



Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism WhatsApp Workshop Seminar

Series 14

Conversation with Degan Ali (Somalia & Kenya)

Racism and Neocolonialism in Humanitarian Aid System

The Community Voices for Peace and Pluralism - Africa (CVPP) is a non-profit network of women professionals providing services in preventing, transforming and solving violent conflict, including ethnic and religious conflicts around the world. CVPP also builds capacities. through a Peace and Pluralism approach, equipping women to contribute to preventing, transforming and solving violent conflict in decision making roles. We offer highly effective consulting services to advance global peace and security.

The WhatsApp Workshop Seminar Series began in the wake of the Global COVID-19 Pandemic. The Pandemic has hit the world's vulnerable and most marginalized hardest. These are the people members of CVPP work with. Members of CVPP decided to meet this unprecedented challenge by speaking to each other every week. Sharing stories, learning new skills from each other all through the WhatsApp platform, to enable reach to those of our members without access to facilities such as Zoom or Skype.

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Introduction by Mandiedza Parichi (PhD):

Hello everyone I hope you are having a great weekend. I am excited to welcome all of you to the 14th CVPP seminar series titled RACISM AND NEOCOLONIALISM IN THE AID SYSTEM. Without wasting much time let me introduce you to our able moderator who is a seasoned peace-builder Emebet Getachew. Emebet will in turn introduce our esteemed speaker of the week Degan Ali to discuss the topic of RACISM AND NEOCOLONIALISM IN AID SYSTEM. There have been a lot of discussions already taking place around the race issue and it's crucial to understand that within the spectrum of white and black the further away you are from the white centre the worse the racism.

From me the Convener let's sit back and enjoy this topical and pertinent conversation.

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to the Community Voices for Peace and Plurality workshop seminar series 14. I am very pleased to moderate today's discussion. Today's seminar focuses on racism and neo-colonialism in the humanitarian aid system. To discuss this timely topic, I have our distinguished speaker Degan Ali with us.

Degan is the Executive Director for ADESO as you will see in her bio at the end of this document. She has more than 20 years of hands on experience in the humanitarian and development field. Degan is a strong believer in transforming the current aid system to give more power and voice to local communities and civil society organizations. Degan continues to innovate and develop new solutions to build the infrastructure that truly shapes power and resources including co-founding the Network for Empowered Response.

Salim, Nigeria: Good afternoon our moderator for seminar series No.14. Looking forward to positive engagement!

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Before we delve into the presentations, I would like to highlight my own departure points. When I was an undergraduate, I read this book called *Lords of Poverty* by Graham Hancock. For me this was an eye-opening book because it exposed the foundation of the humanitarian aid industry. It raises fundamental questions like who controls power, resources and decisions. It represents the problematic conceptualization of the international aid system in general that the west is the giver and Africans are receivers. This is a typical neocolonial and patronistic view most often shaped by racist mindset and mythologies. Even with the COVID-19 pandemic period, we experienced obvious racism which you all remember especially with the racist comment by the French scientist who publicly recommended that the first vaccine should be tested on Africans. But on today's seminar I hope we get the chance to touch base on key questions that we are grappling with and explore more on neocolonialism and racism in the international humanitarian aid system. I hope Degan's presentation and the Q&A that follows will delve more into the topic and the issues highlighted earlier. With that, Degan the floor is yours.

Amina: Thank you Emebet, fully ready to hear from Degan.

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: Good morning! Good afternoon! Good evening! Thank you all for having me. This is Degan Ali. I'm the Executive Director of ADESO which is a Somali Diaspora organization that is now based in Kenya, working in Somali and Kenya. I'm really quite happy to have been invited to this really amazing forum of amazing activists. Thank you for having me today. So I have been asked to talk a little bit about racism and neo-colonialism in the humanitarian and development aid system. I'm just going to give you a bit of background first

about myself and how I have been engaged in this sector. I came to what I am doing now from the US with the desire to always come home and work in the continent and work with my community. When I first came back in 1999, I started job hunting. Immediately, I went to the UN thinking that was the perfect place. Everybody wants to be in the UN. As someone who grew up in the US, I have intimate understanding of racism. I understand it. I can identify it. I can call it out when I see it. So that was my first experience coming back and trying to get a job with the UN and seeing how it was difficult to get a job having the same education as my other white people. Sometimes I believe I had higher education than some of them with better experience and more qualifications but I still found difficulty in getting a job.

