

Anti-Racism Discussions - The language we use to describe our work matters

Introduction

After the murder of George Floyd and prompted by the Black Lives Matter movement and <https://charitysowhite.org/> movement, the Five Talents team in the UK have been doing some reading and learning about the systemic racism which still exists in the UK and especially in the charity sector. (Here are some of the articles on our [reading list](#) if helpful).

We held a workshop and have identified several actions to try to address structural racism - or, as CharitySoWhite recommends calling it, this imbalance of power and privilege - within Five Talents.

One of those actions is to recognise that some of the language we use is unintentionally racist, implying superiority / inferiority judgements.

For example, talking about 'the developing world' positions it as inferior to the 'developed' world. Talking about 'local partners' suggests they are somehow less important. Writing about 'the poor' risks objectifying people. Calling our members 'beneficiaries' makes us the saviours, them, the helpless recipients of what we give. Is 'capacity building' really the right term? Or 'needs assessment'? And why is 'due diligence' not seen as mutual? It is only usually done by the funder to the spender of funds, as if the spender has no right to know more about the organisation raising funds on its behalf and through its stories and work? See [this short article by BOND](#) for a few other examples. BOND has also now published its own recommended terminology for taking British politics and colonialism out of our language; see [here](#).

Words have power. We believe some simple changes in the language we use to describe our work could help identify, address and redress these implicit value judgements.

Ideally, all members of the Five Talents family should seek to use the same language where possible (though we recognise this might not always be possible as different terms have different connotations in different contexts). We have consulted FTUS and FTK on their language usage. FTK noted that for many of our programme partners, it will not be relevant to participate in this exercise; English is often a second or third language and the nuance, context and history of the words are different. As our language is often used for a UK audience, it is the UK contexts and connotations we should pay attention to as we seek to decolonise our language and remove implicit judgements of superiority / inferiority.

There may be some standard terms everyone wants to adopt across the FT family - but we recognise there will be exceptions and uniform language is not our aim here. We all operate in different cultures and contexts, and sometimes there may be good reasons to use one word instead of another. Even in the same culture, there are occasions when a word will be ok and when the same word is not ok. But we hope the discussion will help us recognise implicit value judgements in language, so we use it with more awareness.

Past Terminology used by FT UK team	Standard terminology we aim to use in future	COMMENTS / RATIONALE
<p>Local (delivery) partner / trainer / team(s)</p>	<p>Removing “local” <u>where possible</u> and replacing it with the country/programme/region, for example, “Tanzanian partner/trainer”</p>	<p>‘Local’ can imply inferiority and risks lumping all of ‘Africa’ together. So where possible reference specific location eg ‘our partners in Tanzania’ - but ‘local’ is ok in some contexts</p>
<p>In country / on the ground / in the field</p>	<p>Colleagues/trainers/partners/ who work with communities in location name (ex: Tanzania)</p> <p>Country name</p> <p>Project name</p> <p>Colleagues/trainers/partners in location name (ex: Tanzania)</p> <p>Colleagues/trainers/partners/ who work in location name (ex: Tanzania)</p> <p>Colleagues/trainers/partners who work in region/diocese name (ex: Morogoro)</p>	<p>‘In the field’ risks positioning the places where we work as ‘other.’ In the field is reminiscent of the ‘mission field’ and ‘on the ground’ is militaristic.</p> <p>It also again risks lumping many places and cultures together.</p> <p><u>Where possible</u> we should reference the location eg programmes / partners / colleagues / trainers in Morogoro, Tanzania</p> <p>If talking about FT as a whole and does not make sense to to use specific programme location - we could use “delivery partners/local partners”</p>
<p>Developing world, majority world, global South, low-income countries</p>	<p>Being specific about the single country/region/programme you are speaking about is the best practice.</p> <p>When speaking of FT’s work as a whole it makes more sense to discuss more specific regions: ex. “eastern Africa”</p> <p>Politically fragile states</p> <p>Conflict affected states</p>	<p>‘Developing’ suggests inferiority. Global South lumps together billions of people including Australia and NZ. Again these catch-all terms trample over nuance and context.</p> <p>‘XXX income countries’ is preferable to ‘poor’ recognising that poverty is not just income-poverty. You may want to combine this with other terms / consider if referring just to economic deprivation is appropriate in the context.</p> <p>Being specific and providing sufficient context is best.</p>

