JIGSAW

Inclusive and antiracist language in development

Jigsaw

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Introduction

Why we think this glossary is important

At Jigsaw we are engaging more deeply with issues related to race and racism, and inclusion more broadly. This followed the prominent rise of the Black Lives Matter movement globally, and subsequent anti-racist activism which demanded — and still demands — social justice and equality for people of colour. We recognise that anti-racism is not a new practice and we are in the process of learning about what racism and anti-racism look like within the development and humanitarian sector, as well as within the UK, and our own organisation.

We are approaching antiracism through two main fora:

1. An action plan owned by the entire team, with discrete activities and outputs.
2. Conversations where we discuss antiracism issues and particular areas that benefit from whole-team discussion that have arisen from the action plan delivery.

From team discussions, it quickly became apparent to the Jigsaw team that we needed to critically examine our use of language and consider the role this plays in contributing to racial inequities, and other forms of inequality, in the international development sector and within Jigsaw itself. As such, Jigsaw undertook a process of reviewing the language we regularly use in our work and searching for better alternatives. Our hope is that the glossary is one aspect of Jigsaw becoming actively anti-racist and inclusive, by heightening the awareness of problematic language with the development sector, and proposing alternative, more inclusive terms

We are committed to being open about sharing our learning and contributing to the wider discourse on anti-racism and inclusivity - particularly within the international development and humanitarian sectors. As such, we are pleased to share this glossary, as a live document which will continually be updated, externally. You can follow any outputs we produce on this topic, including our anti-racism reading list, on this page of our website.

How the glossary was compiled

The glossary was compiled by a Jigsaw sub-group as part of the team's anti-racism action plan. The sub-group did additional research to inform the decisions,[1] had extensive discussions with the wider Jigsaw team, and had an externally facilitated discussion.

Two main questions were considered when deciding on terms:

1. Is it clear? If not, how can it be more specific?
2. Would the term be used to describe countries or communities in the Global North?

Specificity of language was prioritized, as many terms currently used in the international development sector are imprecise and coded, and do not accurately describe what they intend to describe. This leads to overarching phrases which are problematic in their generalisations. The second consideration of whether a term is used to describe the Global North is important as using different terms to describe the same phenomena in the Global North and Global South contributes to the othering of Global South countries and communities.

In the process of compiling the glossary, the team identified problematic terminology, language that may be more appropriate, articulated a rationale and collated resources. We engaged in multiple feedback rounds internally to produce the first version of our 'inclusive and antiracist language in development' glossary of terms.

This is a live document to reflect that the use of inclusive and antiracist language is an ongoing and evolving debate within Jigsaw and in the wider international development sector. The document will be updated to reflect changes in our thinking. If you would like to engage in discussion with us about the glossary, please contact Jigsaw at info@jigsaweducation.org - new additions are always welcome, as are revisiting discussions about terms that are currently in the glossary.

How to use this document

The inclusive and antiracist language in development glossary presents three facets of Jigsaw's thinking: terms we think are not helpful, terms we think are helpful, and our rationale for why we have identified these terms. Where appropriate, we have included links to resources we have found particularly helpful. The glossary is split into four types of terminology: international development terminology, descriptors, research terminology and geographic terminology.

If you think a word may be problematic, search for the term to see if it is categorised under "terms we think are not helpful" and what alternative terms are suggested under "terms we think are helpful". This glossary is intended to be a helpful resource when writing or reviewing written work and presentations through the lens of inclusivity and anti-racism.

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[1] The following resources are a good place to start if you are starting to think about anti-racist language in the international development sector: Guardian article, "17 global development clichés to avoid", FP2P blog post, "Which awful Devspeak words would you most like to ban?".

It should also be noted that as researchers we constantly use language to describe, explain and assess the activities of other people and organizations. As a result we need to engage actively in the lexicon of those people and organizations. This means that sometimes we use words in our work that we do not think are ideal. For example, if the official title of an intervention that we are researching is a 'gender-based violence programme' we repeat their term in our work in order to identify it in a way that is understood by the reader. What we do is avoid the use of the term within our own analysis where we can be more precise. When this is the case we take the opportunity to engage a client in conversation and help them think through the accuracy and appropriateness of the terms they use to define their work - ie, we invite them to journey with us in becoming more inclusive and antiracist in the use of words. We also can add footnotes and specific recommendations within reports which propose more accurate terminology.

Inclusive and antiracist language in development

Terms we think are not helpful	Terms we think are helpful	Our rationale for why terms are helpful or unhelpful
International development terminology		
Capacity building	Skills training	Essentially "capacity building" feels like a code and is generally not used in a Global North context. Skills training is language used in the Global North and accurately describes most so-called capacity building programmes. If the term capacity building is used, it needs to have a clear definition and shouldn't be used as a blanket term.
Empowerment Empower	Define what is meant by the term and why it is being used, and use that specific phrasing in narrative e.g. "training in life skills" could be used if that effectively communicated the intended meaning. Often terms such as "self-efficacy" and	It suggests that agency and power is held by a specific group, normally donors and implementers. Current usage of the word has become very broad and has often strayed from its radical feminist principles which advocated for system-overhaul.[2] We should move away from using empowerment as short-hand and use it directly in relation to systemic change or refer to changes to self-efficacy and agency.