It was told to me that it is very hard to hire a Somali to work on a Somalia programme because you are not seen as neutral or impartial. For me, this was code for 'only white people can have these jobs because they are from outside and are coming here to save us Africans'. There is discrimination in the pay system. While you have the same education if not better than your white counterpart, automatically since you are a Somalia, you are not seen as a qualified American citizen. Instead, you are put in a hole of being too less educated to take a national position with great salary. That was my first experience with the system and the racism in the system was in the whole process of recruitment. It was very clear for me from the beginning that the UN and the system tries to portray itself as being extremely authentic and genuine, impartial and transparent.

I learnt quickly that is about whom you know, who you have access to and really your skin color. That was a real fact. It still really is the case. Sorry to say so. Then, once I started working at a local NGO that was founded by my mother Fatima Jibril. She is an award-winning environmental activist. I came to her organisation because basically I saw that while she was visionary, she was having a difficult time turning her vision into funding. Why? Because she was pigeon holed as being local and inexperienced even though she is a highly educated woman, a charismatic speaker and a very amazing person with knowledge and wisdom. But, because she is running a local NGO, she must be: one, corrupt. That is the narrative. Secondly, she has no capacity and so she doesn't understand how to run an organization. She is not an expert. I mean this is her country, her people. This is where she was born and raised but somehow, she is not the

expert but the white people in the INGOs and UN are the experts. It was the constant narrative of being an outsider in your own country and your own home.

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: Yeah so, I joined ADESO and I realized that I had to support my mother translate this amazing work that she was doing into something that these white people who've developed this very western and northern driven system recognized. They talk about documentation, accountability, transparency which is actually good things but the problem is that the system doesn't add value: it harms authenticity and a centered way of working. My mother had grass root community voice. All these things are harmed by the system that has done an amazing job in professionalizing and corporatizing what was supposed to be about the people that they claim to be serving but they are really not. The more I got into this work, I realized very quickly that I had to develop these systems and conform the organization to handle the systems that they needed to be able to be acceptable and access funding.

I was able to come in and develop the HR, Finance, and Procurement in all these systems. I wrote proposal and guidelines and we were very very successful and became bigger and we started getting more funding. Through this process, I realized that no matter how much funding you get, you are always like a slave to the machinery. Soon you are servicing the donor USAID or EU and thinking more about them and burning money or getting it at the door. The concept of burning money, shocked me. This is because the donor has given you the funding and they want you to get the money spent as quickly as possible. If you don't do it as quickly as possible, the system says you are not capable as an organization. I remember having fights with USAID at some point because they wanted us to burn money and we were like no, we need to do this in a gradual way. We need to make this community centered. We can't just throw money around. Keep in mind; these are the same organizations that are constantly portrayed as corrupt.

So here you are, fighting with a big donor who wants you to burn money or funding so that he or she can have a photo-op opportunity to show somebody from congress or someone from USAID in Washington to come and have photo opportunity in your project. They want to see a building or something that they can show them. And you are saying you do not want a white elephant. I want to make sure whatever building that we can construct or whatever thing you are here to see is something that is sustainable and community owned and maybe the community has to put some money on the table.

Salim, Nigeria: Thank you Emebet, Racism and Neocolonialism in the Aid system are a challenging situation even in the context of this discussion. The old adage of 'He who pays the Piper dictates the tune' applies here. Looking at our own peculiar challenges in developing countries, how can we in all honesty carve a respectable stand considering the fact that we are in most cases looking up to our colonizers for assistance?

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Thank you so much Degan for sharing your own story and that of your mother. I'm glad that it didn't take you long to discover and observe your surrounding and the deeply entrenched system built on colonialism!

I would like to also recognize your effort in joining hands to build your own country.

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: Quickly, I started understanding that the western INGO and UN metric of success is about growth i.e. growing bigger. How much do we earn? How much income? How many donors do you have? How many staff do you have on the ground i.e. boots on the ground? Those are the metrics of success. It is not about impact; it is not about whether I supported the community. Have I left it better off? Do my intervention methods mean that I am no longer needed and I can leave the community? Those kinds of metrics are not valued in the system. What is valued is being bigger, more staff, more money, and more wealth that you have generated and more countries that you have offices in.