	<p>Low/Middle Income Countries</p> <p>“the countries we work in”</p>	
<p>Beneficiaries / members / clients / users</p>	<p>Members - but not ‘our’ members. Use programme/Group/Saving Group/Literacy Group members (especially on first mention) to provide clarity on what you are referring to.</p>	<p>‘Beneficiaries’ positions us as saviours. ‘Clients’ is too transactional.</p>
<p>Supporting / helping</p>	<p>Working with</p> <p>The communities our partners work with</p> <p>Facilitating - assuming sufficient context is provided, what are we facilitating: training/Savings Groups formation etc.</p> <p>Supporting is okay in sufficient context -- we are providing funding and the Programme Manager does play a support role</p> <p>Grant-funding</p>	<p>‘Helping’ positions people as being ‘in need’/positions us as a saviour.</p>
<p>empowering/enabling/equipping</p>	<p>‘communities realising / demanding their rights / potential’ use language that talks about ‘autonomy’ or ‘equity’ or ‘rights’ or ‘justice’ instead</p> <p>Empowering -- as long as we avoid the sense that WE are giving people power. See logic in next column.</p> <p>Equipping rather than enabling (and ideally refer to our partners rather than FT as</p>	<p>Empowering is over-used but is ok in the context of communities / people accessing control / rights etc - but avoid the sense we give them power. It is theirs already but we / others have suppressed it.</p> <p>Enabling implies that we’ve done something more directly or that it is something being done TO someone.</p>

	<p>equipping).</p> <p>Learning</p> <p>Training (Ideally don't refer to literacy or PLA tools as 'training' since these are collaborative learning processes with no trainer. But it is okay to use in the context of business training, training on setting up an SG etc).</p>	
Poverty	Economically disadvantaged / excluded	<p>This is a grey area. I think we need to review how we use the word and how we talk about the people who are poor.</p> <p>We should ideally be qualified with stats to define what it means. Poverty looks different in different countries - it needs to be clear what we mean by poverty where we work.</p> <p>Where possible should reference the systems/structures causing the poverty.</p>
The (rural) poor, the global poor, those living in (extreme) poverty	<p>Communities (or rural communities)/people who have been excluded</p> <p>Communities/people who cannot afford basic needs</p>	<p>This Al Jazeera article and this one from Center for Human Rights and Global Justice demonstrate that "less than £xx per day" is also problematic. We will avoid this where possible, but recognise that this is often a benchmark used largely in the sector.</p>
Vulnerable, marginalised, disadvantaged, isolated, deprived	<p>people who have been marginalised</p> <p>people who have been excluded</p> <p>people who have not been listened to,</p> <p>under-represented groups/communities,</p> <p>people left behind</p>	<p>'People who have been excluded / marginalised / deprived / isolated / made vulnerable' etc is helpful terminology in reminding us it was done TO them by others / structures / systems.</p> <p>Vulnerable to [something] rather than as a label.</p> <p>Isolated and deprived too as they are something others or circumstances do TO you, they do not suggest I am</p>

	<p>People who have no safety net</p> <p>People who are vulnerable to [...] or vulnerable because of [...] (e.g. climate change).</p> <p>Isolated/deprived can be used if sufficient context is provided, ex. "Communities in Karamoja are isolated because of poor infrastructure."</p>	<p>inherently inferior or weak.</p> <p>Isolated does have connotations of western sensationalization of 'isolated tribes' although we feel that there is nothing wrong with the word itself. Therefore, it is better to be specific about what we mean here.</p>
Ethnic groups	<p>Ethnic groups</p> <p>Different communities / cultural backgrounds / experiences</p>	<p>We could move language more towards speaking of different communities/cultural backgrounds. Talking about backgrounds also alludes to historical injustices (often perpetuated by colonialism) which mean some groups are marginalised.</p>
Needs assessment	<p>Community identified needs & strengths</p> <p>Community survey/research</p> <p>Or an assessment to define the community's challenges</p>	
Need	<p>Challenges, problems, issues, adversities</p>	<p>Have to be clear on what the need is/what it means.</p>
Capacity building	<p>Sharing learning and knowledge, community led development, training, supporting, leadership development, community organising</p>	<p>Capacity building suggests a lack of capacity or that we have it and 'they' don't.</p>
Unlocking potential to...	<p>Building self-confidence/self-esteem</p> <p>Self-identification of potential / resources</p>	<p>Who holds the key?</p> <p>Members/communities already have skills, resources, sense of self -- the training our partners does builds on this/strengthens their confidence.</p>

Livelihoods	Jobs Work Livelihoods Businesses	
Social capital	Social capital Social support Social inclusion Social participation	
'Our Programme' (we do use 'our partner staff' rather than 'our staff')	Remove our when it makes sense to.	We should aim to say 'our partners' where possible rather than 'our programmes' or 'our Savings Groups' since we are part of the partnership but we are not owning / running the programmes or SGs.
Due diligence	Understanding of partner / partner background and partnership Due diligence (but demonstrate two day elements of this).	The key here is that due diligence should be mutual - not us as the funder checking the partner is worthy of receiving the funds. The partner should check they are happy to receive funds from us - are we a good partner? Are they happy to have us telling their story, raising funds using their stories?
Shifting The Power	Shifting Power Antiracism	To recognise that power is not a fixed parcel you pass from one to another but is a spectrum and different people have more / less power in different circumstances.
Equality/ equity / justice	Equity / justice	Equality doesn't always make things 'fair' - eg giving the same amount of food to a toddler as an adult is 'equality', but would not be wise.

This is a working document so rows can be added when necessary. [Bond's Final Language Audit](#) inspired some of the suggestions above though it does not have to be the final guideline that Five Talents holds itself to.