campus, which inspired them to join the program despite never having considered such a career before. Similarly, an interviewee, who was already working in public service at the Library of Congress, saw joining the Foreign Service as a natural extension of their existing role, stating,

> I was a junior fellow at the Library of Congress, I was a music historian. I just saw public diplomacy for the Foreign Service, as sort of an extension of what I was already doing, I was already working with visiting artists and scholars, I was already, you know, in public service. And so, it just seemed a little bit like an expansion of what I was already doing.

These unexpected paths highlight the diverse and unique journeys that individuals take to enter the foreign aid profession, showcasing the dynamic nature of motivations within the sector. It is noteworthy that some foreign aid professionals stumble upon the career path through seemingly random experiences, and unforeseen opportunities spark their interest in joining the foreign aid profession.

Understanding the motivations behind entering the field provides valuable context for understanding the mindset and perspectives of foreign aid professionals, which serves as a compass for foreign aid professionals influencing their approach to their roles and interactions with diverse communities. These motivations, including family backgrounds, intellectual curiosity, and unexpected encounters, can influence and continue to shape foreign aid professionals' roles and perspectives in the sector. The results of the interviews indicate that complex societal and situational factors drive individuals to engage in foreign aid work. Family backgrounds, which include political involvement, exposure to diverse cultures, and personal narratives, indicate the important role of personal experiences in career choices. These

experiences propel the professionals' passion but could also produce potential biases or preconceptions that might influence their work. For instance, individuals driven by familial ties may approach their work with a heightened sense of empathy, considering the humanitarian aspect of aid and prioritizing connections with local communities.

The intellectual curiosity driving some foreign aid professionals can present a complex ethical dilemma, particularly in the context of global conflicts. While passion and excitement for this type of work can drive innovation and dedication, there's a risk of fetishizing or romanticizing the suffering of others. This raises questions about the potential impacts of their work, when the motivation for engaging in foreign aid primarily stems from genuine empathy and a commitment to alleviating suffering, or the motivation is more closely related to intellectual curiosity or a desire for adventure.

This highlights that there are unconscious factors that shape foreign aid professionals' capacity to approach their work with humility and questions whether they are aware of how these motivations might perpetuate paternalistic attitudes or reinforce Western-centric solutions. Acknowledging these diverse sources of motivation is critical for exploring the complex nature of foreign aid professionals and the potential ramifications of foreign aid initiatives.

Work Institutions: Foreign Aid Sectors

Throughout the study, categorizing professionals in this sector presented a challenge. Various terms such as foreign aid, foreign policy, international development, and humanitarian aid have been interchangeably used to describe the field, each associated with different types of work. When professionals were asked to identify the fields they work within foreign aid, survey participants often selected multiple options. Below are some key highlights:

Figure 6

- Out of the 91 respondents, international development emerged as the most frequently chosen field, with 56 participants selecting it.
- Foreign policy was also a popular choice, selected 44 times, although it was never chosen as a stand-alone field and was always accompanied by another selection.
- The significance of both humanitarian aid and national security was evident, with 29 respondents identifying with each of these fields.
- Human rights closely followed with 27 respondents, while peacebuilding garnered 21 respondents.
- Disaster response was, to a lesser extent, chosen by only 14 participants.
- Other fields, such as cultural exchange/diplomacy, food security, health, military, and nutrition, had a single respondent identifying with them, but none were chosen as stand-alone selections.

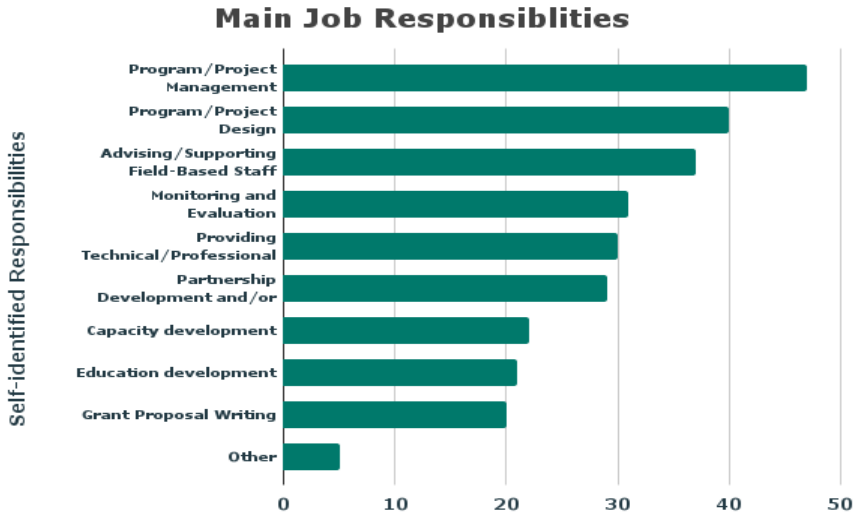
The research findings revealed there is range of perceptions of their field of work within foreign aid. While foreign aid is often used as an umbrella term in congressional reports, the perspectives on naming the field and the types of work encompassed within it vary among the

survey respondents. Almost half of the respondents reported their profession as foreign policy along with another sector, such as international development or peacebuilding. Some respondents checked all the available names for their profession, which may reflect their organization's work but might not accurately represent their own individual roles unless they have been involved in multiple areas of foreign aid over several years. Therefore, there are complexities regarding what is considered foreign aid and whether any name accurately represents the profession.

Foreign Aid Professionals' Positions, Roles, and Responsibilities

The graph presented below holds significant relevance as it provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse roles and responsibilities assumed by the 91 survey respondents within the foreign aid sector. The predominant tasks identified by the U.S.-based foreign aid professionals include program management, project design, grant proposal writing, and monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, it is noteworthy that each survey respondent checked at least three of the main job responsibilities, indicating multifaceted engagement with various aspects of foreign aid work.

Table 1

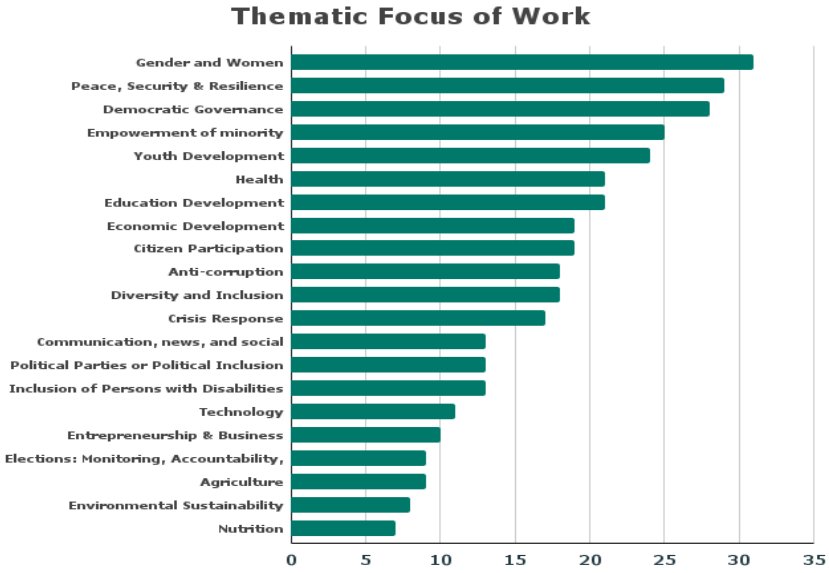


Just over half of the respondents (47 out of 91) identified as being involved in managing foreign aid programs, indicating a substantial number of individuals tasked with overseeing the implementation and coordination of foreign aid initiatives. Additionally, a considerable number of respondents (40 out of 91) are engaged in project design, highlighting the significant role U.S. government-funded foreign aid professionals have in the strategic planning and conceptualization of foreign aid initiatives. Furthermore, the involvement of 37 respondents in advising field staff emphasizes the role played by U.S. foreign aid professionals providing guidance to local communities, or at least the project staff involved in the initiative. Lastly, 31 respondents stated they conduct monitoring and evaluation activities, highlighting the adoption of the U.S.-based indicators of impact on communities. Overall, these survey findings offer valuable insights into the distribution of roles and responsibilities among foreign aid professionals, shedding light on key areas of expertise and types of tasks involved within the field.

The next graph highlights the thematic work done in the foreign aid sector, and it is important to note that most respondents selected more than one thematic focus. Concerning the thematic focus of the work, the majority named gender and women, peace, security, and resilience, democratic governance, and empowerment of minority groups. Specifically, the data reveals that 31 respondents are engaged in gender and women foreign aid projects, demonstrating a significant emphasis on addressing issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment within foreign aid initiatives, at least among those surveyed. Moreover, 29 respondents identified their work as focusing on peace, security, and resilience efforts. There were 28 respondents who identified a focus of their work on democratic governance, underscoring the importance the U.S. government’s foreign aid workplaces in fostering inclusive

and participatory governance structures. Furthermore, 25 respondents prioritize the empowerment of minority populations, though it is difficult to know exactly what this work entails. Lastly, 24 respondents are actively involved in youth development projects, highlighting a recognition of the importance of investing in future generations and addressing the unique needs of young people in foreign aid initiatives.

Table 2



The data on the survey respondents that also participated in the interview provide insights into a deeper understanding of the context in which those interviewees work. The interviewees have work experience in a range of positions and tasks undertaken in their respective fields. These included: working on education projects in Latin America, overseeing global monitoring and evaluation efforts for demining in post-conflict nations, serving as a public diplomacy officer for the Foreign Service at the State Department, and acting as a conflict advisor within the State Department. Other positions involved serving as an Education Officer for USAID, working as a consultant on US-funded projects, and holding a desk officer position for a company specializing in health emergency responses in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Additionally, there were some unique roles reported, such as an analyst for a small firm specializing in creative, human-centered design and system thinking-based solutions, and an entrepreneur who started her/his own company working with clients from various foreign aid sectors. Moreover, some participants were employed by organizations responsible for overseeing US government-funded programs in countries like Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Jamaica, and Mexico. Their work focused on topics such as elections and strengthening political parties. Other notable roles included program officers for nonviolent action programs, gender program officers, and in-house consultants providing expertise on gender-related matters to other programs.

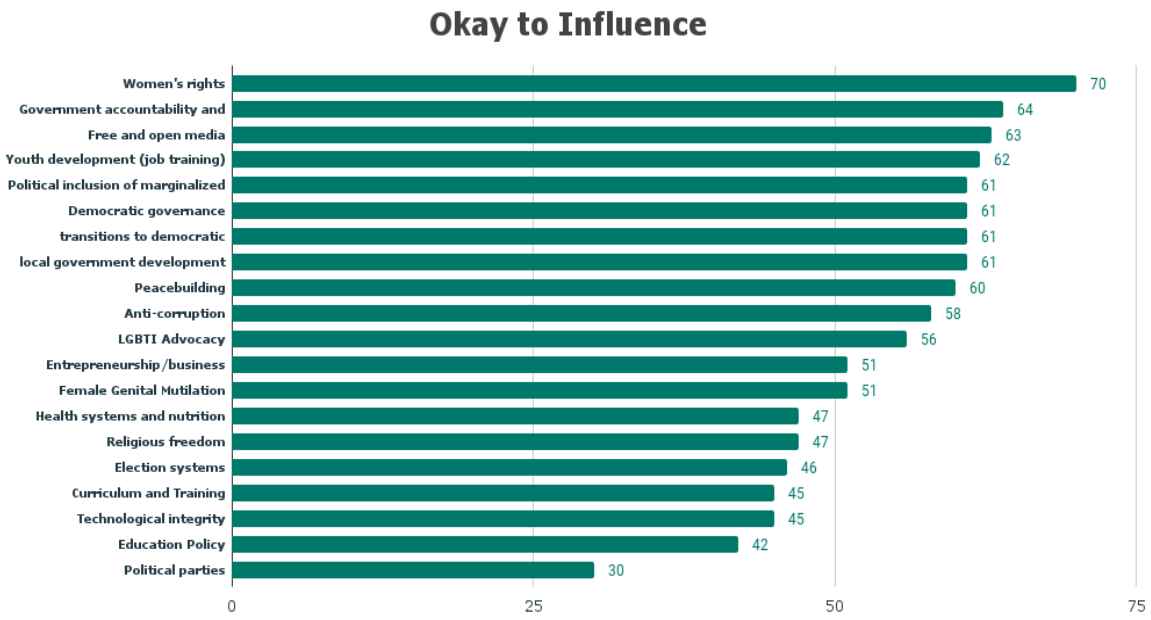
By presenting these two sets of data together, it can be determined that the work on gender equity, peacebuilding, democratic governance, empowerment of minorities and other work themes identified is largely managed, designed, and evaluated by foreign aid professionals based in the United States. This observation further shows the considerable influence wielded by U.S. foreign aid individuals in shaping the trajectory of foreign aid initiatives, based on the sample of foreign aid professionals in this research. It is important to note that the survey respondents are not a representative sample of foreign aid professionals, and the interview sample is not representative of those who responded to the survey. This will be further discussed in Chapter Six to incorporate the intersection of individual and organizational impacts on decisions regarding the design, implementation, and evaluation in foreign aid.

Foreign Aid Professionals' Perceptions of What Influences They Believe They Can Exert: Responses by Survey Respondents

This section delves into the perceptions of foreign aid professionals regarding the impact of their work. To initiate this discussion, survey respondents were prompted with the following question: "Are there any issues listed above that you believe it is not acceptable for the United

States to exert influence on in foreign countries? If so, kindly explain your reasoning, and if any additional issues are missing from the list, please include them." You can see in the graph below of the survey respondents' answers that there were several options provided, and although there were a few added options, no added option was listed twice. This inquiry serves as a starting point in providing insights into the nuanced viewpoints held by professionals within the foreign aid sector regarding the acceptability of United States influence across various sectors.

Table 3



In the survey findings highlighted in the above graph, it was observed that among the respondents, there was a general acceptance that it is ok to influence various sectors through foreign aid endeavors. The majority of respondents, 70 (of 91) individuals, expressed approval for influencing women's rights initiatives, highlighting a significant consensus on the importance of promoting gender equality and empowerment. This also aligns with the previous graph stating gender and women issues as the main thematic focus of the foreign aid professionals' work. Similarly, high levels of support were also

recorded for influencing government accountability and transparency (64 respondents) and advocating for free and open media (63 respondents), underscoring the perceived significance of these principles in fostering democratic governance and societal progress, rooted in the U.S.-based perspective, and understanding of these issues.

A substantial number of respondents endorsed influencing youth development (62 respondents) and facilitating the political inclusion of marginalized groups, along with other democratic governance initiatives (61 respondents). Peacebuilding efforts garnered considerable support as well, with 60 respondents expressing approval for U.S. influence. Anti-corruption (58 respondents) and LGBTI advocacy (56 respondents) received slightly less unanimous support, but still, more than half of the survey respondents reported it was okay for U.S. foreign aid to influence these issues. Although many foreign aid issues received widespread acceptance for U.S. influence, others held lower levels of endorsement. Only 32% of the survey respondents felt it was okay for the U.S. to influence political parties, dropping significantly in comparison to the other foreign aid issues.

While there were numerous responses to the survey question, some participants pointed out that the terms "influence" and "feel are not okay" were open to interpretation and considered vague for research purposes. Nevertheless, despite the varied interpretations, several trends emerged from the answers, and there did not seem to be any significant outliers in how the questions were understood. Yet, this question appeared to evoke discomfort among respondents, potentially indicating their unease with the significant extent of the U.S.'s influence in other countries. As discussed in the literature review, U.S. foreign policy is often exerted indirectly through avenues such as international development, humanitarian assistance, and peacebuilding.

While foreign aid professionals may not always perceive their work as direct tools of foreign policy, the funding allocated to these endeavors inherently serves foreign policy objectives, aiming to advance U.S. interests (Foreign Assistance.gov, 2022; Morgenstern & Brown, 2022). While some individuals involved in foreign aid work have genuine intentions to serve the communities they work with, others may not explicitly link their actions to broader foreign policy objectives in the region or the specific thematic areas they focus on.

Moreover, the question asking whether it is not ok for U. S. to influence certain endeavors itself was critiqued, with one participant stating, "The question is hard to answer because I think if people or institutions from the US are invited to weigh in on any of those areas, then we should be free to. But if we are deciding to influence most of them without the driving force being local, then we shouldn't be doing it." This sentiment suggests the importance of local communities and perspectives to have a significant role in determining the nature and extent of influence. Another respondent stated, "If US influence means money is directed at what the US wants to achieve and not based on the needs, then I don't think the US (or anyone else) should influence any of it." Similarly, a third response added to this sentiment saying, "Those [issues] that are closely linked to US foreign policy objectives without a fundamental rights-based focus should be reconsidered."

In addition, participants identified two reasons why the United States should exercise caution in exerting influence. Firstly, they highlighted the need for the United States to address its own internal issues, as one participant stated, "The U.S. has its own issues which weaken its ability to try to influence other countries/people." Secondly, there was a concern that US foreign aid professionals may lack an understanding of local contexts, as another participant pointed out, "There is a tendency for U.S. representatives to assume they are all-knowing without attempting

to understand local contexts or empowering people to act on their own." Still another participant emphasized the need for influence to be based on the community's needs, stating, "I think education and peacebuilding/democracy initiatives are fine as long as they're based on a population's desired needs and not arbitrary."

Another major theme was regarding elections and political parties. Research participants generally expressed the sentiment that while the United States can provide technical support and assistance, the autonomy and integrity of local elections should be preserved. One interviewee emphasized, "I think that the U.S. can support foreign governments to conduct free and credible elections, but the U.S. should not influence elections abroad... The same goes for political parties - the U.S. can lend technical support but should not influence parties." This quote identifies the importance of distinguishing between providing technical assistance and directly influencing election outcomes, advocating for an approach that upholds the principles of free and fair elections without exerting direct influence. Moreover, this respondent expressed reservations about promoting capitalist values, noting that such promotion perpetuates inequality and may not be the solution to global issues. Another participant pointed out the issues with healthcare in the U.S. and its implications for influencing systems abroad, stating that US with its absence of universal healthcare, should not export certain aspects of the U.S. political system that are not even working in the United States. The overall consensus was that strengthening the entire electoral system, rather than influencing specific parties or outcomes, is crucial for safeguarding the autonomy of local elections. Another respondent pointed out, "In places that do not have sufficient funding or established expertise on certain issues, I think it's appropriate for the U.S. to invest taxpayer resources to support our values abroad. Related to politics, I don't think it's appropriate for the U.S. to support partisan groups." This quote highlights the distinction

between supporting general issues and values (and systems) versus directly influencing political parties, emphasizing the need for caution in party-related interventions. However, the quote also emphasizes how U.S. foreign aid professionals may prioritize Western values as the dominant and superior way of knowing and doing, such as carrying out a democratic election.