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https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-counterpart-international-is-banning-the-word-empower-and-so-should-you-93662

	"agency" are more accurate. The terms empower / empowerment are appropriate, however, if used in direct relation to an activity which is aligned with the original, radical principles of the term and directly concern structural reform at the community or national level.	
Gender-based violence (GBV)	Specify target/type of violence Violence against women, or violence against trans and non-binary people For race-based violence - 'racially motivated violence' or 'racist violence'	'Gender Based Violence' is not specific enough.
Race-based violence	Specify target/type of violence Racially motivated violence Racist violence	'Race-based violence' is not specific enough.
Income generating activity Livelihood opportunities	For individuals: Employment Job To be employed / self-employed / informally employed / an entrepreneur For schools: School business Revenue stream Income sources	'Income generating activity' or 'livelihood opportunities' are not common terms used in the Global North and are coded and vague.
Value for Money	We recognise that VfM is a term existing beyond the international	It is hard to quantify the value of an intervention's impact on a person's life, family and community. Limited quantifiable

	development sector and may therefore not be easy to renegotiate in many settings. However, we will strive to nuance VfM/break it down into its specific component parts (cost-effectiveness, efficiency, equity) wherever possible.	evidence does not mean that an intervention is not worthwhile, which can often appear to be the case under a VfM framework. VfM implies that there is an expected return on investment, whereas cost-effectiveness focuses on how a project achieves its aims and places the emphasis on the implementers' decision-making and efficiency, rather than on a limited view of impact. However, as this is a prevalent term used in the sector we may need to use it as clients require, but we will clearly caveat our understanding.

Descriptors

Beneficiaries	Project participants	To be a beneficiary implies a relational weakness to the benefactor. It also implies that what they receive is inherently "bene", or good. We want to ensure we don't obscure the relationship or change the meaning - development is often done *to* people, not *with*.[3]
Clients Consumers [When used to describe project participants]	Project participants	Development is often done *to* people, not *with*, and therefore 'clients or consumers' may be inappropriate as they imply a choice. And we don't want to define people by their lack of capital or role in capitalist systems.[4]
The poor Impoverished	People living in poverty	People are not defined by their circumstances and poverty is a dynamic, fluid process.
Expert	Specialist	This feels like a definitive statement that prioritises knowledge held by one person over another. 'Specialist' relates to a specific topic or subject.
Disabled people Handicapped	People with disabilities In context of education: Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND),	This is a complicated one and ultimately depends on an individual's preference as some people with disabilities may self-identify with the term 'disabled person' as it is part of their identity rather than the

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https://www.google.com/url?q=https://feedbacklabs.org/blog/do-you-still-use-the-word-beneficiary/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1631793164439000&usg=AOvVaw3rMp4S97FWUBPNPy7vGlOX

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https://www.google.com/url?q=https://feedbacklabs.org/blog/do-you-still-use-the-word-beneficiary/&sa=D&source=editors&ust=1631793164439000&usg=AOvVaw3rMp4S97FWUBPNPy7vGlOX

	or children with disabilities	more distanced phrase of 'person with a disability'. However, several sources suggest we use the term "people with disabilities".[5]
Vulnerable	For safeguarding: at-risk To describe communities: marginalised	'Vulnerable' is more of a characteristic whilst 'at-risk' centres the risk of harm outside of the individual. In addition, there has been a change in terminology legally.[6]
Victim	Survivor	The use of language in safeguarding and when dealing with abuse, particularly sexual abuse, is very important as it has the power to create further harm. The terminology of "victim" can imply helplessness and pity, and can reduce a person's identity to what they experienced. The term "survivor" implies taking back control and a sense of mobility.[7] However, ultimately the use of language should be guided by the personal preference of the individual who experienced the abuse.
Research terminology		
Fieldwork On-the-ground In-country research	Research in [name of country] Face-to-face primary research / face-to-face primary data collection in [country] Remote primary research / remote primary data collection with [type of participant] in [country] Research visit to [country] / Conference in [country] / Workshop in	Ultimately, these terms are not used to describe research activities in the Global North. On fieldwork: "The field" used to mean the frontline of aid and development work. Yet it has now come to mean any location in a global south country. "It is a fabrication, a social construct to separate us (those writing policies in comfortable offices in supposedly superior, civilised western capitals) from them (our more virtuous colleagues testing our policies out in some dark, underdeveloped expanse)."[8]

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[5] The following resources are insightful: UK Government: Inclusive language - words to use and avoid when writing about disability; People with Disability Australia: Words to Describe People with Disability; and Washington Group on Disability Statistics: Definition of disability.
[6] https://www.anncrafttrust.org/resources/safeguarding-adults-at-risk-definitions/
[7] https://helloflo.com/survivor-vs-victim-why-choosing-your-words-carefully-is-important/
[8]
https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/jul/12/secret-aid-worker-field-fieldwork-neocolonial-vocabulary