It is very Berlin Conference kind of system of planting your flag in as many countries as possible or many offices as possible within countries like Somalia, Kenya or Ethiopia. That is the mentality. To be honest when I came into the system in 1999, after coming from the US humanitarian rights and activism space working on poverty issues in the US, I did not expect it to be like that. I was very naïve. Of course, I had read *Lords of Poverty* and *Dead Aid* as soon as it came out but I did not understand how broken the system was.

I have had an overt racist experience with white people who've said data was wrong and we are forging and misrepresenting data because we want money for our community. I've heard people say that cash transfers which are something we pioneered as ADESO, and small local organizations pioneered cash don't work. We fought with UNICEF, WFP, OCHA and all these big UN agencies and INGOs who are very invested in the whole food aid distribution because it is very political. It is about dumping food surplus from the US farmers that get subsidies into our

countries in Africa and much of it is GMO food. Then I realized that the communities in Somalia that were getting this food, majority were actually not eating it but feeding it to their livestock. Why? It was inappropriate. They were giving grain and maize to people who ate rice and pasta. They were also not giving them mills to grind them and it was just culturally inappropriate. We understood quickly that that food was not helping the local economy but cash would help. The kinds of fights we had trying to propose cash transfers because it gives dignity and choice to the people! Dignity in the sense that they don't have to stand in line in heat for hours especially as women waiting to be given a food aid sack.

So, this is the kind of demoralizing, dehumanizing kind of system that we were trying to fight. I'm happy to say we won that battle but it was very hard. Some of the naysayers actually said to me in a public meeting that we are giving cash to people who will spend it on guns or khat i.e. miraa which is a type of drug that men in Somali love to chew. That was the narrative. You are going to give money and that is what they are going to do. The idea is that all men in Somalia are irresponsible. That they would watch their children die from hunger and not try to feed them. It was just shocking considering the amount of emasculation that happens, the imagery and the idea that all men in Somalia are basically useless and they don't care about their families. The narrative being perpetuated and that continues to be is shocking. I was talking to a friend in Liberia and she said that one of the images people have of Liberia is a bunch of sexually crazed men who are constantly raping women and can't keep it in their pants. She says that it is not true. It is not how all Liberian men are but that is the narrative that has been created by white media and white aid organizations. It is all the same kind of things.

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: Sorry I know these are longer than I was told to do. I was supposed to do 10 minutes and now I am at 15. I have never used this WhatsApp platform but I find it so ingenious. I really do. I respect you for coming up with this amazing solution anyway that is the background and my experience with the system. It was purposefully designed to ensure that we will always be dependent on aid and don't have sovereignty. This supposed independence that we have is not real in my opinion. Why do I say that? We have 14 West-African countries still under this yoke of French imperialism and colonialism. They don't have independent economic monetary and finances when their Central Bank is in Paris, Central bank of France.

Where the governments of these 14 supposedly independent countries cannot do contract or procurement without first giving an option to the French company to say they'll bid or not bid. In that process the price is jacked up significantly. We have situations where we see that the western countries are purposefully enabling supposedly democracy which isn't even democracy. This is one of the issues I completely question. I don't like the idea of democracy as being the metrics of a successful government in Africa.

Well democracies, rule of law and democratic programs have been shoved down our throats since independence. But what has that done for the average woman in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya? If I am a woman living in Kibera slums do I want to have the right to vote in corrupt elections of course i.e. charade of voting? And I can criticize and insult Kenyatta or Ruto and say whatever I want but I don't have access to education for my children. I don't have health care. I don't have good water and sanitation. I don't have safe shelter. I don't have to worry about my daughter being raped or molested. What kind of democracy is that? What is its point if it doesn't give you your basic economic rights which are also human rights?

But the west has been very good at telling us that these non economic rights are the priority. People like the Rwandan president are vilified because they are often seen as undemocratic. But what has he done for Rwanda in a span of few years? He has transformed the country completely. Do I want to be living in Rwanda or do I want to be living in Kibera, Kenya. If I am one of the poor, I would probably prefer living in Rwanda. To say this kind of things that democracy is not a priority, is considered sacrilegious. You are considered crazy. It is difficult to challenge the system and question its genuineness and how it was designed to ensure that we continue staying in poverty without having being seen as radical and conspiracy theorists in some way. It is all documented; these are not things I am pulling out of the hat. So, what is the way forward? How do we get out of this aid system and obtain sovereignty once and for all.