Research participants also highlighted the importance of respecting and understanding cultural differences when addressing specific issues, particularly LGBTQ+ rights and religious practices. The consensus among respondents was that these cultural matters should primarily be advanced by local groups and organizations (with US financial and technical assistance support?), considering a country's specific cultural and religious norms, democratic governance, and minority inclusion. It was stressed that careful consideration was necessary, given the potential for cultural backlash and varying societal values across countries. One respondent emphasized the need for localization:

> Yes, FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) and LGBTI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex) advocacy should be left to local groups to advance, considering a country's cultural and religious norms, democratic governance, and minority inclusion. Capitalism does not have to be modeled after the US - there are other ways to interpret it in terms of one's societal values. The US needs to better understand (other) countries' social, cultural, and political fabric and adapt programs accordingly.

This quote shows that the respondent recognizes the importance of adapting programs to each country's social, cultural, and political contexts rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all approach. Respondents acknowledged the sensitive nature of these issues, with another respondent noting, "LGBTi is a very sensitive subject in sub-Saharan Africa."

Overall, these findings underscore the varying and sometimes contradictory perspectives of foreign aid professionals on what U.S. foreign aid initiatives can and should influence in another nation. In general, there seems to be consensus on ensuring that US influence is rooted in (perceived) genuine needs, respects fundamental rights, and is driven by local forces, though what that means and the approach to achieving it may be understood differently within the foreign aid community.

Foreign Aid Professionals' View on What Their Work Has Impact on and How to Be Effective: Responses by Interviewees

The perception of the impact of foreign aid programs was further discussed in the interviews, focusing on what foreign aid professionals felt was the positive impact of their own work and organization. The perspective of the interviewees on the positive impacts of their programs is critical to understanding what they consider good practices in foreign aid. This section identified four key findings throughout the interviews, according to the foreign aid professionals, regarding the positive outcomes of their foreign aid efforts. The four findings include supporting education programs or another form of knowledge exchange, identifying measurable impacts, focusing on country-specific and locally-led programming, and the directly involving non-US based foreign aid professionals in their projects.

The exchange of knowledge and ideas through education programs was an emphasized impact identified by three respondents. These types of foreign aid programs have played a pivotal role in impacting communities. These types of programs involve sharing valuable skills and insights on particular topics such as agriculture, medicine, business practices, political science, and much more. Sometimes these programs look like scholarships for foreign nationals to attend universities or other types of learning programs in the United States, while other

programs are more short-term and provide a space for sharing knowledge and skills with professionals in similar fields. These types of programs are indicated to work towards equalizing the power dynamics between the U.S. and local counterparts. One interviewee provided an example of the impact of knowledge exchange through a successful scholarship program that brought Yemenis to the United States. The interviewee stated, “In Yemen, I met with ministers that were locked down, and going to Yemen has certainly fallen off the radar right now. But, in Yemen, we met with ministers and six of them had gone to school in the United States under scholarships. I think that rate of return is very high because those people have the most influence over what happens in those countries.” These programs provide a platform for individuals who often have significant influence in their home countries to acquire the knowledge and perspectives needed to drive positive transformations. Another interviewee described an education program as a radio education project in the Dominican Republic that enabled children to access education via the radio, and even receive certificates for completing radio education programs. The interviewee stated, “it was along the border of Haiti, where there were some very impoverished folks who have traveled around to fish or to harvest coffee or get whatever the environment provides for them. And so, we were able to do radio education - get it approved through the ministry. So that (getting the radio education) was a big advantage for them.” This type of program enables children from remote and impoverished communities to access education.

Secondly, several foreign aid professionals emphasized the impact and effectiveness of foreign aid programs by having quantifiable, tangible outcomes, and concrete evidence of success observed. One interviewee is in the role of a global monitoring and evaluation specialist for an organization that focuses on demining, while also paying some attention to promoting

safety in post-conflict zones. Demining is post-conflict recovery work, clearing landmines from affected areas to provide safety for communities impacted by war. The interviewee states, “You know, we pull landmines from the ground, it's very straightforward.” The quantifiable measure of landmines removed directly correlates with the prevention of potential injuries or deaths and also facilitates the return of land to agricultural and other uses. These concrete outcomes serve as a testament to the benefits of some tangible, structured and measurable deliverables of a foreign aid initiative.

Another interviewee also identifies a quantifiable outcome as concrete evidence of success. The interviewee tracks the buying and selling of lithium mines in the Arctic, stating several potential implications on national security, global supply chains, environmental impacts, and the treatment of Inuit communities. While the accessibility to the Arctic is the priority concern for the United States, as well as ensuring that neither China nor Russia can monopolize the lithium mines in the region, the interviewee emphasizes the need to quantify and track ownership as it directly impacts the Inuit communities who inhabit the area and the environment. The interviewee further explains, "The indigenous people sometimes are really happy to see any company come in and spread the wealth of money around for a short time, without understanding the ramifications." The consultant’s work thus involves tracking the practices of these companies, monitoring their sustainability practices and ensuring the local Inuit communities are benefiting economically from the extraction of these resources from their land.

This interviewee compares the situation of the lithium mines in Congo saying, “The Congolese lithium mines are very problematic because of child labor, and abuse of human rights. Companies are shying away from Congo, but Canada is a country that is careful, but you (still) need to be careful where the lithium is coming from and who's monopolizing it.” The

interviewee believes that monopolization can hinder the accountability of extraction practices, potentially harming the natural environment, and exploiting local communities. Therefore, it is understandable that the interviewee finds this form of monitoring and evaluation impactful, as it plays a pivotal role in balancing the economic benefits and national security with protecting the environment and Inuit rights.

Having quantitative, measurable impact was also discussed by an interviewee who works on initiatives related to healthcare, where the results can be more easily measured. For instance, in healthcare, the availability of essential medicines, the number of healthcare workers, and the increased success of medical procedures can be quantified. The impact is seen in the immediate and tangible benefits within a community. The more long-term measurements can include access to healthcare and an increased number of individuals who have received healthcare. An interviewee who works for an international health organization stated, “If someone safely gave birth because they had access to a doctor or midwife, or if now during COVID a community receives health care workers, or if someone has access to medicine for hypertension or diabetes, it's a pretty easy, measurable accomplishment.”

However, beyond quantifiable, quick, and immediate results, the interviewee describes how the continuity of care is an issue, as well as the quality and training of local healthcare workers. The interviewee states, “A classic case study is when folks look at the response in Haiti to earthquakes. And, you know, people poured in orthopedic surgeons [who] were performing surgeries for crushed wounds, but then they left, and people had, you know, equipment left in them.” The surgeons providing lifesaving procedures are evidence of a measurable impact, preventing unnecessary deaths. However, the measure of impact is not only about the lives saved but should also consider the ongoing quality of life. The departure of these surgeons left patients

with a need for ongoing care and management unattended, such as the removal of surgical equipment meant for only temporary use, rehabilitation, and treatment of potential complications. In this sense, the impact is measurable but incomplete.

The interviewee working on healthcare initiatives also describes how Venezuelan migrants in Colombia do not have access to the free public healthcare due to their lack of formal status in Colombia. The interviewee's organization provides healthcare to those migrants, explaining, "It's a public, you know, it says socialized medicine. And so, people are supposed to be able to access free health care, except Venezuelan migrants cannot because they're not nationalized, or normalized, as I call it. So, our programs there are running essentially nine clinics that provide care around the country to Venezuelan migrants." These clinics serve as critical healthcare access points for a vulnerable population that would otherwise be left without any form of medical care. By providing free healthcare services to Venezuelan migrants in Colombia, the organization not only provides immediate healthcare needs but also contributes to a broader public health effort, especially during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regarding impacts, interviewees also emphasized the importance of understanding cultural and social contexts to better design programs that are to be country-specific and locally led. This approach was deemed fundamental if foreign aid is to have a significant impact on the community and genuinely address issues identified by the community itself. By prioritizing country-specific and locally led programming, aid efforts can better align with the needs and priorities of the communities they serve, fostering closer collaboration between U.S. individuals and local counterparts. An interviewee noted the positive impact of this approach, saying "It became more of a locally led project than we had originally intended because of COVID. And I've been hearing this a lot, I heard them talking about like saying, 'Wow, we actually need to

continue doing this in the future, because this is the right way to do it.'" This remark highlights the potential long-term benefits of adapting to locally-led approaches in foreign aid initiatives.

A locally led foreign aid approach also emphasizes cultural awareness and respect for customs and traditions, while scrutinizing the prevailing practices that overlook or undervalue cultural nuances. By highlighting the significance of cultural learning, relationship-building, and context-specific knowledge, the interviewees challenge the notion of a one-size-fits-all approach to aid. One interviewee states, "We need to have a better understanding of what can be done, what can't be done. We need to understand where people are and what is acceptable." This statement reinforces the need to appreciate and respect the cultural diversity of the communities being served. Therefore, imposing Western practices or solutions without a deep understanding of the local fabric can lead to ineffective outcomes, as one interviewee puts it, "Imposing Western perspectives and assumptions on diverse cultural contexts without fully understanding the local dynamics is a neocolonial practice that disregards the intricacies and complexities of the local context." Several of the interviewees stated a clear recommendation for organizations to incorporate local perspectives and expertise into program design to ensure cultural sensitivity and enhance the impact of foreign aid initiatives.

Moreover, the interviews repeatedly emphasize the need for foreign aid professionals to increase their understanding of cultural and social contexts when executing foreign aid projects. One interviewee stated, "In locally led initiatives, it becomes imperative for foreign aid professionals to be proficient in the local language of the community they are working with." This ensures effective communication, fosters trust, and empowers local stakeholders to fully participate in decision-making processes, thereby promoting genuine partnership.

However, foreign aid professionals do not always follow these guidelines. For instance, one interviewee discussed a foreign aid program led by USAID that was aimed at improving agricultural practices in a rural village. They shared how a local farmer, having decades of agricultural experience in the region, possessed invaluable insights into the specific challenges and opportunities related to the project. This farmer explained to USAID personnel that mice were nesting at a particular level above the ground, indicating that would be the expected water level during the upcoming farming season. Despite this local knowledge, USAID chose to rely on Western-based weather predictions. Unfortunately, the result was that the seeds were planted at a level of the ground that eventually was flooded, resulting in no crops for the season and severe negative consequences for the community. The local farmer's knowledge, grounded in years of experience and cultural familiarity, proved challenging for an outsider to comprehend, and trust. However, had these USAID individuals been exposed to more culturally sensitive and critical case studies during their higher education program, their approach might have leaned toward following the lead of local knowledge. This underscores the significance of tapping into these local perspectives and knowledge systems, which constitute an essential component of fostering truly effective and community-driven foreign aid initiatives that minimize harm to local communities.

Also, interviewees emphasize that the voices of local advocates and organizations be heeded. One example provided was when working on issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and honor killings. The interviewee states, “We need to listen and better understand the environment that we're working in. And then if we have a goal, work with the people to achieve that goal.” These FGM and honor killings are typically seen from the Western perspective as cultural practices that need to be stopped at all costs. Yet, respectful listening and action with

local communities and organizations, devoid of imposition or pretentiousness, are considered as critical to addressing these practices. This underscores how the interviewees acknowledge the complex challenge of balancing the imperative of listening to local communities with adhering to their own and their organization's values, emphasizing this as one of the most impactful approaches in foreign aid.

Finally, concerning the perceived positive impact of foreign aid initiatives, all interviewees emphasized the personal involvement of foreign aid professionals in projects to achieve positive results. A couple of the interviewees felt that active involvement in the field signifies a commitment to witnessing firsthand the impact of aid programs on the ground. This hands-on approach also allows aid professionals to understand the real-world implications of their initiatives and to adapt them as needed. One interviewee states,

> What got me into this line of work, what keeps me here, is designing programs that are catered to the country context that involve staff and partners from the country in question where the program is being implemented. Really relying on staff and partnerships from all over the world to implement really smart, informed programming. And that's also why I was eager to make the jump from DC HQ to the field itself. Because, you know, being in the country and getting to see the programs get implemented and see the actual change that can affect people's lives. To me, that's the most rewarding part of it. And especially working in spaces where there's maybe an ongoing transition to democracy or more of a closed society where there are interventions from an INGO.

The interviewee further discusses how the local counterparts were more vulnerable leading these projects, so the U.S. foreign aid professionals leading the work removed the risk of local counterparts from being punished for doing work not allowed by local governments or society.

In the case above, initially, it may seem that the direct involvement of foreign aid professionals would diminish the role of local counterparts. While the interviews lack sufficient information to conduct further analysis on whether this direct involvement exacerbates power dynamics, the key takeaway is that foreign aid professionals perceive a hands-on approach as a means to gain a deeper understanding of local dynamics, foster in-person collaboration with local counterparts, and potentially influence the narrative of impact and project design during the grant writing and proposal stage.

In assessing their impact, foreign aid professionals often express optimism about the positive impacts of their work, overlooking potential negative consequences or limited successes. For instance, one interviewee checked all the boxes in the survey regarding which topics were deemed acceptable for U.S. influence, saying, "I checked all of the topics that my organization works on, as I believe our programming can have a positive impact in those spaces." While this statement is indicative of their belief in the potential positive impact of their organization's work, this stance reveals a potential lack of awareness regarding the neocolonial implications of foreign aid, despite the “success” of some projects. This underscores the need for fostering greater reflexivity and critical examination within the foreign aid community to better understand the power dynamics and implications of their interventions.

Unpacking the Role of Individuals in Foreign Aid

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of foreign aid professionals regarding strategies to disrupt policies and practices that perpetuate unequal power dynamics within foreign aid. This section employs a decolonial framework specifically to examine the roles of the individual foreign aid professional within the foreign aid system. The decolonial framework challenges the underlying assumptions historically associated with Western perspectives on foreign aid, notably elements of paternalism and a white savior approach, wherein Western actors assume authoritative decision-making roles and view recipients as passive beneficiaries (Cole, 2012; Fanon, 1963; Saavedra-Vargas, 2023). The framework underscores the importance of empowering local communities, fostering self-determination, and recognizing alternative forms of knowledge and agency (Dickson, 2023; Saavedra-Vargas, 2023). This section discusses how foreign aid professionals may or may not have challenged dominant Western perspectives and approaches to foreign aid in their work, drawing upon data from the interviews.

Foreign Aid Professionals' Ability to Identify Neocolonialism in Foreign Aid

As discussed in previous sections, foreign aid professionals may unconsciously perpetuate colonial legacies shaped by their socialization cycles, educational experiences, and personal values. Understanding the nuanced power dynamics between U.S.-based staff and local counterparts within the foreign aid sector presents a significant challenge. These power dynamics, sometimes internalized and unconscious, stem from years of socialization (Fanon, 1952) and may reflect Western values, sometimes manifesting as white supremacy and delivered within the framework of a white savior complex. While this research primarily explores the perspectives of foreign aid professionals, it also delves deeper into the underlying themes

embedded in the interview discourse, highlighting phrases that reflect internalized white privilege and supremacy (Dickson, 2023; Fanon, 1952; Saavedra-Vargas, 2023).

The interviews reveal interviewees' awareness of the colonial power embedded in the foreign aid sector. One participant pinpointed the problem of imposing Western ideals on other countries in their work, stating, "We try to impose on other countries; we do impose on other countries. And we need to have a better understanding of their cultural fabric and the social fabric." This imposition, though well-intentioned, often clashes with the local context. The interviewee continues to say,

> For example, in Afghanistan, we gave the women telephones, and we wanted them to use their telephones and media to track their sales, to track, you know, who their clients were, to show product to do things. I mean, it was, for them, it was way too advanced. A lot of times the men would take the phones and say you shouldn't have a phone. So, again, it depends on the culture where you are.

What this interviewee highlights are the types of development projects that reflect the value of Western modernity, inherent in the Western view of progress, where technological advancements like cell phones are seen as universally beneficial. However, despite the potential benefits to women's empowerment, such initiatives may not align with local cultural norms and values, and resembles capitalistic values, leading to resistance by some and unintended harmful consequences.

Participants also gave examples of how the conceptualization of race and other social issues in the United States is applied to foreign aid projects in other nations. An interviewee's statement highlights the significant challenge that staff of a Washington, D.C.-based

organization, heavily funded by the U.S. government, faces in avoiding the imposition of their own biases on their foreign aid projects. The interviewee states, "When you think about, like LGBTQ inclusion, you know, the way things work in the US, you know, you can't apply that same thinking or the same assumptions about LGBTQ inclusion to Bolivia, it's just a different context.[5]" This statement indicates the awareness of foreign aid individuals that applying U.S.-based assumptions and ideals can lead to misconceptions and ineffective aid strategies. The interviewee goes on to point out that the U.S. has a more rigid and binary understanding of race, whereas Latin America, including Brazil, has a more fluid and complex perception of racial identity. The interviewee describes this situation by saying,

> In a country like Brazil, for instance, where more than 50% of the population self-identifies as Afro-descendant. But it's not in the same US context, right? In the US, we have this kind of, we have in our own internal biases. And it's kind of clear-cut who is white and who is black. And that's not the same in Latin America and Latin Americans don't see themselves that way. And so being able to kind of separate our understandings of race, of class, of sexual orientation, when we're designing our programs in the region, I think is a challenge.

Though the interviewee doesn't explicitly discuss racism and oppression, but comments on different understandings of racial identity, the interviewee's comments illustrate how understanding of U.S. forms of racism and oppression is projected into different cultural contexts. This interviewee highlights the necessity for international organizations to grasp the intricacies of diverse contexts and acknowledge the perilous nature of ethnocentric values being

[5] It is important to note that not all people and all states in the U.S. have a progressive view of LGBTQ+ individuals.

universally applied. The interviewee emphasizes how foreign aid professionals must remain aware when undertaking their projects to identify instances where Western ideals and values are being projected into their foreign aid initiatives.

