Track Changing Initiative (TCI)

Terms of Reference

Reclaiming the “aid narrative” and its power for the issue of social justice and global solidarity

The Track Changing Initiative (TCI) is a taskforce of the Kampala Initiative that was established during a civil society workshop on “How to advance cooperation and solidarity within and beyond aid” that took place in Kampala on 15-16 November 2019.

The aim of this task group is to provide a critical and global civil society perspective on the “aid narrative”, and to look for more truthful alternatives grounded in social justice and global solidarity.

The “aid narrative”

The current dominant story we are told about poor health and poverty is one of charity, aid and so-called “international development”. This story tells us that poverty and poor health can be overcome by generous donors in the “global north” simply giving to those in the “global south”.

While aid - in its different forms - is important, the story that it is the sole solution to poor health is untruthful and damaging. It acts as a smokescreen hiding the real issues that create and maintain poor health, including neoliberal and neo-colonial economic policies such as privatisation and public spending cuts. It also presents the “global north” as the saviours of the “global south”. This is not only inaccurate, it also undermines global solidarity by creating otherness and cementing colonially-rooted power dynamics in favour of the “global north”.

There may also be a link between the “aid narrative” and the declining public support that we witness in many countries for development and health related issues, such as in the UK. This support is vital for holding governments to account for their actions.

The power of language

Social psychology and cognitive linguistics have shown us that how we communicate the issues we care about impacts how people think, feel and act on them. In other words, there is power in the language we use.

Studies such as this one really show how changing just one word in a sentence can make a difference to how people would address an issue.

We therefore believe that finding a more truthful way to communicate about poor health and poverty in the world is an important part of a strategy for transforming aid into an equitable means of ensuring health rights, and to build a future where health justice and equity are realised and aid is no longer a necessity.

We also believe that it is important to ensure that initiatives to move away from the traditional “aid narrative” incorporate the perspectives of communities most impacted by this language.

Track Changing Initiative

At a civil society workshop in Kampala, a small group of civil society representatives came together to discuss, address and find alternatives to the “aid narrative”. We agreed that the aid narrative” deserved continued attention from activists around the world, bringing a global perspective on this issue, and so formed the Track Changing Initiative.

The aim of this task group is to provide a critical and global civil society perspective on the “aid narrative” and to look for more truthful alternatives grounded in social justice and global solidarity.

We aim to do this through the implementation of our work plan, which contributes to and compliments work Health Poverty Action is already carrying out in this area.

We are currently delivering this work plan on a volunteer basis without funding. However, as the group becomes more established, and as we continue with our implementation, we may find that we have funding needs. These needs could include design work, translations, capacity building/training and perhaps covering the cost of our coordination and time inputs of TCI members. If/when this need arises, we will consult with the Kampala Initiative Steering Group to decide the best route forward.
Agreed tasks

- Critically analyse the “aid narrative”
- Collectively explore alternatives to the “aid narrative”
- Develop understanding on how the “aid narrative” and alternatives to this translate into other languages and contexts around the world
- Engage civil society actors in our own contexts in the importance of language in their work, and in the importance of incorporating multiple perspective on this issue, especially from communities most affected or impacted by the “aid narrative”
- Support other task groups of the Kampala Initiative with the issue of language in their work
- To explore opportunities for funding in consultation with the Kampala Initiative Steering Group

Task group governance

The task group is an informal group set up within the overall structure of the Kampala Initiative. It is currently coordinated by two group members (a lead coordinator, and co-coordinator) who coordinates activities, facilitates group work, provides an entry point for newcomers and reports on activities to the Kampala Initiative Steering Group. Each group member plays a role in representing the team towards external institutions when relevant.

Interested civil society colleagues are welcome to join the task group if they have endorsed the Kampala Declaration, and are able to engage actively in the group's work. We aim to ensure that there is equal regional representation within this group across southern and northern boundaries.

The group has a Google drive in which relevant documents are stored, and communicates via email and on regular calls.

Initial core team members

- Akaninyene Obot, Nnamdi Azikiwe University & Ukana West 2 Community Based Health Initiative, Nigeria
- Baijayanta Mukhopadhyay, People’s Health Movement, Canada
- Danny Gotto, Innovations for Development, Kenya
- Linda Shuro, People’s Health Movement Africa, South Africa
- Lizzy Igbine, Nigerian Women Agro Allied Farmers Association
- Spéro Hector Ackey, People’s Health Movement Benin (coordinator)
- Tess Woolfenden, Health Poverty Action, UK (coordinator)

Contact
These terms of reference were adopted by the group, along with the work plan, on April 2020 as a starting point for our work. They should be considered live documents.

More information about the Track Changing Initiative:
https://www.medicusmundi.org/track-changing-initiative/