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Thank you for your reflections, the key takeaways for me; how the system continues to dehumanize the so called third world countries; the co-relation between power and race and how colonial dynamics keep manifesting in our countries and continue to deepen injustices and inequality in our societies.

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: Let me conclude by saying that my little space that I've been working on is the humanitarian development aid architecture. In that we've done quite a lot in organizing global south civil societies. To do this I recognized that it was important to have a mechanism for us to connect. This is another thing; the North has done a very good job of constructing walls between us. Constructing walls between countries, these artificial borders that have been established. They have divided us into these little tiny systems that are not even sustainable.

I'll send you a video from Dr. Arikana Chihombori, former ambassador to the AU. She is an amazing lady. She talks a lot about the history of colonialism and what it did in creating viable states. So, having a country like Burkina Faso negotiating with China on trade policies, how is that fair? How is that equal. I digress. My point is that the system is extremely political but it tries to perceive itself as being neutral and not political. The humanitarian aid system is very good at acting like its not political when we know many of the real causes of these crises in the world, majority are manmade such as Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and DRC. Many of these are political and highly contributed by them or not resolved by them.

This is true whether it is the UN Security Council, the VETO Powers or if it is climate changes in Asia and even more in Africa. We are bearing the brunt of those climate changes while they have polluted the environment for 100s of years as they were developing. These are political issues that require us to be really political savvy and aware. Unfortunately, what I find is that most of us in this sector and space are not making connections and connecting the dots. We just function in this kind of way that we are continuing to perpetuate the machinery's complacent system. I was part of it too. You know, going around trying to find funding for my project or organization and not really trying to step back, look at the bigger picture and try to understand what I was really doing.

How I'm I really helping Somalia or Somali people? Is this really making a difference? And is there a better way to do this work? I think we need, one, radical political education of our people and that doesn't exist right now. Our education system does everything to dumb us down. Talk about politics and political issues. This is because they don't want an educated public that will hold them accountable. But this is what is important: we need to make sure that every man, woman and children in our countries are politically educated and they understand the history of

where we come from and why we are where we are. This didn't happen by accident. It was by design. It all happened in a process called colonialism and then neocolonial project. Secondly, we really need to figure out and this is exactly what is amazing about this group you all have. How do we create coalition building and break down these walls that have been constructed so that we actually organize across the continent and the oceans with people in other southern countries facing similar problems. They have been very successful at keeping us so isolated and feeling helpless.

You just want to say I can't do anything about Somalia. It is just too much! I am alone. No! You are not alone! There is a way to do something about it but we need to figure it out together. There is a level of organizing that we have to do as Somalis to fix our country, same thing as Kenyans, Ugandans, Zambians and Nigerians. However, we also have to find ways of coalition build across the continent and support each other in really becoming serious actors trying to get sovereignty in the entire continent. That is the power of many and that is what they don't want. Listen! The Europeans figured out that they can't stay in these little systems in these little unviable countries. They came together and they call themselves European Union and now they negotiate everything as a block. But everything is done as much as possible to undermine the AU. Our politicians do a great job by not funding it properly and not taking it seriously.

Kagame has tried to address some of these issues but it is very difficult if only 2 or 3 presidents in the entire continent want to put resources in the AU. You can never fix AU; you can never have continental monetary and economic policies unless the countries in the continent fund it. The moment it is funded externally by aid actors, external governments, and then you will have no autonomy or sovereignty and that is the reality. For me my hope is on how do we get continent wide mechanisms like AU working? How do we get regional mechanisms like IGAD, ECOWAS and all the other groups working? I think that is where power lies. That is where the solutions lie. I'm not hopeful that we are going to change the INGOs, the UN. I think it is a losing battle. But what I am hopeful is that we can do the work needed in our own countries and across the continent and global south.

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Thank you Degan again for sharing your story and your powerful reflections. I think it all comes back to the point that you mentioned about the politics of the system. When we say politics, it is really deeply entrenched. How do we move away

especially in building new alternative models which I think you started in Somalia and the support you gave your mother and establishing your own organization to strengthen the system to support people around you and the work that you do. The question that comes to mind is for you to reflect on perhaps the dangers you face because you keep on exposing racist behaviors in the system? Maybe you can first take us through that question.