Foreign aid professionals, however, also made statements that unintentionally denied the existence of unequal power dynamics. One interviewee described how an oil company was "aware" of the need to care about the community where it was putting in oil pipes, stating,

> The oil company, Chevron, has a pair of foundations that deal with the Niger Delta region, and it was that Chevron had operations there and realized that just making sure that the communities that hosted their operations were prosperous, and happy was not enough to secure the longevity of their pipelines and so on down there. So, they founded this very independent foundation to say, go make the Niger Delta peaceful, do what you need to do.

This quote indicates the irony lies in the fact that Chevron presents its initiatives as "helping" the communities affected by the conflict near their pipelines, while it is, in reality, one of the primary drivers of the conflict. The presence of foreign oil corporations in the region has led to environmental degradation, socio-economic inequality, and the displacement of indigenous communities. Providing financial support for peace initiatives without addressing the root causes of conflict simply deflects attention and accountability away from the oil industry. Therefore, the interviewee's perceived positive impact is undercut by the failure to recognize the inherent contradiction in Chevron's actions driven by capitalist and colonial desire for resource extraction for wealth.

During the interviews, there were instances where the foreign aid professionals displayed subtle, yet condescending attitudes towards the countries they work with. In describing the peace

process in an unidentified African country, an interviewee highlights how power dynamics become complicated, often due to the asymmetrical distribution of knowledge and resources between foreign aid professionals and local communities. She describes the situation saying,

> I don't mean that in a pejorative way, just when you're talking about negotiations, and particularly when you're talking about government design, after negotiations, there's a lot of technical jargon, you know, you're setting up different institutions of government and figuring out how they work together. And most people in the world have experienced one, maybe two types of government in their lives. And they just aren't familiar with the options that are out there.

While the interviewee does not overtly express a superiority complex, there is an implicit assumption that the foreign aid workers possess knowledge that the local community lacks. This underscores the inherent power dynamics present in foreign aid initiatives, where professionals often assume a position of expertise and authority, potentially marginalizing the perspectives and agency of local communities in decision-making processes. However, while the interviewee's statement may be true, that the local people might just be unfamiliar with the options that are out there, this instance also illustrates the ambiguity in discerning when Western knowledge and superiority complexes are at play and arguing whether that is indeed the case. This ambiguity makes it difficult to identify and address dominant Western knowledge frameworks and concepts like white saviorism, given the blurred intentions behind such actions.

Here and there, the interviews reveal subtle traces of Western values among foreign aid professionals, yet it is challenging to discern whether these stem from adapting to the demands of the system and workplace or from a lack of awareness of their own biases. Regardless, the examples cited above indicate a need for foreign aid practitioners to proactively examine their

projects for signs of neocolonialism in design, execution, and assessment. Recognizing neocolonial elements demands practice and concerted effort, particularly in discerning instances where Western values overshadow – or are evaluated more positively than – local ones. Acknowledging the existence of these power dynamics marks just the initial step toward their disruption and the subsequent step involves actively pinpointing and addressing them.

Foreign Aid Professionals' View about Their Ability to Change Colonial Practices

Insights from the interviews with foreign aid professionals revealed how their position and role as U.S.-based professionals influence their decision-making, priorities, and interactions with local partners. The attitudes and actions of individuals involved in foreign aid appear to contribute to the structures perpetuating dominant and subordinate positions within the field. While operating within strict funding regulations, U.S.-based foreign aid professionals have some influence over policies and practices. Therefore, fostering critical reflexivity can be a useful practice for foreign aid professionals to deepen introspection and self-awareness regarding their roles and responsibilities in the foreign aid landscape. Beyond formal education, individuals must devote themselves to learning about decolonial conceptions and practices, starting from within their own socialization frameworks.

Behind every institutional policy and condition attached to a grant, there are individuals who created these restrictions with specific motives. Despite the constraints imposed by these structures and systems, interviewees described some avenues for change at the individual and team levels. One participant describes this potential for change, stating,

> I do feel like I can make changes. And I came on to my team, I think at the best possible time. I'm working on a project that is just starting. So, I got to start working with a new team on a new project. It was the perfect opportunity to do an

> internal assessment of our program strategy, our office strategy, or our organizational strategy. And I was lucky enough to get paired with a team that shares the same values that I have. And I'd say that core value is empowerment of our local staff.

Similarly, another interviewee describes the potential for change in the foreign aid industry but expresses frustration with the lack of time, remarking,

> We've been encouraged as a team to think individually, about how might we, as white evaluators, engage with, you know, evaluation in a way that's not extractive or colonial or all of these things. But I think, I keep bringing it up to my boss, shouldn't we as an organization spend some time collectively wrestling with that issue? (But we were not able to do it). Because, you know, and that sort of thing is not really a priority, we need to just do the work.

Thus, engaging in critical reflexivity might reduce the risk of perpetuating racial hierarchies in the realm of foreign aid; however, foreign aid professionals need their leadership to be invested in providing these spaces and opportunities.

In analyzing the motives of foreign aid professionals, it is essential to consider whether their actions inadvertently perpetuate white saviorism, racism, or reinforce U.S. dominance over other countries and cultures. Regardless of their intentions, the focus lies in understanding how these foreign aid professionals can address colonial behaviors within their practices. Some foreign aid professionals recognize that that a colonial mentality can lead to constructing policies and practices that strengthen the prevailing social constructs in the U.S. and project them abroad. One interviewee described the necessity of navigating within the colonial structures to instigate changes within communities, stating, "I mean, so many places it's easier to work within the

established structure, and that is oftentimes a colonial structure." While navigating within colonial structures may yield tangible results, it raises the contentious question of whether striving for impactful work within these systems perpetuates or challenges colonialism itself. This emphasizes the critical importance for foreign aid professionals to thoroughly comprehend the historical legacies of colonization and their ongoing implications in contemporary global dynamics, encouraging them to engage in continuous learning and reflection to navigate these complexities effectively.

The internalization and normalization of colonial ideologies in the foreign aid sector poses significant risks for foreign aid professionals potentially perpetuating unequal power dynamics, racial hierarchies, and cultural hegemony, even in the absence of direct colonial rule (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Scholars emphasize the urgent need for foreign aid professionals to confront and challenge internalized colonial constructs as part of the broader efforts toward decolonization and liberation (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, 1986). However, participants in this study expressed concerns about having limited time to engage in self-reflection on their positionality, often feeling powerless to effect change due to existing funding and reporting structures. They struggle to promote or envision policies or practices that fall outside their own established worldview, recognizing the necessity of reflection on the values they bring to their work. As one interviewee remarks,

> I think it's unconscious bias. To be honest, I don't think it's on purpose, I just think it's an unconscious thing. But, like, we need to do better, especially if we're going to encourage other people and local organizations to do that, too. We just need, I think, to do a better job also of putting our money where our mouth is, and doing the things that we tell other people to do. And reflecting those values ourselves.

Therefore, the process of unlearning deeply ingrained beliefs, perspectives, and practices through critical reflexivity is essential to disrupting these behavioral patterns (Cunliffe, 2004; Jacobson and Mustafa, 2019). Shifting away from the deficit mentality in the context of foreign aid is an important endeavor; yet it demands considerable effort, particularly in the absence of built-in accountability mechanisms for such endeavors. Although, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices have been established and there are foreign aid networks and organizations that are specifically working towards building systems and structures to address neocolonial practices in foreign aid, not all organizations have the resources to implement these efforts.

Interviewees believe a fundamental shift in mindset involves adopting the perspective that foreign aid functions as a means of reparations for the enduring legacies of colonialism, which persist into the neocolonial era. This viewpoint was underscored by two interviewees who both highlighted how they perceive their work as reparative. One interviewee articulated,

> There's no good way to describe the way that this world is set up, you know. But in some ways, all humanitarian aid is colonial, right? The way that I think about especially the work that we do, in that I focus on in South and Central America right now, is I tried to think about it and the way that we do it more as reparations work.

Another interviewee echoed this sentiment, saying,

> The United States has had such a disastrous impact on these areas of the world and the way that our country has meddled and created really dangerous and difficult situations where people find themselves living today. So, I choose to think about this more as facilitating reparations to these countries and helping to repair the damage that was caused.

These foreign aid professionals have devoted time to critically reassessing and reframing the underlying motives behind their work, and yet perhaps still function in ways that reflect colonial practices.

In foreign aid, the discussion around terminology by practitioners (and academics), often framed within a Western lens and conducted in English, carries a risk of perpetuating colonial practices. Some of the foreign aid professionals who were interviewed discussed the importance of critically evaluating the language they use in their work. An interviewee states, “I'm talking about the impact of colonization, I've got to understand what colonization means. Right. We have to understand what diversity is, we have to understand the impact of the colonial movements.” This foreign aid professional points out the full impact of using terms related to colonization and diversity, and the importance of critically reflecting on the language used in the field. The discussions and reflections shared by all of the foreign aid professionals highlight a collective awareness of the need for a critical examination of terminology. The analysis is not merely academic, but fundamental in steering foreign aid towards practices that are equitable and mindful of historical contexts, particularly in the usage of language in foreign aid contexts.

Chapter Six:

Institutional-level Neocolonial Practices in Foreign Aid Structure and Policy

This chapter explores foreign aid organizations from the perspectives of the foreign aid professional, constructed from the insights taken from the survey of 91 respondents, 15 qualitative interviews, and the four respondents of the online questionnaire one year after the initial interviews. The structures and decision-making power within foreign aid organizations, whether government departments or agencies, multilateral institutions, or nonprofit

organizations, are critiqued using a decolonial lens. These data sources enable a nuanced exploration of the perceptions of foreign aid professionals to meet the primary aims of this research. This chapter addresses the dissertation's research questions by doing the following:

1) Investigate the presence of neocolonial structures, policies, and practices aiming to understand how they shape the landscape of foreign aid practices.

2) Dissect the intricate power dynamics between US-based foreign aid professionals and their international counterparts, to understand the US-based professional's perspective of the relationship.

3) Explore the experiences of the U.S.-based foreign aid professionals by investigating the challenges they encounter, and their perspectives of the impact of policies and programs on the ground; and

4) Gain insight into the most effective ways of providing support to professionals working on decolonial efforts in the sector.

The chapter is structured to explore various facets of foreign aid organizations through the perspectives of foreign aid professionals. First, it examines the various types of institutions involved in foreign aid. Second, it investigates the sources of funding for these organizations, highlighting the channels through which financial support is acquired to sustain foreign aid efforts. Third, it highlights the division of labor between US-based organizations and local staff, particularly regarding the design, implementation, and evaluation of foreign aid initiatives, uncovering the power dynamics at play and their implications for project impact and sustainability. Fourth, the chapter discusses the transformative shifts in the foreign aid landscape prompted by significant global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement. These events have sparked a reassessment of priorities and

approaches within the sector, potentially reshaping its trajectory in unforeseen ways. Finally, the chapter engages in a critical discussion, exploring strategies to dismantle neocolonial elements within foreign aid operations, including addressing systemic inequalities and power imbalances within foreign aid organizations.

Foreign Aid Sectors Participants Work In: A Recap

As is indicated in the previous chapter, more than half (56 out of 91) of the participants indicate they worked in the field of international development. Also, 44 participants indicated their field as foreign policy, while 29 mentioned humanitarian aid and national security, 27 in human rights, and 21 in peacebuilding. The rest are in disaster response, cultural exchange/diplomacy, food security, health, military, and nutrition.

To reiterate, it is evident that there is no common denominator in how professionals identify their field of work within foreign aid. There is a lot of overlap in terms of the work foreign aid professionals do. There are discrepancies regarding what is considered foreign aid and whether any name accurately represents the profession.

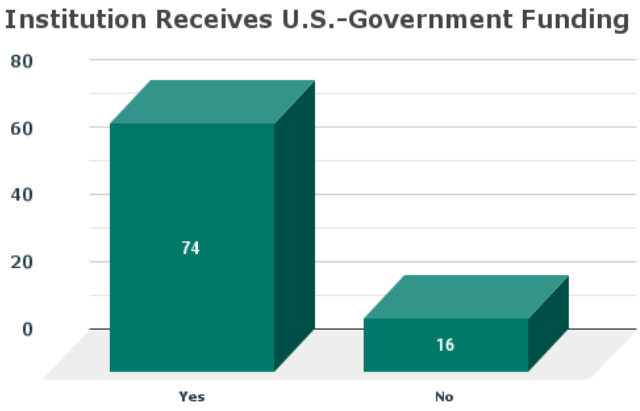
For this reason, this research has used foreign aid as an umbrella term, with the other terms representing sub-sectors within the field. It is important to acknowledge the diversity of perspectives and understand that the categorization of the profession is not universally agreed upon.

Funding Sources and Institutions

This section provides insights into the funding landscape of foreign aid efforts, shedding light on the prevalent influence of U.S. government funding across various organizations engaged in this sector. Understanding the extent of U.S. government involvement is crucial for assessing the potential impact on aid programs and the broader geopolitical implications. The

data presented here reveal the pervasive nature of U.S. government funding, raising questions about the autonomy of organizations and the potential for bias in decision-making processes. The first chart on the left below illustrates how many of the survey respondents identified their work and/or their organization as receiving U.S. government funding. The graph on the right shows the types of organizations the survey respondents work at, such as government departments, nongovernmental organizations, multilateral banks.

Table 4



The majority of survey respondents working in the foreign aid profession are involved in U.S. government-funded activities. Over 80% of the survey respondents stated they use U.S. government funding, and 10% identified as working in multilateral organizations. Multilateral institutions received funding from multiple nations, with the U.S. government being one of the largest funders of the banks, especially the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB, 2023).

The interviewees represented a range of organizations engaged in foreign aid efforts. The government played a significant role, with four interviewees working for government agencies such as the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and USAID. Eight interviewees

were employed by nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations, including two bipartisan nonprofits and two with specific party affiliations. Despite being non-governmental, all eight of these interviewees at nonprofits worked on projects funded by the U.S. government, primarily receiving their funding through USAID and the Department of State contracts or grants. One interviewee worked at a multilateral organization that received funding from member countries, including a substantial contribution from the U.S. government. Finally, two interviewees worked for private companies, both of which received US government funding for their projects. In total, 14 out of 15 interviewees worked in organizations that directly received US government funding, with one working in an organization potentially receiving indirect funding. These findings underscore the significant influence of U.S. government funding on the allocation of foreign aid within the research sample, even in organizations not directly affiliated with the government, though often still dependent on government funding. It might be inferred that most organizations within the research sample – and the study's participants who serve as foreign aid actors within them – lack genuine autonomy in decision-making regarding program design, implementation, and evaluation due to the reporting requirements tied to U.S. government funding (discussed in the following section). The U.S. government exercises substantial power over foreign aid efforts, underscoring the extent to which foreign aid serves largely as a tool for advancing the political and economic interests of the U.S.

Furthermore, the fact that individuals working at private organizations also rely on U.S. government funding raises concerns. This reliance on government funding by private companies indicates that foreign aid extends beyond development and humanitarian assistance and serves the interests of private companies closely connected to the government.

Assessing Collaborative Dynamics: U.S. Institutions and Local Organizations in Foreign Aid

Survey Insights on Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation

This section explores the power dynamics between U.S.-based institutions and local communities in foreign aid initiatives. It focuses on the extent of collaboration and partnership between these entities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of aid programs. The data presented in the following charts offer insights into the levels of involvement of both U.S.-based professionals versus local organizations, exposing the dynamics shaping foreign aid practices. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for assessing the ownership of foreign aid efforts and for addressing potential disparities in decision-making processes.

In this context, partnership refers to an agreement or memorandum of understanding between a U.S.-based organization and their international counterpart in the country they are working in. The charts below depict the respondents' perspectives on their collaborative involvement in foreign aid initiatives with international partners. Each percentage represents the level of responsibility attributed to the foreign aid professional and/or their organization, with the remaining percentage indicating the portion of responsibility conducted by local partners or organizations at various stages of the initiative.

Figure 7

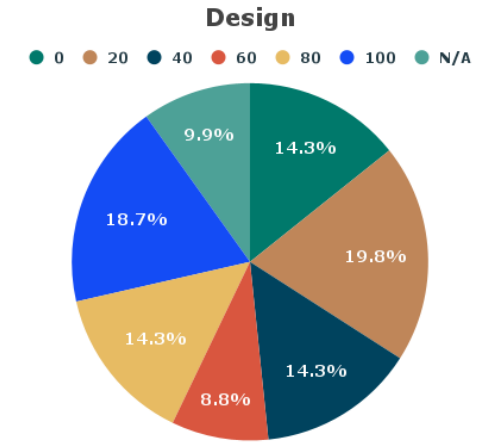


Figure 8

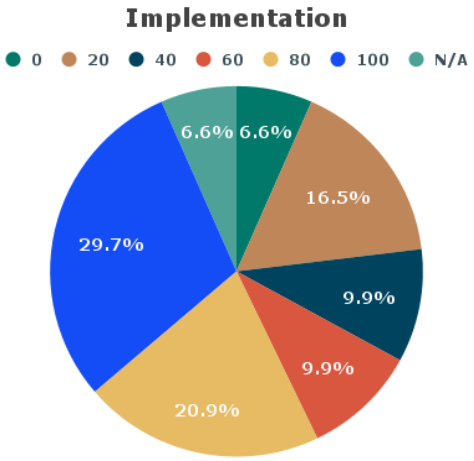
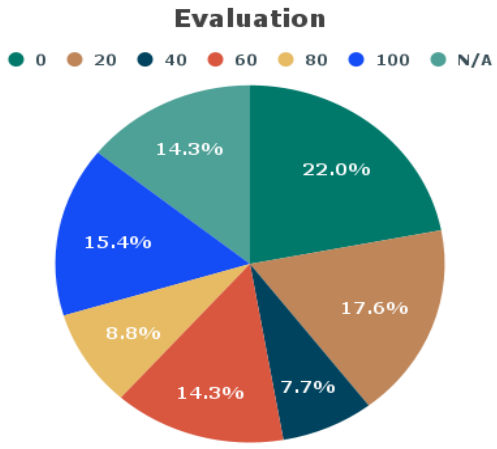


Figure 9



According to the survey results shown above, in terms of *programming design*, 14.3% of the respondents indicated that none of the programming was designed in partnership with local organizations, and 19.8% of the respondents stated that only 20% of the programming was developed in collaboration with local organizations. Similarly, 14.3% of the respondents reported that 40% of the programming was designed in partnership with local organizations, and only 8.8% of the survey respondents mentioned that a significant portion, approximately 60%, of the programming was developed in collaboration with local partners. Another 14.3% of the respondents indicated that a substantial 80% of the programming was designed in partnership with local organizations. Lastly, a noteworthy 18.7% of the survey respondents expressed that all of the programming, 100%, was developed in close collaboration with local partners. These findings highlight the range in levels of partnership observed by the survey respondents, though partnership does not necessarily depict equal power or influence on partners, just a joint effort.