	[country] To describe partners: Research partner in [country]	
Best practice	(Examples of) good practice (with caveat below*) Emerging good practice (with caveat below*) Lessons learned *Example caveat to include in a report: *Lessons learned are meant to be based on experience but also have relevance to a wider context. Whilst the lessons learned detailed in this section are primarily targeted to the work of [CLIENT], they may also provide useful insights for other organisations working in the same area, or in other country contexts. However, the relevance and applicability of these lessons learned to other contexts must be assessed on a case by case basis, and not unquestioningly adopted as generalisable 'best practice'.*	Similar to "expert", this is hierarchical language which implies that our way is better than others. It implies a level of generality that 'best' practices can/should be replicated or adopted across contexts. Absolutely we should be learning from/inspired by what worked well in other projects' contexts for future projects, but with the understanding that what is 'best' in one context/point in time may not be suitable in another. Also, "best practice" is not considerate of the fact that what we see to be 'best' at one moment in time will inevitably evolve and adapt as new innovations, research, methods of implementation, technologies etc are developed.
Participation Participatory approaches/research [Note: not that it is unhelpful to have participatory methods but the language is used	Community participation in research [Note: unless a participatory research methodology is actually followed]	Similar to empowerment, the term had a specific origin and has been co-opted. We support the use of participatory research methods and seek to use the terminology accurately and not to dilute the concept. We suggest referring to Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation to accurately describe the type of participation used.[9]

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[9] https://organizingengagement.org/models/ladder-of-citizen-participation/

misleadingly in a lot of cases]		
Geographic terminology		
Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)	Central Africa, Western Africa, Northern Africa, Southern Africa, Eastern Africa [be specific]	Sub-Saharan Africa is a highly generalised and broad categorisation that covers a huge breadth of geographic areas and diversity of cultures. By using generalised language, it creates the idea of a homogenous and monolithic "African" experience and contributes to the misconception that "Africa is a country" (not a continent with 55 countries)[10]. This is untrue and misleading. As such, we will use specific geographic descriptors.
Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Middle East	Wherever possible we use specific country names, including the Arab League states.[11] When grouping is appropriate consider using South-West Asia & Northern Africa (SWANA)	MENA and Middle East are broad categorisations that obscure the diversity of contexts in this part of the world. The framing of the term "Middle East" is such that it can only be described in relation to something else (middle or east) rather than on its own. "Middle East" is a eurocentric term coined by the British in accordance with the proximity of the region to Europe[12] (see also Edward Said's 'Orientalism'). Our preference is to use specific country names and avoid grouping. However, if grouping is considered appropriate or necessary, we recommend SWANA. The grouping of North Africa with South West Asia is commonly used by people living in the region, which is why we are suggesting the use of SWANA. We recognise that this is not widely used and will use footnotes to explain why we are using it as a replacement to the "MENA" term.
Asia	East and North East Asia; North and Central Asia; South East Asia; the Pacific; South and South-West Asia	Asia is a highly generalised and broad categorisation that covers a huge breadth of geographic areas and diversity of cultures. By using generalised language, it creates the idea of a homogenous and monolithic "Asian" experience. As such, we will use specific geographic descriptors.

[10] For discourse https://africasacountry.com/
[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_League
[12] https://www.e-ir.info/2021/02/25/the-middle-east-an-orientalist-creation/

Failing/failed states Fragile state Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS)	No alternative - don't use. Simply describe the political/governance context of the country where needed.	Unnecessarily pejorative and neo-colonial. Terms only used to describe global southern countries. Factually descriptive terms such as "conflict affected" are appropriate.
Low-resource environments Developing countries First/third world Emerging countries	Global South (where accurate) Low / middle / high income country Majority / Minority World	'Resource' is a very broad term and suggests that the places where we work have limited resources of all sorts - this contradicts work such as Sen's capabilities approach - which emphasises how many resources there are even in the midst of extreme economic poverty. Global South is preferable when referencing or discussing history, privilege and culture (though recognising that these vary significantly across the Global South). When discussing present day socio-economic contexts, low/middle/high income works as an accurate descriptor that refers to a specific measure and does not lay a judgement on perceived value, quality of resources or the economy. The terms "Majority World" or "Minority World" can also be helpful terms to draw attention to the fact that the majority of the world's population reside in low or middle income countries, and a minority live in high income countries. These terms emphasise the issue of justice in international development and unequal global power dynamics. It is important to note that this phrase was coined by a Bangladeshi photojournalist and social activist Shahidual Alam as an alternative to the terms "Third World" and "developing".[13] We recognise this is particularly difficult terminology, and we will seek to find more specific terminology and avoid homogenising language where possible, and provide caveats and definitions as needed.

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[13] https://borgenproject.org/tag/majority-world/ and
https://www.travelfordifference.com/why-third-world-is-outdated-what-you-should-say-instead/