According to the survey findings, in terms of *implementation*, 6.6% of the respondents stated that none of the programming was implemented in partnership with local organizations. Furthermore, 16.5% of the survey respondents reported that 20% of the programming was implemented in collaboration with local organizations. Similarly, 9.9% of the respondents stated that 40% of the programming was implemented in partnership with local organizations, and 9.9% of the survey respondents mentioned that a significant portion, approximately 60%, of the programming was implemented in partnership with local organizations. A notable 20.9% of the respondents expressed that a substantial 80% of the programming was implemented in collaboration with local partners. Finally, an overwhelming majority of 29.7% of the survey respondents stated that the entirety, 100%, of the programming was implemented in partnership

with local organizations. These findings highlight the varying degrees of engagement and involvement observed by the survey respondents.

Based on the survey responses, in terms of *evaluation*, it was found that 22% of the respondents stated that none of the programming was evaluated in partnership with local organizations, and 17.6% of the survey respondents reported that 20% of the programming was evaluated in collaboration with local partners. Furthermore, 7.7% of the respondents stated that 40% of the programming was evaluated in partnership with local organizations, and 14.3% of the survey respondents observed that approximately 60% of the programming was evaluated in partnership with local organizations. In contrast, a smaller percentage of 8.8% of the respondents expressed that 80% of the programming was evaluated in collaboration with local partners, and lastly, 15.4% of the survey respondents stated that the entire programming, 100%, was evaluated in partnership with local organizations.

These responses regarding the percentage of programming designed, implemented, and evaluated in partnership with in-country partners highlight the unequal distribution of responsibilities in foreign aid projects. The data reveal that the majority of design and evaluation processes are still predominantly undertaken by U.S.-based foreign aid professionals. While over 50% of implementation is reported to be at least 60% conducted in partnership with in-country entities, there remains nearly 25% of programming where the partnership contribution is 20% or less. These findings emphasize the need for further examination of power dynamics and ownership in foreign aid initiatives. However, the data presented highlights the unequal distribution of responsibilities in foreign aid initiatives, with a significant tilt towards U.S.-based control.

One notable limitation of this survey question is the diverse interpretations of partnership. Different individuals may perceive shared design differently, with some considering it as the in-country partner leading the design while the U.S.-based organization handles grant proposal writing and evaluation. Another professional may report the same design percentage in partnership but interpret it as the U.S.-based organization designing the program with input and feedback from the in-country partner before implementation. Thus, analyzing the data for this question requires careful consideration of these various interpretations of the question.

Interviewees' Insights on Partnership in Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation

The interviews enrich the survey findings with a narrative context, going deeper into the dynamics of responsibility distribution within foreign aid programs. These conversations provide a more comprehensive understanding of the nuanced aspects of responsibility sharing, thus complementing the insights derived from the survey data. For example, one interviewee highlights a missed partnership opportunity, explaining,

> I say generally on the organization level, I feel like there is a very big challenge with regard to involving local voices in project design. Basically, if you receive government funding, you just go for the funding opportunity that comes either from USAID or the State Department. We have millions in funding, and everyone competes to win it. In that process, basically, what is missed is a conversation with the local partners to identify a particular topic they want to address.

Many other interviewees also expressed the challenge of bridging the gap between the headquarters of their organizations based in the U.S. and the locally hired staff, either as a partner or employer. This lack of local input led to programs that do not effectively address the actual needs and priorities of the communities they aim to serve, as discussed in the funding and

political/economic imperatives sections. Of course, it is important to note that it cannot be fully assumed that locally hired staff will know or prioritize the needs of the local community as well. One interviewee emphasized this issue, stating, "decision-making power tends to be imbalanced, with headquarters staff holding more influence than local staff." This practice in foreign aid perpetuates a top-down approach that fails to recognize local communities as active participants in their own development processes. Another interviewee agrees by saying, “I must say, policy, people in Washington that decide things that really don't know the countries very well.”

One interviewee discussed her/his organization's approach to responsibility sharing in projects aimed at addressing landmine contamination through the hiring of local staff. The interviewee illustrated that the organization is comprised of 250 non-local employees and 9,500 locally-based team members, but there still exists an imbalance in decision-making power. The interviewee shared a recent experience from a visit to a project site in Zimbabwe, where highly respected deminers, some with decades of experience dating back to the late 1970s, were working.[6] However, the management team of the program included an individual from Canada, a 24-year-old woman from the UK, and a man in his late 20s from Scotland. Despite this, the interviewee still claimed that their organization commits to maintaining a local focus. The interviewee shared an example involving direct engagement in mine clearance efforts across approximately 26 countries. According to the interviewee, depending on the specific location, these initiatives might include a clearance of agricultural fields. The interviewee said that the organization was aware that, upon completion of the work, local communities might still lack essential resources, skills, or knowledge to maximize the potential of these cleared fields. Therefore, they often collaborated with agricultural organizations to facilitate the distribution of

[6] This interview will be referenced again on page 149.

seeds and provide necessary guidance. Nevertheless, the interviewee emphasized that the predominant workforce involved in these efforts remained primarily composed of local staff members while leadership mainly comes from Western countries.

This model of responsibility sharing highlights the landmine removal organization's recognition of the importance of collaboration and leveraging local partnerships and expertise. Although leadership positions are primarily held by professionals from the West, the organization tried to partner with agricultural organizations and tap into local knowledge, which helps bridge gaps between the immediate clearance needs and the long-term sustainability and empowerment of local communities. Beyond the organizational model implemented to ensure power-sharing with local communities, the staff working locally also work with local community organizations and individuals who have to follow the decisions made by the local government in each country. The interviewee points out that the decisions made by the local government may not always align with the local organization's own assessment of needs and priorities or the data about landmines provided to them. This indicates a potential gap between the aspirations and needs of the local communities and the decisions made at the governmental level. This misalignment might potentially stem from various factors, such as differing priorities, limited resources, or conflicting perspectives on the severity and urgency of landmine contamination. This highlights the inherent challenges in navigating power dynamics and reaching a consensus, not just between the priorities in Washington, but also between local stakeholders with potentially divergent perceptions and interests. This also brings to question who really knows the "needs" of the local community and/or if the voices of the community are being heard.

The interviewee also elaborated on community involvement strategies, emphasizing the importance of prioritizing work areas based on data-backed assessments and community

engagement. They stressed the critical need to collaborate with the community in decision-making, particularly considering the different perspectives of men and women on contaminated areas due to their distinct usage patterns. The interviewee said that community engagement remained an essential aspect of the initiatives. While the organization has a commitment to power-sharing with local stakeholders, the interviewee also acknowledged the intricacies of decision-making processes and potential misalignments among various stakeholders. They described a nuanced process wherein each country typically had a national authority actively participating in site selection. However, the effectiveness and degree of involvement of these authorities varied globally – as likely did these national authorities' intimate knowledge of local areas and communities' views. The organization's approach involved assessing contamination levels, past incidents, current land use, and potential post-clearance land utilization to determine task priorities based on the likelihood of accidents and subsequent economic impacts. This information was then presented to the national authority. Different countries had distinct approaches; some requested work plans, while others relied on the organization's data to make determinations. The interviewee recognized that, initially, work often began in the government officials' immediate areas of policy priority. Still, as the organization gained influence and a stronger voice over time, it aimed to align its priorities more closely with the community concerns rather than just the local/national government's priorities.

Another interviewee similarly addresses the gap between the high-level decision-makers in-country working with U.S.-based foreign aid professionals in the government. The interviewee in their work has seen both the implementer side and the donor side and indicated that successful negotiations are difficult as there are conflicting views on the purpose of the related program design, with parties at the table knowing that there is no way for full inclusion of

local voices. This interviewee highlights the distance between those making decisions and those who are supposedly benefiting from program, stating,

> Very rarely you are implementing a project for the people sitting at the table. And the people sitting at the table will usually be offended at the idea that they are the subject of an international project or program. They're important people, they are leaders in their communities, and they are often leaders of significant armed factions. They're not interested and are sometimes resentful of the idea that they would be the subject of, of a program.

Another interviewee described a time when she/he found her/himself between responding to the decisions of the high-level decision-makers in the U.S. who send out the calls for proposals, typically getting their policy and program priorities from Congress and the White House, and the locals they work with on projects. An interviewee describes this struggle, stating,

> In my role as sort of the liaison between our staff in the field who are, you know, people in the communities we're working with, I think the best that I can do is listen and be respectful of those folks, and when they tell us things. The problem is, I'm also bound to, you know, we need to report in a certain way, we need to measure things in a certain way.

The interviewee highlights the tension imposed by specific reporting and measurement criteria that shape the operations and being able to genuinely engage with local organizations. The interviewee states, “What we're doing is, I think, limited by the system that we find ourselves in.” Yet, these types of statements, as true as they may be, could also be seen as excuses for not putting more of their own time and energy into seeking out and using local voices in program

design. Or rather, there may be a lack of knowledge on how to truly communicate with the local community and apply local voices in the work being done in Washington.

The interviewees echo the idea that more local input is needed in foreign aid, which is already deeply understood in the field, as was seen in the localization literature prevalent and growing this past decade. Yet, it is difficult to decipher what procedural changes are required to implement these changes or if foreign aid professionals could do some of this already in their role. To some degree, the statements from the interviewees adhere to the restrictive proposal conditions, but those proposals can also be seen as quite broad with at least some room for flexibility in program design on the ground -- as long as a specific theme is being constructed. The question is, how much of that change does not occur because of a lack of time, energy, and financial resources it takes to restructure the grant writing process within the INGOs versus how restrictive the proposal writing processes are. One interviewee describes how some programs can adhere to the proposal calls and design programs with local communities when provided enough time, saying "We did do a proposal and we did consult local organizations in the design process, especially because the donor wanted 50% of the funds to go directly to supporting local CSOs. We had more time, so we did talk to partners on the ground." Although the organization of this interviewee adhered to the proposal call, they also showed effort to incorporate local input and participation.

Another interviewee highlighted instances where they observed programs that appeared to be overly influenced by the decision-making of headquarters of US funding agencies or US-based contracting organizations, in Washington, D.C., or expatriate staff working in the field. They emphasized that the success of a program is closely tied to community involvement and the collaborative development process with the citizens of the country in which the program is

implemented. They mentioned witnessing cases where this approach was not followed, leading to strained relationships over time. However, the interviewee believed that such instances were exceptions, often attributed to specific personalities or particular projects that did not align with the interviewees' preferred standards. In her/his view, the overall advantages of consulting with and collaborating with local communities in community-focused programs outweighed these occasional shortcomings.

Another interviewee expressed the same sentiment of the U.S.-based foreign aid professional having the ability to collaborate more with locals versus being restricted by proposal processes in Washington. The interviewee shared her/his experiences working in two new countries where she/he faced significant challenges due to a lack of existing contacts. There were instances when the interviewee realized that her/his proposed actions did not align with what should have been done, as local partners were often not adequately involved in program design. The interviewee attributed this to the limited timeframe available for submitting proposals, typically around a month, for all the coordination work. However, in one specific proposal submitted in May in one year, this foreign aid professional took extra steps to consult with local organizations during the design phase. This was especially important as the donor required 50% of the funding to directly support local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). This consultation process spanned five different countries, making it a complex – time and financial resource – consuming – endeavor. Nevertheless, the interviewee emphasized the importance of being responsive to local needs and tried to address them in the proposal. The interviewee aimed to incorporate aspects like mapping exercises or baseline assessments that allowed her/him to engage with local partners, increasing the prospects that her/his actions aligned with local needs.

With few exceptions, the foreign aid professionals' examples of practices include limited community involvement in program design, donor-driven agendas that neglect local perspectives, and the perpetuation of power imbalances and structural inequalities. The examples provided demonstrate the unintended consequences and disruptions caused by foreign aid interventions. These practices also hinder the international development process by maintaining dependency, disempowering local communities, and failing to address the root causes of problems. These findings collectively reveal the power imbalances present in foreign aid. They indicate the need for greater consultation.

The following interviewees discuss how they were able to work within the restrictive system to ensure local expertise was used in their programming, especially when it concerns changing cultural customs. One interviewee describes her/his experience partnering with local organizations, remarking,

> I'll give an example about FGM, female genital mutilation. Some people in Egypt said, you've got to stop this practice. Well, for the US to come in and say stop this. No. So, what we did is, we used local organizations that were against it. They have now free towns, free cities – meaning there's no more FGM, or it's limited. And same with honor killings, things like that we need to certainly say they're not acceptable. They're not something to be proud of, but we have to work with local communities to be able to affect that change. So, listening, and then acting in a way that is not so pretentious, and heavy-handed, is the best thing.

Overall, the survey responses and interviews shed light on the complexities and nuances of partnership in foreign aid programming, and underscore the need for greater consultation, the incorporation of local knowledge, and a shift in power dynamics to ensure more equitable and

effective aid programs. By prioritizing meaningful partnerships, foreign aid organizations might work towards building sustainable solutions that address global challenges and empower communities to shape their own futures. While decision-making power tends to be imbalanced, with international staff holding more influence than local staff, there is a growing recognition by the aid professionals of the need for accountability to beneficiaries and involving local communities in setting priorities. However, this shift in mindset and practice is slow and often depends on the individuals leading the programs, although U.S. government prescriptions on the level of local CSO participation in at least implementing programs seems to encourage such at the design stage.

Impacts of COVID-19 on Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on foreign aid professionals and their work, prompting at least some degree of critical examination of established practices. An interviewee explained that maintaining relationships with local staff and/or community members became more challenging during the pandemic, but the aid professional found innovative ways to adapt, sharing, "I would email, I would call, I would send packages, like Christmas cookies to different contacts. So, it's like, you know, I may not be geographically close, but I'm continuing with this relationship," demonstrating a determination to sustain connections despite the limitations of travel imposed by the pandemic. Also, communication platforms previously used for entertainment became foundational tools in her/his daily work. The interviewee stated, "Now, social media and media, in general, has become a tool, rather than just something that people were kind of doing." This shift allowed professionals to leverage these platforms for effective communication and information sharing, particularly in remote settings.

The pandemic also necessitated a reevaluation of the approach in field work such as conducting face-to-face interviews and gathering information. One interviewee shared her/his experience, explaining, "We had initially intended to put us on a plane and go, you know, tour around Senegal, Kenya, and India to do a whole bunch of interviews, and the pandemic stopped that." In response to this obstacle, the interviewee described how local consultants were engaged to guide the interview processes and lead the interviews on the ground. This unintended shift towards locally led projects proved successful and sparked discussions about the potential benefits of continuing this approach in the future.

Another interviewee also felt that the COVID-19 pandemic emerged as a catalyst for reevaluating the development process and the role of local partners. The interviewee highlighted how travel restrictions during the pandemic allowed local organizations to demonstrate their expertise and capability. They stated, "COVID-19 reframed the development process in the benefit of the local partners... Smaller local groups who have been doing this work got a chance to shine." Another interviewee agreed stating, "COVID-19 reframed the development process in the benefit of the local partners, local organizations, and smaller local groups who have been so much abused for many years." The shift towards recognizing and empowering local actors was seen as a positive development and aligned with the growing trend of diversification and partnerships within the sector.

This finding suggests that the pandemic provided an opportunity to recognize the professionalism and effectiveness of local organizations. COVID-19 has highlighted the resilience and effectiveness of local organizations and the potential for more efficient use of limited resources. Furthermore, virtual work and remote events became the norm during the pandemic, as described by another interviewee. This foreign aid professional noted, "I

fortunately am now able to join those events kind of whenever I want versus needing to travel." In contrast to the earlier positive sentiment concerning finding solutions to the lack of international travel, one interviewee felt there were negative impacts of COVID-19 on program implementation and monitoring. The interviewee described this perspective, saying, "For field offices during COVID, a lot of the expat staff left and went back to the US, since everything was virtual and remote. This led to a decrease in staff capacity and slowed down decision-making processes." Therefore, while the increased local engagement and accessibility were viewed as positive, the pandemic also presented challenges and limitations. However, this quote does signify that somehow the expat staff are more knowledgeable and/or skilled, and therefore not replaceable by local staff.

The experiences shared by aid professionals during the pandemic provided lessons learned that can shape future practices, such as the importance of building and maintaining relationships, leveraging digital tools, and recognizing the value of local partnerships. The challenges and limitations the aid professionals faced during the pandemic serve as a reminder of the need for preparedness and resilience in the face of unforeseen circumstances. As the world moves forward, these insights can contribute to the consideration of more effective and inclusive approaches to foreign aid, ensuring that local people/staff play a larger role in determining how the most vulnerable communities receive the support they need in a crisis or an emergency situation.

The Influence of the U.S. Black Lives Matter Movement on Program Design, Implementation, and Evaluation

According to the interviewees, during both their interviews and in their post interview questionnaire, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which was re-energized in 2020 in the

U.S., but also became a global movement, has also had a significant impact on foreign aid initiatives and organizations based in the United States. It has prompted extensive discussions regarding issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within the realm of foreign aid. The movement's global resonance has brought critical considerations of issues to the forefront, such as those related to power dynamics, historical injustices, and the need for internal reflective work within organizations and international development initiatives. Additionally, the BLM movement has catalyzed discussions about reevaluating the terminologies and approaches used in foreign aid. Conversations have arisen concerning the language employed to describe project beneficiaries, emphasizing the need to avoid colonial or outdated terminologies. This process of rethinking extends to the broader lexicon of development, with organizations actively working to adopt more inclusive language and practices.

Moreover, the movement has led to conversations about the establishment of offices dedicated to DEI within foreign aid organizations. These offices have the potential to influence policies, including the reform of hiring practices to ensure a more diverse applicant pool. As one interviewee highlighted, "There's a whole Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiative that is happening right now. It's been very slow going, but, you know, the new president (referring to their organization) did hire an outside consultant who seems to have a very intentional process." The phrase, “very intentional process” suggests a deliberate and systematic approach by the outside consultant. This indicates that the consultant is likely proposing and implementing DEI initiatives with careful planning and purposeful strategies. Such an approach has the potential to address inequalities within the organization and further aligns with broader efforts for more inclusive work implemented by the organization in the foreign aid sector.

This approach to DEI emphasizes the importance of "casting a wider net" during recruitment, with a focus on representation not only among field and home-office staff but also within leadership roles. It reflects the growing recognition of the significance of having diverse voices at all levels of foreign aid organizations. A significant concern raised is the lack of diversity and representation within certain organizations where the majority of employees are noted to be white, with a noticeable absence of People of Color, especially Indigenous or local representations, hindering the possibility of achieving genuine diversity and inclusion in the sector. According to the interviewees, while there have been successful recruitment efforts aimed at attracting diverse candidates, the retention of black, brown, and female employees remains a substantial challenge. Interviewees attribute this challenge to structural issues within organizations, such as the burden placed on minority employees to constantly serve as representatives in hiring panels, detracting from their core responsibilities. One interviewee describes this type of situation saying, “whenever we have a hiring panel at work, one person has to be a minority, and one of them has to be a woman. One of my co-workers is a black female so when they put her on the panel, she checks two boxes.” This practice not only places a burden on minority employees but also contributes to an unequal work environment, potentially leading to feelings of tokenism and marginalization.

Furthermore, the BLM movement has underscored the need to promote inclusivity and diversity within the project or other offices of foreign aid organizations overseas. During interviews, many individuals expressed their concern about the limited representation of local professionals in leadership positions within such offices. The imperative of internalizing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives is universally acknowledged but remains a work in progress. One interviewee described how, despite Zimbabwe's well-established reputation for

highly skilled deminers dating back to the late 1970s, program managers have remained predominantly foreign aid professionals from Canada, the UK, and Scotland, many of whom have limited experience in the field. The interviewee stated, "The conversation about diversifying leadership positions began before the George Floyd incident but gained momentum afterward, influenced by the push for racial justice and the Black Lives Matter movement." This BLM movement alerted people to the growing disparity in leadership roles and prompted initiatives aimed at enhancing the representation of local experts in management positions. As a result, specialized training courses have been introduced at this interviewee's organization to nurture the management skills of local staff and create pathways to higher-ranking positions. This example illustrates the need to prioritize diversity and amplify marginalized voices within foreign aid organizations. However, while individuals within the sector demonstrate personal commitment to these issues, organizational structures and practices often fall short of addressing them.

While the journey toward greater diversity and inclusion is a long one, these discussions represent essential steps in creating a more equitable and inclusive environment within the field of foreign aid. Yet there remain significant challenges in translating these intentions into tangible actions in the field. Many of the interviewees said it is essential to acknowledge that while these discussions are vital, there are concerns that the discourse has at times been performative, especially since the momentum of these changes has been slowing down after the peak of the racial reckoning in the United States. Interviewees express frustration with what they see as performative actions taken by their organizations. They highlight instances where ambassadors or representatives publicly support causes like Black Lives Matter, while their behavior and actions within the organization do not align with genuine intentions and values toward diversity

and inclusion. The interviewees expressed skepticism about the authenticity of diversity and inclusion efforts within their organizations. They perceive actions such as sending supportive emails or making symbolic gestures, like displaying flags for causes like Black Lives Matter or Pride Month, as superficial and driven by a desire to check boxes rather than indications of a genuine commitment to understanding and addressing underlying issues. There is also a perception that, despite advocating for global equality and inclusion, not enough work has been done domestically either. Criticism of the U.S.'s track record on issues of race and diversity becomes a point of contention in the foreign aid profession. Interviewees acknowledge the complexity of bringing about cultural changes within institutions and raise questions about the feasibility of transforming an entire organization's culture due to complex challenges and resistance from many parties.

Reflections on Transforming the Role of the Institution in Foreign Aid

The insights derived from the surveys and interviews present a compelling narrative for reforming foreign aid policies and practices. Within these perspectives, several key themes emerge, each advocating for specific changes to improve the efficacy and impact of foreign aid initiatives. One notable aspect highlighted by the interviewees is the need for greater accountability to local communities and a decolonial approach to foreign aid. Utilizing a decolonial lens in this analysis, the discourse acknowledges the need for meaningful engagement with the people who are being impacted by foreign aid initiatives. The tone of the interviewees highlights the importance of understanding the locals needs, priorities, and perspectives and actively working collaboratively, especially when making decisions. There was an emphasis on reimagining an approach to foreign aid from the U.S., bringing the authoritative decision-makers

to equal partnerships with the locals that value the agency of local communities. As one interviewee puts it, “We must engage with local voices, prioritize their needs, and incorporate their input into our initiatives.” Another interviewee made nearly the same statement, saying, "We need to make sure that we're talking to people about what their priorities are and taking their needs into consideration." These statements highlight the outdated nature of the term 'beneficiary,' emphasizing the need of the foreign aid sector to move beyond portraying local collaborators and communities as passive recipients of foreign aid.

Most the foreign aid professionals’ voices call for critical examinations of the existing narratives surrounding recipient countries and call for a shift towards promoting self-determination and empowering local organizations and communities, essentially challenging the current neocolonial approach to foreign aid. The interviewees highlight the need for foreign aid programs to be designed in a way that supports and builds capacity within recipient countries, enabling them to lead their development initiatives. One interviewee articulates this by stating, "The program proposals need to come from within the countries... and there's a lot of inherent capacity building that has to happen there." These perspectives emphasize the importance of meaningful engagement, self-determination, and empowering local organizations and communities, ultimately challenging the neocolonial approach to foreign aid.

Reforming the Mission Statement of the Institution

International foreign aid organizations play a critical role in shaping the trajectory of foreign aid initiatives. The study’s findings suggest that to transition from their current neocolonial practices to more decolonized approaches, these organizations might adopt several key strategies. The foremost step towards substantive change involves a thorough reassessment and alignment of their mission statements and vision with the goal of their eventually becoming

obsolete, ultimately aiming to empower local communities and dismantle the neocolonial structures perpetuating dependency. Recognizing that there will likely never be a time when foreign aid is not needed, the emphasis on self-elimination serves as a paradigm shift, influencing the mentality and design of aid programs. This shift encourages a departure from neocolonial practices and mitigates the risks associated with the white savior complex. Reorienting organizational missions toward the ultimate aim of self-elimination and providing reparations, international foreign aid organizations might establish genuine collaboration and partnerships with local actors, progressively transferring responsibilities to the communities.

This shift not only empowers local communities but also fosters a more equitable foreign aid landscape. Furthermore, it signifies a departure from the deficit mentality often associated with foreign aid. A fundamental shift in organizational mindset involves adopting the perspective that foreign aid functions as a means of reparations for the enduring legacies of colonialism, which persist into the neocolonial era. This viewpoint, as discussed in an earlier chapter, was articulated by two interviewees who perceive their work as a form of reparations.

The findings suggest that by embracing reparations and self-elimination in the mission of foreign aid organizations, and prioritizing collaboration and partnerships with local actors, international foreign aid organizations can acknowledge the inherent capabilities within communities to address their own needs and drive sustainable development. As international organizations relinquish their role as the main decision-makers in foreign aid and instead become facilitators of community-led solutions, they contribute to the creation of a foreign aid landscape that is more truly inclusive and responsive to the needs and aspirations of local populations.

Reforming Resource Allocation

In the perspectives of foreign aid professionals participating in this study, a critical step forward involves transferring decision-making authority for project design, notably in the grant writing process, from foreign aid organizations to the communities they aim to serve. This transition, as emphasized by many professionals, represents a necessary departure from traditional top-down or core-periphery approaches toward a more community-centered model. This shift signifies a pivotal moment toward dismantling neocolonial structures and fostering genuine collaboration between international organizations and local communities.

The findings of this study suggest that the organizational transformation required for this shift primarily revolves around resource allocation. As highlighted by many of the interviewees, organizations must conduct a comprehensive evaluation of their resource allocation process, with a particular focus on personnel distribution among grant writing, program design, program implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. It is critical to note that the majority of funding in U.S. foreign aid often goes towards the organizations of U.S.-based foreign aid professionals as well as U.S.-based companies supplying goods that are purchased, thereby limiting the financial resources available for direct community impact. This allocation dynamic undermines the principle of community participation and local ownership in foreign aid initiatives. Many foreign aid professionals emphasized the need for mechanisms to enhance meaningful community participation in decision-making processes. In contrast, one interviewee described the justification for excluding the local community in the resource allocation process, saying, "Unfortunately, the way I perceived it or the way it has been implemented was with less participation from the recipient country. Because I think that the nature of itself as a bank, we need to sell our knowledge, and also, we need to sell our product." To address this imbalance and empower local communities, it is imperative to facilitate training and capacity-building

initiatives aimed at developing their own resource allocation methods. By bypassing intermediaries and directly investing in community-driven initiatives, foreign aid organizations can move toward ensuring that financial resources are utilized more efficiently and effectively, maximizing their impact on the ground.

Moreover, organizations should conduct budget assessments and establish clear objectives for redirecting funding to better serve partner countries. This includes engaging in transparent budgetary evaluations to discern current spending patterns and priorities. Therefore, foreign aid organizations would need to make conscious efforts to reflect on how to integrate clear and measurable goals for redirecting funds toward community-driven initiatives and sustainable development, akin to the efforts undertaken by USAID in their localization initiative[7]. In essence, reforming resource allocation practices within foreign aid organizations represents a critical point in pursuing more equitable and effective foreign aid initiatives. This might involve allocating more of the overall grant funds to local organizations or even communities more directly. By embracing community-centered approaches and prioritizing the needs and aspirations of local populations, international organizations can pave the way for a more inclusive and impactful foreign aid landscape.

Building Institutional Networks

A pivotal reform in the foreign aid landscape could be the establishment of robust networks and partnerships among organizations that share similar objectives, including both funders of foreign aid, contractors, and local organizations. While the ideal scenario prioritizes local organizations to lead initiatives, a collaborative approach between U.S.-based institutions

[7] Discussed in Chapter 1

can harness collective resources, enhance capacity building, and incorporate diverse perspectives to address complex challenges more effectively and innovatively. Through such collaborations, foreign aid funders can significantly augment their efficiency in directing funds to communities (or at least the organizations based in the community), thereby enabling more comprehensive and sustainable long-term endeavors.

This shift towards collaborative networks marks a departure from the current practice of fragmented, underfunded programs tethered to rigid conditions. Instead, it introduces a dynamic system that replaces limitations imposed by capacity constraints with adaptability and resilience. Moreover, fostering networks go beyond a mere structural shift, it represents a strategic reimagining of how foreign aid is conceptualized and implemented. By integrating local leadership, mentorship programs, collective resources, and collaborative partnerships, these networks could foster a sense of shared responsibility and collective progress. Such institutional networks offer a platform for exchanging best practices, leveraging expertise, and coordinating efforts towards common goals with the hopes to eliminate some of the competition for funding. They provide avenues for mutual learning and capacity enhancement, allowing organizations to address challenges more holistically and respond more effectively to the evolving needs of communities. This collaborative approach not only enhances the impact and sustainability of foreign aid initiatives but also fosters a culture of cooperation and shared responsibility among stakeholders.

Promoting Institutional Diversity and Inclusion

Within the realm of foreign aid, promoting institutional diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is another critical endeavor that requires a deep understanding of the dynamics at play and a commitment to decolonial practices. While recent global events such as the COVID-19

pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement have briefly shifted power dynamics, or at least the division of labor, offering glimpses of opportunities for reevaluating the existing paradigms in foreign aid, it may be short-lived changes. The interviews of foreign aid professionals emphasize the importance of redefining 'diversity' within foreign aid organizational contexts. While many institutions have already developed these DEI departments, as highlighted by interviewees, DEI efforts are often concentrated within the confines of the United States and may be more rhetorical than real. Therefore, DEI work within organizations should extend its commitment beyond U.S.-based offices to encompass the three layers of diversity and inclusion efforts: Layer one involves fostering diversity and inclusion within the U.S.-based organization and within the U.S.-based context. Layer two entails promoting diversity and inclusion in the context of each region or country where organizations operate and ensuring equity in those offices. Layer three focuses on DEI work between the individuals working in the United States and the local staff and the local communities they serve, fostering collaboration and mutual respect. Therefore, it is essential to avoid conflating DEI work in the U.S. context with the related but distinct context of DEI work between U.S.-based personnel and their foreign counterparts, ensuring a comprehensive approach to diversity and inclusion efforts in foreign aid organizations, truly reflecting decolonial efforts.

An essential step in this process is redefining precisely what diversity and inclusion mean for the organization. Having an explicit anti-racist, gender equity, and anti-ableist framework serves as a guide for aligning diversity and inclusion efforts with the organization's mission and values. Therefore, the offices responsible for diversity, equity, and inclusion should also include a team of individuals explicitly dedicated to addressing the international component of DEI. One interviewee describes how this layer of DEI work is not recognized in the DEI offices of foreign

aid organizations. The interviewee states, “I do think, though that the field in general, it has not done a good job of connecting the dots between the social justice movements here [referring to in the U.S.] and what that means for our work, and how a lot of our field is based in like colonialist principles, like that's how it started. And I think that I feel sometimes kind of weird about it. But I also think that it's really important that our country directors in other countries, like they're not from those countries, why is that?” This disconnect underscores the importance of critically examining the dynamics shaping the field. Recognizing these imbalances is essential for addressing the subtleties and underlying dynamics associated with the white savior complex, which is not exclusive only to white individuals.

This also entails not only fostering a diverse workforce within U.S.-based organizations but also actively ensuring that foreign aid initiatives promote diversity, equity, and inclusion within the specific context of each country where they operate. It is crucial to note that DEI efforts extend beyond merely staffing individuals of color and should involve recruiting personnel from the countries where organizations work, to be placed in the United States offices. This necessitates a reevaluation of what is considered "qualified" when hiring individuals to work in U.S.-based offices of these organizations. Additionally, incorporating individuals from the nations receiving foreign aid will provide a more localized context throughout all stages of the foreign aid process. This shift challenges conventional definitions of qualifications, suggesting that organizations should provide training to individuals who may not meet traditional criteria but exhibit the ability to make valuable contributions, emphasizing local knowledge. This transformative approach aims to create a more inclusive and equitable environment, both domestically and internationally.

Lastly, fostering a culture of introspection and self-awareness among staff is a vital step in dismantling the current neocolonial elements present in foreign aid. Instead of solely relying on online training sessions for subjects like sexual harassment and cultural sensitivity, organizations should introduce mandatory facilitated sessions centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion, using a decolonial framework. One interviewee notes the lack of DEI training provided by foreign aid organizations, stating, “I mean, I don't think I did any sort of training on DEI or anything when I was at either organization.” These in-person sessions would not just encourage critical reflection, the policy of requiring individuals to engage in ongoing self-reflection demands their employees to regularly question their and their funders’ and their organizations’ positionality and biases. This policy change promotes self-awareness and cultivates a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in foreign aid work.

Chapter Seven:

Governmental-level Analysis of the Needed Structural Changes by Foreign Aid Professionals

This chapter presents an analysis of the final layer of the foreign aid landscape, covering a governmental-level analysis of structural challenges from the perspectives of foreign aid professionals. It examines the power imbalances resulting from U.S. government decisions and actions that influence the foreign aid landscape, as well as the limitations of current paradigms and the systemic challenges they present. Through this exploration, the chapter lays the groundwork for a comprehensive discussion of potential reforms within the foreign aid sector. Applying a decolonial framework, this chapter scrutinizes foreign aid at the government level, as opposed to the organization level in the previous chapter, recognizing that all levels of the decision-making process and all social identities contribute to neocolonial practices in U.S.-government-funded foreign aid. This critical examination of the foreign aid landscape and its complex dynamics addresses the dissertation's research questions by doing the following:

- Investigating the presence of neocolonial structures, policies, and practices and how they shape foreign aid efforts.
- Exploring the experiences of the U.S.-based foreign aid professionals by investigating the challenges they encounter and their perspectives on the impact of policies and programs through their work.
- Gaining insight into the most effective ways to engage in decolonial efforts in the sector.

The chapter is structured to begin with an examination of political imperatives, which play a significant role in shaping U.S.-funded foreign aid strategies. Following this, the chapter

explores the economic imperatives guiding U.S.-led foreign aid initiatives, which extend American economic influence by utilizing foreign aid as a means to exert indirect control over local markets. Lastly, the chapter concludes by discussing the intricate government funding processes and mechanisms that govern foreign aid endeavors. This examination reveals a bureaucratic labyrinth characterized by systemic issues such as racism and disparities in access to foreign aid.

Influence of Political Imperatives

The chapter begins by examining the influence of political imperatives, a significant factor shaping U.S.-funded foreign aid strategies. In the U.S., political imperatives often dictate the alignment of aid projects with different Administrations' constantly shifting priorities, often determining the fate of these projects. One interviewee highlights how projects may be rejected if they don't align with prevailing political agendas, stating,

> As an officer (for USAID), one thing that's the biggest consideration is political imperatives. Because if I want to do something on the ground, and it doesn't jive with what Washington thinks you should do, you don't do it. So, a lot of times it is, what is the flavor of the day, depending on the Administration [and Congress]. You may think it's really good to do a local project, helping certain folks, but it just won't be acceptable.

This top-down approach has also been applied to emerging issues that impact geopolitical interests. One interviewee provided an example in East Africa, stating, "Based on the Administration, they will resist or support emerging issues happening. Maybe if something big happened in a country, like Sudan this year, U.S. Congress will 'locate funding' - they located around $70 million to work on Sudan. And then based on the $70 million, we will support the

democratic transition." This illustrates how the allocation of foreign aid resources is intricately tied to political agendas, often reflecting geopolitical interests rather than keenly addressing local needs.

However, the shifting government policy often means that projects are subject to the ever-changing priorities dictated by different Administrations or Congresses. Another interviewee highlights the fluctuating priorities driven by different Administrations, in Latin America specifically, stating, "Trump cut all funding to Central America, I mean, like millions and millions of dollars to Central America, and gave it to programs focused on Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. And then Biden comes in and is like, you know, what? No, millions of dollars (need to go) back to Central America." This example demonstrates how changes in Administration often result in reallocating resources based on political agendas and diplomatic objectives, removing consistent financial support for certain regions and countries. The interviewee continues to discuss how the allocation of funds and shifting priorities within the realm of foreign aid are closely linked to the will and interests of those in positions of power, whether it be the President, his advisers, or entities like the National Security Council. The interviewee describes how a major issue in Brazil was not addressed, stating, "I'm like, excuse me, there's a huge democratic erosion in Brazil happening for years now. And no one's paying attention because it's not impacting migration (to the U.S. border)." This change of the Administration causing changes to the foreign aid sector was a prevalent discussion in the interviews, disclosing how much the U.S. foreign aid policy is influenced by U.S. politics.

Other interviewees also emphasized a difference between the Trump Administration and the administrations before and after the Trump Administration. The interviewees highlighted their role as State Department officers, emphasizing their nonpartisan approach regardless of the

political affiliation of the President. However, they noted a significant shift in the foreign policy landscape between January 21, 2021, and the preceding four years. Under the Trump Administration, the United States' position in foreign policy and stature as a global player in important international actions faced challenges due to the Trump government's actions like pulling out of the Paris Climate Change Agreement and withdrawing from international organizations such as UNESCO. Such governmental decisions left the U. S. foreign aid counterparts uncertain about the stability of the agreements and engagements they have had with the U. S., which presented difficulties in the sector of international development.

Another interviewee recounted her/his experience with an executive order issued by a previous Administration, and the nuanced dynamics at play. The interviewee explained that she/he had been diligently working on translating a Trump-era executive order on International Religious Freedom into practical guidelines for various agencies. The interviewee explains,

> I was working on a project to basically help translate the requirements from the executive order into what it meant for all the different agencies and make it easy to lead. But then they [upper management] sort of just decided, you know, we're not gonna really follow through on implementing it. You can't cancel an executive order and really write (the guideline), but you (would still do it and) could just ignore it a little bit.

This demonstrates how the changing political landscape evolved with the change in administrations, leading to a distinct shift in priorities. While the executive order remained in place, the change in leadership essentially reverted to a previously non-political stream of work. This shift followed a top-down approach; while the executive order wasn't canceled, its impact could be subtly minimized.

Though high-level decisions often rest with the government, international NGOs can actively engage with government officials to advocate for specific priorities. An interviewee describes this, saying,

> It's hard because I think a lot of those decisions are made at an extremely high level, but that doesn't mean an organization like *nonprofit B* can't have an impact, whether that's having meetings with someone in the US government or on the hill [with Congress] to talk about priorities. But again, when it comes down to our level, our priorities are just whatever the Administration tells us.

This quote is another example of the intricate interplay between political imperatives and foreign aid foci and strategies, where NGOs navigate within the confines set by government policies while striving to advocate for their desired outcomes.

In contrast to the above interviews, according to some interviewees, changes in U.S. Administrations do not always directly impact foreign aid programs. It's noteworthy that U.S. foreign aid professionals can conduct their work consistently, regardless of who holds office. For instance, one interviewee highlights the stability of a government department's funding and work related to Israel stating,

> You're going to get money for Israel. I mean, we're going to still have our programs. So, it wouldn't really matter with funding. I got hired in the Bush Administration, I went through the whole Obama Administration and the Trump Administration. Obviously, during the Obama Administration, we saw some budget cuts. I don't think that's gonna end. I think they're saying that we might see some budget cuts under the Biden Administration, but we haven't seen them yet. I think that's more just speculation than anything.

This interviewee exemplifies how Israel is in a unique position to receive consistent funding since it is considered a strategic ally to the United States, receiving funding across various U.S. Administrations. While other foreign aid programs may face fluctuations in funding, Israel's stable funding highlights the priority of foreign aid funding for U.S. foreign policy.

These examples of economic foreign aid initiatives showed it is evident that foreign aid is deeply intertwined with the political and economic interests of the United States (or at least some of the corporations based in the U.S.). The changing tides of political administrations can lead to shifts in foreign aid priorities and the focus of projects. It's important to note that these changes are not always abrupt or uniform across all foreign aid programs. A recurring theme in the interviews is the tension between addressing local priorities and advancing U.S. political and economic interests. The change in U.S. Administrations can bring about significant shifts in foreign aid strategies and funding allocations for specific regions or thematic areas based on the personal interests of members of Congress.

Influence of Economic Imperatives

The economic imperatives guiding U.S.-led foreign aid initiatives play a significant role in shaping global economic dynamics and influencing local communities. Various interviewees discussed the importance of assessing how these imperatives impact local economies and contribute to broader geopolitical strategies.

One key aspect emphasized by interviewees is the evolving perspective within the U.S. government regarding economic development, particularly in light of foreign aid programs' implications for the US global supply chains and national security. For instance, an interviewee highlights a shift in discussions about climate change and its effects in the Arctic, remarking,

“We're now [since the advent of the Biden Administration] allowed to talk about climate change. And when you’re talking about climate change, you’re talking about the melting of the ice cap, you’re talking about permafrost, you’re talking about all of these different things that are impacting the Arctic, and those living there, but also impacts those who might be interested in starting to do business there.” This recognition encompasses the interconnectedness of environmental concerns, local communities daily life, and global economic activities Furthermore, the interviewee draws attention to the intersection of foreign aid initiatives and economic activities in the Arctic, saying,

> It was just announced that a US-Australian mining company is buying a lithium mine in Quebec. These are really important things that don't make it on the radar screen, but it can have a serious impact on supply chains in the United States and on national security. You can't just look at the mine, you've got to look at who owns the mine, who's employed in the mine, and what jobs do they employ in the mine.

The interviewee suggests that despite the recognition of environmental and economic concerns, the U.S. focuses its foreign aid initiatives or supporting economic interests over the well-being of local (and global) communities. This indicated a notable focus on projects geared towards serving strategic U.S. foreign policy objectives, such as maintaining control over Arctic mines, despite the acknowledgment of disruptions to the environmental and local economy.

The interviewee emphasizes the need to adopt a holistic perspective that extends beyond the mere operation of the mine. It involves, “scrutinizing ownership, employment patterns within the mine, and the broader impact on the local economy.” The interviewee states, “The focus is on understanding the intricate web of relationships and economic dynamics within the communities

holding mining rights." The interviewee raises questions about whether companies are truly investing in these communities and supporting them beyond monetary transactions. Overall, these interviews show how evident it is that U.S. foreign aid is often driven by primary interests in safeguarding U.S. economic and national security interests, with the well-being of local communities and the global environment being secondary.

Another interviewee provided insight into the impact of U.S. foreign aid programs on local economies, citing an example of providing financial assistance directed towards small businesses run by local women to boost the local economy. These foreign aid programs offer interest-free grants aimed at supporting local entrepreneurship. However, a lack of understanding of the local social structures and networks can lead to unintended consequences. For instance, investing in new local businesses puts those recipients of the funding in direct competition with longstanding local businesses, creating a new tension in the community. The interviewee states, "This can create unfair competition for businesses that have been operating without [foreign] intervention for years," says the interviewee.

The interviewee further illustrated this point by comparing the impact of foreign aid interventions to that of other foreign economic activities. The interviewee referenced the issue with U.S. (and other foreign) businesses coming in and replacing local businesses, stating, "There was an enterprise, Kentucky Fried Chicken, brought to a village in Kenya. Essentially, all local producers were impacted by that, as people would always go there to eat because it looked nice and came from America." The interviewee continued to explain how this shift in consumer behavior disrupted the traditional local markets. Rather than boosting the local economy, it introduced a new issue, disrupting the local economy. This illustrates how foreign companies can

inadvertently destabilize local economies and social structures, perpetuating a cycle of dependency rather than bolstering the local economy.

Funding Processes and Mechanisms

Before delving into the intricacies of foreign aid funding processes and mechanisms, it is essential to acknowledge the critical role they play in shaping the landscape of foreign aid. The allocation of funds and the mechanisms through which they are distributed can significantly impact the effectiveness and sustainability of aid projects. Furthermore, understanding the various challenges and limitations inherent in these processes is key to developing strategies for more efficient and impactful foreign aid initiatives. With this in mind, the findings are organized into key themes, including the impact of restrictive proposal writing and conditional programming, the balance between long-term planning and responsiveness, and the bureaucratic funding mechanisms.

The interviewees for this research self-identified as being U.S.-based, but one finding was that not all of the foreign aid projects received direct U.S. congressional funding. Yet, all of the foreign aid professionals interviewed identified themselves as receiving U.S. foreign aid funding through indirect means. For example, one interviewee works at a development bank and would not receive U.S. funding directly for her/his project, but the bank received a large amount of its resources from the U.S. government and has U.S. government priorities influencing its foreign aid work. The Bank employee notes, “As a donor country, obviously, like, it's the biggest donor country, that's why it's hosted in the US.”

In contrast, another interviewee works at a company that is not headquartered in the United States. However, the company has established a small nonprofit entity with limited staff

in the U.S. This strategic move allows it to apply for and receive funding from the U.S. government. The interviewee from this organization elaborates on the sources of this organization's funding, revealing that a significant portion, approximately 40%, is obtained from the U.S. Department of State. This interviewee notes that the U.S. presents a unique scenario concerning landmine-related initiatives[8], as there are currently no U.S.-based organizations actively engaged in this field. The interviewee suggests that if a U.S.-based organization were to enter the field of landmine-related activities, it could lead to a redirection of funding from existing non-U.S. entities to prioritize U.S. organizations. Furthermore, the interviewee mentions securing several smaller grants through USAID. Notably, this person highlights the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement as a key donor, emphasizing this office's strong focus on tangible outputs. While the interviewee clarifies that the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement's emphasis on outputs, such as counting the mines removed, does not imply a lack of interest in the ultimate outcomes of its work, including education, it serves to insulate the office's funding from the volatile nature of politics. By maintaining its focus on measurable achievements, such as the removal of landmines, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement seeks to safeguard its funding within the Department of State from political fluctuations. However, the interviewee also points out that the funding situation changes when conversations shift towards broader development and stabilization initiatives. This shift introduces elements of political influence that can impact the funding dynamics, a phenomenon that the interviewee finds particularly intriguing. This exemplifies the power the United States

[8] Landmine-related initiatives in foreign aid include programs for clearance, education and awareness, advocacy and policy, and victim assistance, addressing the issues associated with landmines in countries previously impacted by conflict.

has in shutting down any unwanted competition in foreign aid, and the inherent power the U.S. has built with its wealth, military strength, and political leadership.

The remaining interviewees all receive funding directly from USAID or nongovernmental intermediary organizations responsible for distributing U.S. government funding for foreign aid. The perspectives shared by these interviewees shine light on the challenges the foreign aid professionals face in obtaining the funding they need for sustainable and impactful projects and the conditions that are placed on them by the U.S. government funding for foreign aid. Furthermore, the process of obtaining funding is often concentrated in Washington, D.C., with limited input from field offices and local actors. The interviewees highlighted how this concentration can create a disconnect between the priorities and needs of the local communities and the program design.

Restrictive Funding Processes and Conditional Programming

The interviews with foreign aid professionals also revealed that foreign aid funding practices often impose restrictive requirements on proposal writing, leading to competition among civil society organizations instead of fostering collaboration among them. The interviewees described the first step of the funding process as writing a grant proposal, typically to USAID, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), or another intermediary organization that distributes government funding.

Interviewees expressed frustration with the extensive time and effort required to write proposals and the need to align activities with donor priorities rather than local priorities. This restrictive approach diverts attention from addressing actual needs on the ground, as organizations are compelled to tailor their proposals to meet U.S. foreign aid priorities. One interviewee discussed how local organizations that want to partner with U.S. government

agencies must prove themselves to be legitimate and capable organizations, and the qualifications are difficult enough to exclude many organizations. One interviewee discussed how these local organizations have to demonstrate that they are not working for organizations that are laundering money or that are terrorist organizations – reasonable requirements, though not always easy to document. They said to prevent being disqualified, the conditions to be a partner include having a bank account and a stringent vetting. Another condition is being a registered organization with its government which can be nearly impossible in some countries in conflict. The interviewee noted, "That degree of structure is to exclude a good 60% or 70% of any organizations working in any country, which is frustrating." The stringent parameters and tight timelines set by donors make it challenging to identify and engage with smaller nonprofits and activists. Consequently, the funding process hampers the ability of projects or programs to establish meaningful connections and partnerships. The emphasis on restrictive proposal writing reinforces the dominance of donor priorities over the actual needs on the ground.

An interviewee provides an example of how restrictive funding practices impact foreign aid programs addressing gender-based violence. The interviewee describes the challenges faced by her/his organization, particularly seeing cases through comprehensively, due to limitations imposed by funding restrictions and mandates, stating,

> One of the things I think we have issues with are seeing those (gender-based) cases through because we're extremely limited with what we can do. Are we failing patients who come to our clinics looking for help? And it's because of the way that we're either funded or mandated by the local government or our donors on what we are able to do or not do.

For instance, a young woman seeking refuge from a traumatic experience, such as complications from female genital mutilation (FGM), may only receive direct medical support at the clinic due to funding limitations, leaving crucial psychological, legal, and community support unaddressed. This scenario illustrates the organization's struggle to navigate restrictive funding frameworks, hindering its ability to provide holistic aid. The organization's efforts are hampered by rigid donor-imposed mandates, risking the failure to deliver essential services and support to those in urgent need, potentially leaving vulnerable populations without the assistance they require. This is an example of how restrictive funding processes can undermine the effectiveness of foreign aid initiatives, and places donor priorities over ground-level needs.

Another interviewee echoes the issue of donor-driven funding inadequacy, explaining that implementers often anticipate that donors won't fund projects in a manner conducive to achieving long-lasting impacts. This anticipation, in turn, influences the design of programs, which may not be designed to ensure sustainable impacts. The interviewee expresses skepticism about the sections in program proposals that discuss post-program impact, considering them mostly unrealistic. This skepticism stems from the limited duration of implementers' presence, typically around 18 months, during which building trust and ensuring sustainable continuity can be challenging and uncertain. The interviewee hopes that the work will persist but acknowledges the uncertainty surrounding this aspect.

Long-term Planning and Responsive Funding Practices

The interviewees' perspective outlined above reiterate the challenges faced by implementers in designing and implementing programs that have a lasting impact when funding constraints and short timeframes discourage those efforts. Leading to another concern brought up by the foreign aid professionals is the ongoing debate regarding the trade-offs between long-term

planning and responsiveness in foreign aid funding practices. The interviewees highlighted the need to strike a balance between the advantages of extensive planning and the flexibility required to respond to immediate and emergent, urgent needs. They questioned whether waiting several months or even years before addressing pressing issues that demand immediate attention was necessary. In the words of one interviewee,

> "Donors often say, 'Well, things change too much. We can't think that far ahead.' Which is true that things change a lot. Like, what happens if another crisis crops up in the meantime, and we have to use that funding somewhere else, which is a very valid argument. But things change a lot in a lot of other areas of international affairs and somehow we manage to still have strategic plans."

The interviewee explained that certain international development organizations maintain long-standing connections with specific entities, NGOs, or civil society organizations in foreign countries, allowing them to incorporate a more significant number of local insights into their work. However, this particular interviewee noted that her/his organization hasn't had the opportunity to experience such collaboration. The problem, as she/he described it, often stems from donors focusing on regions or countries grappling with crises and expressing a desire to contribute to the bringing about of stability. In response, these donors pool funds and issue a call for proposals, providing organizations with a mere 30 to 60 days to submit their project ideas. This tight timeframe leaves organizations in a state of chaos, particularly when dealing with new crises or opportunities in different contexts, as they lack established relationships or connections on the ground. The interviewee recounted their own experiences in program design, where they frequently found themselves reaching out to local NGOs, conducting interviews to gain insights

into the situation on the ground and determine how they could provide assistance, all with little to no prior relationship with these local entities.

The interviewees' concern about flexible and rapid-response funding raises concerns about the traditional mechanisms employed in foreign aid and their impact on prompt responses in emergency economic situations or conflict environments. It is evident the prevailing structures that hinder rapid adaptation need to be changed to allow for flexible funding mechanisms with the ability to swiftly respond to changing circumstances. An interviewee critiques the existing contracting mechanisms, stating, "Their contracting mechanisms are not conducive to rapid changes... it takes so long to get money out there." This theme also intersects with the discussion on the necessity of adequate funding and dedicated time for meaningful community engagement, localization efforts, and effective programming. The interviewees critically examined the limitations of the current grant proposal and funding structure, recognizing its challenges in undertaking long-term community-centered work. By exposing the constraints of short-term funding cycles, interviewees indicate a need for increased funding and resources to support community engagement and localization. An interviewee passionately emphasizes, "If you want to have meaningful conversations with the communities you're trying to impact, you have to leave the time and funding to do it." This highlights the critical need for reform in funding structures and processes, emphasizing the importance of sustained investment and adequate resources to foster meaningful community engagement and localization, ultimately improving the effectiveness of foreign aid initiatives.

Bureaucratic Funding Procurement Procedures

Although the proposals are due a short time after a funding opportunity is announced, on the flipside, there is also a conflicting challenge which is the slow and bureaucratic process to

“select the winners of the bid for funding” and for foreign aid institutions or projects to actually acquire the funding for the implementation of the program. Many interviewees expressed frustration with the lengthy approval process, which could take anywhere from three to nine months, hindering their organizations’ ability to respond quickly to changing needs and urgent situations. This delay was particularly problematic when addressing time-sensitive issues and limited the effectiveness of aid efforts. Interviewees emphasized the need for more rapid and flexible proposal processes that would allow for quicker access to funding. As one interviewee observed, "there hasn't been a great track record with international, multi-disciplinary funds to support programming." The interviewees emphasized the importance of a more streamlined and responsive funding system that allows for greater flexibility and enables organizations to effectively address the evolving situation on the ground, rather than being constrained by rigid procedures and timelines. This bureaucratic funding mechanism reflects a top-down approach that limits local agency and undermines the capacity of organizations to adapt to changing circumstances.

The competitive bidding process in foreign aid funding often creates a disconnect between available funds and the actual needs on the ground, leading to potential shortcomings in addressing pressing issues. This competitive dynamic among organizations vying for funding can undermine the overall effectiveness of foreign aid programs. As one interviewee pointed out, “There's insufficient funding for this. And everybody wants a piece of it, and every country could use a piece of it. So that is a challenge. When you have a lot of democracies trying to coordinate on policy and governments change, then their priorities change.” This emphasis and competition on securing donor funds often compel organizations to align their priorities with the donors' interests, particularly the U.S. foreign policy objectives. This alignment becomes crucial

for organizations seeking funding, as they must demonstrate their commitment to furthering these priorities to secure financial support. As a result, the competitive nature of the funding process forces organizations to focus on meeting donor expectations and aligning their initiatives with the broader strategic goals of donor countries, potentially, in most though not all cases, at the expense of addressing the most urgent and context-specific needs of local communities. One interviewee describes the negative sentiment towards international NGOs in the context of Tunisia,

> "There's a lot of INGOs, (and not enough funding) for civil society, and it's made civil society more competitive rather than more collaborative because they often exist just to get these donor funds. There's, you know, a little bit of reticence now 10 years after the revolution for Western interference in Tunisia's political and civic processes. So, we're starting to see a little more anti-Western, at times, anti-NGO sentiment primarily among political actors, not among civil society as much, but it's definitely an overtone."

The competitive nature of securing donor funds has instilled a reluctance to trust foreign aid. While this sentiment may be more pronounced among political actors, it signals a broader awareness of how foreign aid dynamics can impact local perceptions and dynamics. The rise of anti-Western or anti-NGO sentiments highlights the need for reforming foreign aid practices that prioritize collaboration, community engagement, and responsiveness to local priorities.

The interviewee quoted immediately above shared a specific situation where funding complexities had a detrimental effect on local experts involved in a project. This foreign aid professional elaborated on this by explaining that a monitoring and evaluation contract was in the works for the USA's engagement with Azerbaijan. While her/his organization's team lacked prior

experience with Azerbaijan, the staff embarked on a quest to gather insights from numerous experts, conducting interviews and establishing potential partnerships. The interviewee stated, “Engaging in this competitive bidding process felt like a frenzied race, with multiple entities vying to secure experts before their competitors.” This interviewee further explained that during the proposal process there was a Q&A session, but when the responses came back, the previously announced budget was abruptly slashed in half. Initially, the budget was already considered too small for the project's scope, but they hoped it would be manageable for their debut as prime contractors. However, the budget reduction made it evident that they couldn't execute the project effectively within the constraints. Regrettably, her/his organization had to release the experts they had enlisted, despite having them sign non-competitive agreements. The narrow application window, and the cutting of budget by half abruptly, resulted in qualified individuals not being able to participate in the project. The interviewee said the situation left them pondering the missed opportunity even if her/his organization had amassed a team of people to be engaged in the project.

In conclusion, the challenges and dynamics within foreign aid practices identified above underscore the imperative for a reevaluation of current approaches. These issues include limited access for local organizations, constraints imposed by restrictive proposal writing time, bureaucratic procedures, and insufficient responsiveness to local needs. To move toward more equitable and effective foreign aid practices, it is essential to diversify funding sources, foster collaboration among stakeholders, empower local communities, and actively involve them in decision-making processes. By embracing these principles, foreign aid funding practices can evolve to be more inclusive, responsive, and capable of genuinely serving the communities they aim to support. These efforts are crucial for mitigating neocolonial dynamics and forging a more collaborative and equitable future in the realm of foreign aid.

Discussion: Unpacking the Role of the U.S. Government in Foreign Aid

The research findings underscore that the absence of local input and collaboration in decision-making processes is still prevalent. The top-down approach in foreign aid decision-making likely affects the effectiveness of foreign aid initiatives. Most foreign aid professionals interviewed in this study assert the necessity for comprehensive reforms to bring about meaningful change. These reforms encompass systemic changes within U.S. government funding mechanisms, encompassing practices that reallocate funding directly to local organizations and communities, bypassing the US-based intermediary institutions. The interviewees narrated about the bureaucratic funding processes fraught with systemic issues, including emphasizing and upholding the pervasive power of the Western countries, perpetuating a mentality rooted in colonial legacies that distinguish between the 'developed and underdeveloped' (Kakura, 2023; Wearing et al., 2017; Willer-Kherbaoui, 2019). This mentality has profound implications for the exclusionary access to foreign aid, as it limits the participation of smaller local organizations and activists, which, in turn, hinders the diversity of voices shaping foreign aid initiatives.

The organization of this section unfolds in three key facets. The first topic addresses the government funding process and necessary reforms to combat the bureaucratic and top-down and core-periphery nature of existing foreign aid mechanisms, with a focus on streamlining grant proposal processes to better align with community needs. The second topic gets into the inherent top-down approach within government structures, highlighting the forced requirement for foreign aid professionals to align their values and their organizations that receive U.S. government funding. The final topic discusses congressional engagement, stressing the importance of transparent communication with congressional members to ensure that funding

priorities align with recipient community needs and promote accountability in foreign aid allocation and implementation.

Government-level Funding Process Reforms

The heart of the matter lies in the highly bureaucratic and often top-down nature of the existing foreign aid funding mechanisms, as the foreign aid professionals discussed during the interviews. Firstly, grant proposal writing, as it stands, necessitates aligning local project activities with donor expectations, and this requirement can be both time-consuming, rigid, and not genuinely address community needs. Instead of being a rigid process, new approaches should be adopted to accommodate smaller, local organizations by providing them with the necessary resources and support to navigate the complexities of grant writing effectively. Furthermore, the competitive bidding process, driven by donor requirements and priorities, creates a disconnect between the available funds and the actual needs of the communities. Organizations often compete for funds, striving to conform to donor expectations, which may not necessarily align with local contexts or expertise. This dynamic can favor organizations that have mastered tailoring their proposals to donor preferences, potentially sidelining those with profound local knowledge. Such competition reinforces existing power imbalances between the donors and the recipient countries and communities as well as perpetuates the neocolonial structures that hinder progress toward more inclusive and effective foreign aid. Consequently, a reformed funding process should streamline the process and enable a more adaptable funding structure, ensuring that aid reaches its intended beneficiaries. By doing so, these reforms would encourage a broader range of voices and expertise to participate in the development initiatives. Lastly, these bureaucratic funding mechanisms have the unintended consequence of creating a slow and inflexible process. The review and approval cycle, which often takes significant time, can lead to

delays in accessing funding. This delay, in turn, impedes the timeliness and effectiveness of aid efforts, particularly when quick responses are needed to address emerging challenges or crises.

Currently, most U.S. foreign aid funds remain within the United States, mainly supporting the grant proposal process and the monitoring and evaluation procedures as well as the procurement of goods and services from U.S.-based corporations. Instead of funding going through so many government offices, contractors, international organizations, and other hands, the funding process should be more accessible to the communities in other countries that the funds are intended to impact. One proposed solution involves investing in the training and development of professionals in-country, enabling them to engage effectively in grant proposal writing, as well as the monitoring and evaluation process. This approach empowers local voices and expertise, bridging the gap between local needs and foreign aid programs. By actively engaging individuals who have a deep understanding of their communities, local organizations can take on a more significant role in shaping the direction of foreign aid initiatives. Training programs help ensure the local organizations and their staff meet international standards and align with donors' expectations, while allowing them to represent their communities authentically.

Additionally, integrating AI systems into the grant proposal process can significantly streamline the allocation of resources and enhance efficiency. These systems can use a template for the grant proposal, allowing small organizations to input their community-identified needs, project goals, and process for evaluating success and the AI systems can produce a well-written report. However, there are risks. This change can eliminate many jobs held by individuals in the United States and redirecting a significant amount of the funding being held up in the United States directly to communities. While human oversight remains essential, AI can drastically

reduce the time and effort required for grant proposal writing, as well as make grant dispensing, and therefore U.S.-based funding, more accessible.

Emphasizing Localization Efforts: Changing the Top-down, Center-Periphery Structure

Another crucial reform pertains to the implementation process of U.S.-based foreign aid funding. While USAID has initiated localization efforts in its programs and grant proposal processes to some extent, the pace of this shift has been gradual and lacks firm integration into the core values and mission of the agency. To effect meaningful change, the principles of localization should be firmly embedded in the foreign aid mission of USAID, the State Department, and all other U.S. government foreign aid entities. Such a reform would necessitate not only a shift in the ownership of initiatives but also a fundamental realignment of the values governing organizations that receive U.S. government funding. To genuinely uphold this principle, it becomes imperative to eliminate the restrictive conditions inherent in the existing funding structure. This transformative shift should encompass a reduction in the stringent conditions imposed on program types, granting communities the autonomy to identify their specific needs and evaluate program success according to locally defined criteria. This shift towards a more localized and community-centric foreign aid approach must begin with the funding source, as it not only enhances the efficacy of interventions across most U.S.-based foreign aid institutions but also fosters a sense of self-reliance and empowerment among the partnering countries and communities.

Congressional Engagement for Localized Foreign Aid: Enhancing Transparency and Community Alignment

To effectively address key issues in foreign aid allocation and implementation, it is crucial for entities such as USAID and the State Department to engage in transparent communication with congressional members, particularly those serving on the Foreign Relations

Committee. This communication should focus on conveying the importance of adopting a localization approach to foreign aid, ensuring that funding priorities align with the specific needs of recipient communities. Such an approach marks a significant departure from past practices, which often viewed human rights and economic security through a Western-centric lens, primarily serving U.S. government and U.S. corporate interests.

While certain conditions attached to U.S. government funding aim to combat corruption, support congressional members' regional interests, and safeguard economic and security interests, it is imperative to realign foreign aid projects with the genuine needs of the communities they aim to assist. Moreover, in addition to participating in congressional sessions, efforts should be made to facilitate direct engagement between congressional members and community organizations supported by foreign aid. Trips for congressional members on the Foreign Relations Committee and other relevant committees, where they visit recipient countries to witness the situation on the ground do already exist and should adjust to focusing more on observing and supporting localization efforts.

By fostering this inclusive communication and engagement strategy, a feedback loop is established that enhances accountability and ensures that foreign aid programs more accurately reflect local realities. This proactive approach directly addresses identified gaps in the current foreign aid landscape, promoting a more effective and responsive allocation of resources.

Chapter Eight:

Conclusion, Recommendation for Future Research, and Limitations

This dissertation concludes with a comprehensive review of the intricate dynamics within the foreign aid sector. However, before concluding, it is imperative to restate its primary research aims. By revisiting the key research objectives, we can reaffirm the focus of this investigation and provide a clear roadmap for the conclusions drawn in subsequent sections.

To reiterate, this dissertation has the following research aims: 1) to investigate the presence of neocolonial structures, policies, and practices aiming to understand how they shape the landscape of foreign aid practices; 2) to dissect the intricate power dynamics between US-based foreign aid professionals and their international counterparts, with the aim to understand the US-based professional's perspective of the relationship; 3) to explore the experiences of the U.S.-based foreign aid professionals by investigating the challenges they encounter, and their perspectives of the impact of policies and programs on the ground; and 4) to gain insight into the most effective ways of providing support to professionals working on decolonial efforts in the sector. The support is aimed at fostering reflections on and the disruption of neocolonial policies and practices and promoting the broader endeavor of decolonizing foreign aid.

The dissertation has explored the historical foundations of foreign aid, the prevailing colonial legacies, the role of dominant Western actors and challenges to Western-centric and white savior approaches, the urgent need for decolonial practices, and the pivotal role of education and training for foreign aid professionals. Each of these themes reveals the intricacies, power dynamics, and multifaceted nature of foreign aid. The colonial legacy, often feeling like an inescapable shadow, shapes foreign aid's foundations, policies, and practices. The power

imbalances, enforced values, and economic interests that characterized colonialism still persist today, subtly embedding themselves into the foreign aid paradigms. While foreign aid ostensibly seeks to alleviate suffering and promote "development," as defined by Western development rhetoric, its roots often rest in the strategic interests of donor nations and their corporations, echoing the historical motivations of colonial powers.

Western actors, most notably U.S.-based foreign aid professionals – who are the focus of the research – exert significant influence in foreign aid. They exert significant influence over foreign aid policies and practices, shaping – but not autonomously determining – the direction of foreign aid initiatives. Their perspectives, attitudes, and approaches significantly impact the aid landscape. Understanding the mindset and behavior of these actors is essential to addressing the deeply entrenched neocolonial practices within foreign aid. Yet, foreign aid is not a one-sided endeavor. It involves the perspectives and experiences of those receiving aid as well. The local partners and communities impacted by aid programs hold invaluable insights and knowledge and there would be significant value in future research focusing on their perspectives and behaviors. Engaging with these partners, understanding their needs, and involving them in decision-making processes challenge existing power dynamics and contribute to creating more effective foreign aid programs. These partnerships could be essential to dismantling the top-down approach that has long characterized the sector.

Decoloniality emerges as a central theme and theoretical framework in this dissertation, highlighting the urgency of dismantling neocolonial practices. Recent global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement, have forced the foreign aid sector to engage in robust discourse on racism and neocolonialism and to consider the need for transformation. Organizations have established Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices or

expanded their influence, attempting to drive reforms. These reforms are not only crucial for the foreign aid sector but also for addressing broader issues of power, inequality, and systemic bias. Yet, these challenges are met with deep-seated resistance, although often unintentional and built into the structures and systems of the foreign aid landscape. Dominant Western perspectives, often rooted in Western knowledge structures favoring Western language and cultural values, perpetuate power imbalances within foreign aid. The lack of language and cultural fluency among foreign aid professionals can perpetuate the reliance on Western knowledge, furthering the power divide. Bureaucratic funding processes, racial disparities, and exclusionary access requirements also hinder progress. These challenges must be recognized and addressed for substantive change to occur.

The foreign aid sector operates as a complex ecosystem characterized by interconnectedness, feedback loops, and relationships. Small changes within this system can either lead to disproportionate or unexpected effects or disrupt the system, fostering positive change. The exploration of the foreign aid field has extended beyond neocolonial structures to using a Western lens and approach to practices that perpetuate these power structures. While the findings and discussion chapters presented provide a foundational understanding of this complex system, it also highlights the need for further exploration and in-depth analysis. Institutional reforms can also lead to a future of decoloniality in foreign aid. These institutional reforms should center on resource allocation, diversification of the workforce and leadership, and inclusivity of local community voice. Foreign aid organizations must aim to make themselves obsolete by prioritizing community empowerment and self-reliance, though acknowledging this. The power imbalances and dependencies that persist in the foreign aid sector call for substantive changes that center on local participation, context-specific knowledge, and power redistribution.

These reforms should encompass systemic changes within U.S. government funding mechanisms, policy shifts within multilateral organizations, and a reflective process at the individual and organizational levels, prompting a reconsideration of Western knowledge and skill sets currently required in international development and foreign aid work.

The examination of foreign aid in this dissertation extends beyond the descriptive statistics and qualitative data collected. It highlights many of the perspectives, emotions, and power dynamics within the sector, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of foreign aid.

Yet, it's essential to recognize the limitations of this research, which is predominantly focused on the U.S. context and involves a non-representative sample of survey, interview, and questionnaire respondents. The global nature of foreign aid and its power dynamics necessitate further international investigations to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the field.

As I conclude this dissertation, the research presented here issues a call to action. It advocates for a more equitable, locally led, and sustainable approach in the foreign aid sector. It encourages deep self-reflection, as well as institutional and systemic change, to address the deeply embedded neocolonial practices that persist. Foreign aid has the potential to bring about positive change on a global scale. However, to fulfill this potential, it must undergo significant transformation, moving away from the dominance of Western perspectives and practices to embrace more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches. By taking these steps, the foreign aid sector can truly empower communities, foster positive and sustainable change, and dismantle the power structures that have persisted for far too long.

Implications

The implications of this research could be far-reaching, with a focus on engaging both practitioners, researchers, and politicians in a reflective and creative process for meaningful change in the foreign aid sector. The study highlights the need for an intersectional approach that considers power dynamics, cultural fluency, and the diverse roles of aid professionals. The implications call for systemic transformation, advocating for changes in U.S. government funding mechanisms, policy shifts within multilateral organizations, and individual and organization-level reflection. The hope is this research will inspire practitioners and policy makers to find ways to embrace a more holistic and culturally sensitive approach, integrating local knowledge and perspectives into the work in the foreign aid sector. The study encourages practitioners to prioritize community empowerment, ultimately entrusting local partners with program design, implementation, and evaluation. Additionally, the research aims to promote reflection on all levels of the foreign aid sector, from top governmental and institutional layers to the individual, challenging the existing structures, practices, and biases.

Researchers can find fertile ground to build upon this research, seeking ways to support practitioners on the ground and promoting the development of innovative solutions that embrace decoloniality. By doing so, both practitioners and researchers can collectively contribute to the transformation of the foreign aid sector, fostering equity, sustainability, and meaningful change for local communities, thus aligning with the call for an anti-neocolonial stance and furthering the cause of equity worldwide.

Recommendations: Reforming Higher Education in Foreign Aid

The ideas expressed in this section are concluded from the analysis of the researcher, and not recommendations from the perspectives of the research participants. Addressing the education and training of foreign aid professionals is a fundamental consideration. The research

findings highlight the prevalence of advanced degrees among foreign aid professionals, with a significant proportion holding at least a bachelor's degree and the majority having obtained a master's degree or higher. These statistics highlight the potential for higher education reforms to wield significant influence throughout the foreign aid community. Consequently, reforming the education and training of foreign aid professionals holds the potential to cultivate a more knowledgeable and culturally sensitive (and decolonial-oriented) workforce.

To foster decolonial reforms within higher education programs for foreign aid professionals, it is imperative to focus on recruitment strategies that prioritize the inclusion of international faculty, staff, and students, as well as marginalized populations in the United States. This approach ensures that diverse voices and perspectives become integral to the educational environment, ultimately enriching the learning experience for all students. Moreover, by recognizing the financial barriers these students may encounter, institutions could establish support mechanisms to facilitate their access to higher education. By reducing financial hurdles, these institutions actively promote diversity and equity within their programs.

Furthermore, to commit to fostering diverse voices, higher education institutions could broaden the scope of knowledge. To achieve this, higher education programs should distance themselves from conventional, western frameworks and instead proactively integrate scholarly works from scholars in the global south, emphasizing those from outside of the Western context. Additionally, higher education programs can incorporate diverse literary, poetic, and creative course materials that stimulate critical thinking and encourage the exploration of various narratives and perspectives. These materials not only empower students to explore alternative solutions to global issues but also challenge the dominance of Western epistemologies (de Sousa Santos, 2017). By providing students with a multitude of perspectives and knowledge sources,

these programs could facilitate critical self-reflection on their own positionalities (de Sousa Santos, 2017; Kester, et al., 2020).

For many students, initially embracing alternative knowledge systems may seem unconventional and challenging, but it is vital to incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems into the education system. This inclusion not only equips future foreign aid professionals with the skills to actively listen but also empowers them to genuinely recognize the value and validity of local knowledge. This transformation becomes especially crucial when they transition into full-time roles, allowing them to approach their work with the deep-seated belief that these local insights are inherently valuable and right.

Expanding the focus of international relations programs in higher education goes beyond a mere analysis of literature and technical skills. These programs should underscore the significance of comprehending the lived experiences and emotions of the communities foreign aid professionals will engage with. In pursuit of this, educational institutions must establish spaces that foster dialogue, empathy, and self-reflection, nurturing students' appreciation for the intricate aspects of human experiences and cultivating a profound sense of cultural humility.

Additionally, the integration of Indigenous Ways of Knowing and teaching stands as another pivotal element in decolonial higher education programs. Rather than fixating solely on theoretical concepts and sources of information, these programs can provide creative and practical opportunities for students to actively engage with Indigenous knowledge systems and practices. This could involve linking theoretical concepts to real-world contexts, immersing students in experiential learning, and involving local communities in the teaching and learning process. By embracing these transformative approaches, future foreign aid professionals will emerge with a more comprehensive understanding of global issues. They will be well-prepared

to navigate diverse cultural landscapes with the utmost sensitivity, respect, and a genuine willingness to embrace alternative ways of thinking and being.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research Gap 1: Global Comparative Analyses and Impact Assessment

One notable research gap lies in the absence of global comparative analyses of foreign aid practices and their impact. Future research should examine foreign aid practices across various donor countries and contexts to understand what is working – and for whom, what isn't working, and why. This should include comprehensively exploring policy and funding reforms in the foreign aid sector and their potential impacts. This research should explore how changes in program policy and practices influence outcomes, community development, and local empowerment while considering both positive and negative impacts. Simultaneously, examining how funding mechanisms, guidelines, and priorities can be reformed to prioritize community-led development is crucial.

Researchers should also adopt a complex systems approach to analyze the foreign aid sector's nonlinear relationships and feedback loops. Additionally, future research should investigate potential policy changes at national and international levels to shift foreign aid practices towards decolonization. This can include an assessment of the impact of decolonization efforts on the effectiveness of foreign aid programs. This approach enables the development of models to predict the impacts of proposed changes and aids in forecasting how decolonial policy changes will impact organizations. The integration of these aspects can significantly contribute to further decolonial studies. Moreover, understanding the extent to which local knowledge is incorporated into initiatives and what further integration is also essential for future research,

including collecting data regarding perspectives and practices of individuals working in local organizations and others in local communities.

Research Gap 2: Psychosocial Characteristics of Foreign Aid Professionals

Another potential area for future research would be an examination of the psychosocial characteristics of foreign aid professionals. It would be valuable for researchers, such as cognitive behavioral specialists or those specialized in psychology and behavioral patterns, to delve into the underlying factors that shape the mindset and motivations of foreign aid professionals and organizations. Of particular interest is understanding the authoritarian versus other psychosocial characteristics that may underlie saviorism and the desire to contribute to foreign aid efforts. By delving into these psychological aspects, researchers can gain deeper insights into the root causes of certain behaviors and attitudes prevalent in the field, and society. This understanding can, in turn, inform the development of more effective intercultural training programs.

Furthermore, intercultural training research should assess how these programs can effectively break down biases, foster cultural humility, enhance language proficiency, and facilitate a more nuanced understanding of local contexts. With the support of research, intercultural training can emphasize the importance of incorporating reflection on positionality in the workplace, ultimately leading to more culturally sensitive and impactful foreign aid practices, and individuals.

Research Gap 3: Impact of Current Events

Another path for future research lies in examining the impacts of recent global events and their lasting effects on foreign aid practices. Beyond traditional conflict analysis, researchers could expand their focus to investigate how recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and

the Black Lives Matter movement, have influenced foreign aid initiatives and the organizations involved in such work. This research could assess whether the changes initiated during these events have become permanent or have reverted to previous norms. The evolving dynamics of foreign aid, especially in the post-pandemic era, present an opportunity for scholars to gauge the adaptability of the sector.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a notable increase in reliance on local communities for aid distribution, with this shift being considered as a positive impact. However, as the pandemic subsided and U.S.-based personnel could travel again, thus providing an opportunity to examine whether this increased reliance on local partners abroad was due to necessity, a shift in mentality. Were the local communities perceived by U.S.-based foreign aid professionals and/or by themselves as being capable of carrying out their own community development work using the U.S.-funding independently, and what were the factors that contributed to this shift back to U.S.-based professionals taking back the responsibility? Understanding the reasons behind the possible transition back to pre-COVID-19 operating procedures may shed light on the potential inherent resistance to decolonizing the field.

Limitations

Reflecting on the limitations of this study, I found several limitations that were encountered that impacted the research.

One notable limitation of this research is its primary focus on the U.S.-based foreign aid sector. While this approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of U.S.-specific policies and practices, it may limit the generalizability of the findings to other donor countries with distinct foreign aid policies and practices. Furthermore, the sample size is relatively small and does not

provide a comprehensive view of the U.S.-based perspectives in the foreign aid profession. The unique context of the United States may not fully represent the complexities of foreign aid on a global scale.

The research encompasses a specific time frame that includes the impact of significant events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. The rapidly evolving nature of these events may limit the long-term applicability of the findings. It is important to note that during this period, interviewees, like many others, were experiencing heightened mental exhaustion due to the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the political environment in Washington, DC, where most of the interviewees resided. The study predominantly captures a snapshot of foreign aid practices during this specific time frame, and longitudinal data would provide a more comprehensive understanding of possible changes over time.

Lack of Indigenous Voices

The study does not explore the perspectives and knowledge of local communities and local partners who no doubt has unique insights into decolonial practices. The omission was intentional and outside the scope of this research. However, it is still a notable limitation and reflects the exclusive focus on U.S.-based personnel in the foreign aid sector. The voices of those who receive (or perhaps resist), foreign aid is not directly incorporated into the study. This limitation is particularly relevant given the increasing emphasis on empowering marginalized and other local voices in foreign aid. This issue raises the concern that the dominant culture is, once again, centered in this study. However, there is significant literature that does incorporate interviews and direct input from these individuals and communities to gain insights into their experiences, challenges, perceptions of foreign aid, and its impact on their lives. However, most

of this type of research involve case studies and are specific to geographic regions or foreign aid programs. By connecting the experiences of the communities receiving U.S.-funded foreign aid to the existing literature, it becomes possible to unearth the complexities of their positions within the foreign aid system. Conducting future large-scale research on this topic could emphasize the significance of amplifying their voices and recognizing their agency to potentially shape the initiatives that affect their communities. Moreover, it aids in developing more responsive and practical strategies that prioritize their identified needs. This research gap emphasizes fostering inclusivity, participatory decision-making, and creating context-specific initiatives within the foreign aid sector, thereby facilitating a more equitable and locally driven approach to foreign aid practices.

Limitations of a Junior Researcher

While working on my dissertation, I had to keep in mind that I am at the early stages of my scholarly journey. This project is not intended to be the pinnacle of my research career but rather a steppingstone, a learning process to develop essential research skills that I can build upon in the future. One challenge I grappled with was my desire to use innovative approaches to conducting research. Being relatively new to the world of scholarship, I found it daunting to veer too far from established scholarly norms. I worried that my work might not be seen as 'scholarly' if I ventured too far off the beaten path. It is important to recognize that a dissertation serves as a capacity building experience, and the goal is not necessarily to revolutionize the field but to make a meaningful contribution within established boundaries. Although my dissertation might not represent groundbreaking research, it has allowed me to explore innovative ideas and experiment with novel approaches while remaining within the framework of traditional scholarly practice. These experiences provided me with valuable lessons to apply in future research

endeavors, where I aspire to challenge conventional norms with more confidence. In essence, this dissertation has been a learning journey, and its limitations are inherent to the early stages of my scholarship. As I progress in my scholarly career, I aim to expand the boundaries of conventional research and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in my field.

Conclusion

Moving forward, embracing recommended approaches to reforming foreign aid requires adopting a more participatory and inclusive approach, giving local communities and partnering organizations greater agency and decision-making power. Implementing these changes cannot be limited to a single layer of foreign aid. For example, while localization initiatives have been central to many USAID-led foreign aid efforts in recent years, organizations and U.S.-based foreign aid professionals in the field sometimes still micromanage program implementation, hindering true change. Conversely, when policy shifts fail to reach the funding source, bureaucratic hurdles impede the advancement of localized approaches. In both cases, the current foreign aid ecosystem perpetuates neocolonialism, inadvertently promoting Western-based socially constructed racism by giving the decision-making power to individuals from Western countries and disregarding local perspectives and priorities. Furthermore, this also perpetuates the white savior complex that underpins U.S.-funded foreign aid, by allowing interventions that are framed as benevolent acts by Western actors coming to rescue poor and marginalized communities. This narrative can reinforce stereotypes of inferiority and dependency among communities participating in foreign aid initiatives. Therefore, disrupting neocolonial policies and practices requires action at every level of foreign aid decision-making—individual, institutional, and governmental.

As this dissertation approaches its conclusion, an earnest discussion about the state of foreign aid is essential. The complexities of neocolonial dynamics, the dedication of professionals in the field, and the concept of decolonizing foreign aid have been explored in depth. Yet, the necessity to continue addressing these issues remains. Despite citing esteemed Black and Brown authors, referencing numerous research papers, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, the challenge persists. Until there is a collective effort to reflect on and disrupt deeply ingrained colonial mindsets and practices, this topic will continue to resurface. It is akin to reading the same page repeatedly, hoping for a different ending. The time has come to turn the page and embrace the transformative power of decoloniality.

This shift is not solely a moral imperative; it also promises more effective, relevant, and equitable foreign aid. The urgency is significant, calling on governments, organizations, and individuals to drive this change. As this chapter concludes, there is hope for a transformative journey toward a decolonized and liberated foreign aid landscape. This transformation has the potential to shape global development and cooperation, ensuring a brighter, more inclusive future.

Appendix

Data Collection Tools

Survey Questions

1. How many years of work experience as a foreign relations [ETC.] professional do you have?
    a. 0-5 years
    b. 6-10 years
    c. 11-15 years
    d. 15-20 years
    e. 20+ years

2. What is your highest level of education?
    a. Bachelor's Degree or similar
    b. Master's Degree or similar degree (in-progress)
    c. Master's Degree or similar degree
    d. PhD or similar degree (in-progress)
    e. Completed PhD or similar degree
3. How many years have you lived outside of the United States, from the time you were born until today [or just during your adult years?]?
    a. 0-5
    b. 6-10
    c. 11-15
    d. 15+

4. Please list the countries in which you have lived abroad (if applicable)

5. Do you speak a language other than English? (Yes, No)

6. If yes, please list the language(s), and level of proficiency (elementary proficiency, limited working proficiency, professional proficiency, full professional proficiency, native/bilingual/multilingual proficiency).

7. Do you use your language skills in your professional work? (Yes, No, Other)

8. Which of the following field(s) are you involved in through **your job**? (check all that apply)
    a. International Development
    b. Humanitarian Aid
    c. Peacebuilding
    d. Disaster Response
    e. Foreign Policy
    f. Human Rights
    g. Other _____

9. What is the thematic focus of **your** work? (check all that apply)
    a. Agriculture
    b. Anti-corruption
    c. Citizen Participation
    d. Communication, news, and social marketing
    e. Crisis Response
    f. Democratic Governance
    g. Diversity and Inclusion
    h. Economic Development
    i. Education Development (formal/informal/nonformal)
    j. Empowerment of minority populations
    k. Entrepreneurship & Business Development
    l. Elections: Monitoring, Accountability, Systems
    m. Environmental Sustainability
    n. Gender and Women
    o. Health
    p. Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities
    q. Monitoring & Evaluation
    r. Nutrition
    s. Peace, Security & Resilience
    t. Political Parties or Political Inclusion
    u. Technology
    v. Youth Development
    w. Other_____

10. Currently, what are your main responsibilities in your job? (check all that apply)
    a. Advising/supporting field-based staff
    b. Budgeting
    c. Conducting capacity development programs/activities
    d. Grant proposal writing
    e. Monitoring and evaluation
    f. Partnership development and/or partnership maintenance
    g. Program/project design
    h. Program/project management
    i. Providing technical/professional contributions in the field
    j. Other (please specify): _____

11. Which regional areas does your work impact (currently and in the past decade)? (check all that apply)
    a. Asia-Pacific
    b. Central & Eastern Europe
    c. Eurasia
    d. Latin America & the Caribbean
    e. Middle East & North Africa
    f. Sub-Saharan Africa
    g. Other_____

12. Which best describes **your institution**?
    a. Foundation
    b. Government
    c. Grassroots
    d. Multilateral organization
    e. Nonprofit
    f. Private
    g. Other _____

13. Does your institution use U.S. government funding (directly or grant or contract-based/other)?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Other _____

14. To what extent does your institution **design** programming in partnership with local organizations or individuals in the country of interest. (To a great extent, to some extent, to a limited extent, not at all, depends on the program)

15. To what extent does your institution **implement** programming in partnership with local organizations or individuals in the country of interest. (To a great extent, to some extent, to a limited extent, not at all, depends on the program)

16. To what extent does your institution **evaluate** programming in partnership with local organizations or individuals in the country of interest. (To a great extent, to some extent, to a limited extent, not at all, depends on the program)

17. Which of the following values do you feel **are okay** for the U.S.to try to influence abroad? (check all that apply)
    a. Anti-corruption
    b. Capitalist values
    c. Democratic governance (legislative development, transitions to democratic governments, local government development)
    d. Education curriculum and teacher training
    e. Education Policy
    f. Election systems
    g. Entrepreneurship/business development
    h. Female Genital Mutilation
    i. Free and open media
    j. Government accountability and transparency
    k. Health systems and nutrition
    l. LGBTI Advocacy
    m. Peacebuilding
    n. Political inclusion of marginalized groups
    o. Political parties

p. Religious freedom
q. Technological integrity
r. Women's rights
s. Youth development (job training)
t. Other: Please list any missing values you feel **are okay** to influence abroad.

18. If there are any values listed above you feel **are not okay** to influence abroad, please explain why you feel this way (list any missing values). (open-ended)

19. Are you interested in participating in an interview to further discuss your work? (YES, NO, PERHAPS)

20. If you answered "yes" or "perhaps" to participating in an interview, please provide your: First Name

21. If you answered "yes" or "perhaps" to participating in an interview, please provide your: Email address.

22. Other comments or questions?

Interview Round One

1. Can you tell me about why you chose to be in the field of _____ (int dev, humanitarian aid, etc)?
2. What do you feel is your role in this field?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about your organization, and your role?
4. How do you or your organization (walk through the process of each of the following, indicating what categories of people tend to be involved):
    a. Identify and maintain partners abroad?
    b. Identify and plan projects/programs? (follow up about partner involvement, if not discussed)
    c. Fund the projects/programs?
    d. Implement projects/programs?
    e. Staff the projects/programs both in the U.S. and abroad?
    f. Monitor and evaluate projects/programs?
5. How comfortable are you with the overall influence in your organization and in the countries/projects in which you work?
6. In what ways, if any, have you heard about (neo)colonialism or decolonization in the field of foreign assistance? Please explain what you've heard, where/how you heard about such, and what you think about these issues.
7. In what ways, if at all, does your organization incorporate/adopt decolonizing structures and practices: (discuss a-e as stated in question 5)
8. *(only ask if the answer to question 7 was NO or I don't know)* If an organization incorporated/adopted decolonizing foreign assistance structures and practices, what do you feel that would look like in your role/institution? (discuss a-e as stated in question 5)

9. Has your institution taken any explicit steps to incorporate anti-racist policies and practices in the past few years?
    a. What did this entail if such took place?
    b. Who promoted such changes, if any, and why?
    c. If efforts were made to implement anti-racist policies and practices, how has this impacted those with whom you work abroad (national government officials, local government officials, experts from the country, local community leaders, other community members)?
10. Who do you feel should (or could) take the lead (and who else should be actively involved) in making changes to decolonize the work of your institution? (Open ended)
11. What challenges or barriers do you think you/others would face in working towards decolonizing the field?

Interview Round Two

1. How do you feel the pandemic has impacted the field of foreign aid in terms of staffing, designing, implementing, partnering, and evaluation of projects/programs/research, etc? Please try to address each of the listed points in the process, if applicable.
2. Since our last discussion, do you have anything to add about issues of racism or white saviorism in the foreign aid sector?
3. As we discussed in the first interview, the term decolonization has buzzed throughout the foreign aid sector. How have the discussions on decolonization or decolonial work impacted you personally and/or professionally, if at all? Can you give one or two examples?
4. Have there been separate discussions or actions that have focused on anti-racism versus decolonization? Please describe the different types of work being done and how these two concepts have differed in your workplace OR if please give an example of how these two concepts have been used interchangeably.
5. What type of work have you done, personally or professionally, to educate yourself on issues of racism or colonial legacies (just a reminder there is no judgment on how you answer). Can you give me one or two examples?
6. Do you feel your undergraduate and/or graduate education programs prepared you for thinking [and acting] critically about racism/white saviorism, or deconstructing historical and/or current forms of (neo)colonialism?
7. Reflecting on your higher education experience, do you have any wishes/recommendations for higher education programs to better prepare foreign aid professionals? This can include topics of anti-racism, decolonization, or other topics/technical skills.
8. Have you participated in any professional development related to anti-racism and decolonization in the past few years? If yes, please identify if this was voluntary or required. If yes, what are covered in the activities?
9. What kind of support or professional development related to anti-racism/decolonization would you like to happen in the foreign aid sector (whether you would participate or not)?
10. Do you have any other thoughts or reflections to add?

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