Thank you Degan! I'm now opening the floor for Q& A.

Amina, Ahmed, Nigeria: Hmmmmm Degan, the narrative is same everywhere in Africa. We all somehow somewhere started with that naivety as you did. Races and neocolonialism is eating every fabric of Africa. They already have preconceived information about us and that is why they have already prepared templates about African conflicts and they want to force humanitarian workers to work on the basis of such fake information about us.

For me Community Voices PP Africa is a platform we can use to change the narrative.

Selina Kwamini, Kenya: I see the communication campaigns are so skewed. In media we call it lazy reporting. They are derogatory. You can drive campaigns and fundraise without demeaning the locals.

Degan Ali, Somalia & Kenya: Dangers? There are quite a lot of dangers. Let me just tell you that being a successful local organization that defies all odds and competed against the big INGOs and won contracts, proposals meant that we had a lot of enemies and we still do to the point where some of these large donors did every single thing possible to claim we were fraudulent. I can't tell you the number of terrible audits experiences we had because of this. They can't find anything and so they get frustrated. So, when they cannot find anything, they try another thing and another to the point that we have made a decision that we are just not going to take that money again no matter what. If they threw 10M\$ on our laps, we would never take it and that is the promise I made years ago. There is a price to be made and that price is not worth it.

There is punishment that the system gives out. I remember last year at a conference I was in Melbourne and someone introduced me I think it's in one of the articles I shared about. Someone from Devex interviewed me and I talked about my experiences like now I didn't name names of

organizations in terms of what they did to me but I talked about the system being racist. It was shocking the reaction from white male donors to a point where we were blacklisted. Some of them said to those working with me that since you are working with ADESO, we don't want to be part of you and we are never going to fund anything that includes them in any consortium or programme. They were very blatant and clear in their statements.

So, there is punishment but you know the rewards in my opinion. I am a very religious person and I have a strong faith and I believe that whatever God has intended for me to have in terms of funding or money or success will be there no matter what. And it is not in the hand of these white men. That faith has really helped me through these difficult times because they would do everything possible to destroy you and to malign you, your reputation and to marginalize you and sideline you. But this is where you have to figure out other solutions. So, we are now saying, 'no more bad money'. We want quality money.

When COVID-19 hit and all the big INGOs were facing financial difficulty, we had started the process of downsizing 3 years ago. So, for us, we were very lean, flexible and small. Now we are not big and we don't want to be big anymore. We want to remain small. People asked if we were facing financial hardships as the rest but we were like no we didn't have to let go of any staff because of COVID-19. We had already started the journey of downsizing and becoming smaller, nimble and more financially sustainable.

For me my biggest advice on running an organization in this space is financial sustainability. There is no way you are going to have the ability to speak truth to power and do the level of advocacy you need to and influence and be a political actor without financial stability. That is what I see I see myself doing. I am being very political and the system doesn't want to be told the truth unless you have financial stability. So right now, we are looking at even commercial investments for the organizations. We are borrowing heavily on the model of Kenyan Red Cross where the former director and CEO Abbas Gulet has built hotels and different things to get the organization to have income and that is where I believe the real sovereignty and independence comes from. This is when you have your own money. My mother calls the system professional begging. That is what the system makes sure you do, stay and remain a professional beggar. We need to stop it and have our own money and wealth so that we too call the shots and do our own

things. InshaAllah my goal is to get ADESO to a point it becomes its own foundation and it doesn't need a penny of donor funding.

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Beyond the narrative, the system is built on a multi-billion-dollar industry. The leaders in our countries have been and continue to be arm twisted if they go off the track of the prescribed development formula

Dr. Sellah Nasimiyu, Kenya: Thank you Emebet. Looking forward to hear from Degan!

Patricia Nyaundi, Kenya: Joining now! Great intro catching up with the audios

Stella Sabiiti, Uganda/Ethiopia: The COVID-19 issue, the fact that Africa isn't as hard hit so far still puzzles the western world. It puzzles us too, but not with the same reasons. Just joining now too, so hope I'm not repeating question. ^

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia (responding to Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya): Thank you Degan! Indeed, the punishment is visible and we have seen in history how African leaders like Thomas Sankara were punished for saying no to the system! Recently in Ethiopia the US suspended its aid to Ethiopia because Ethiopia didn't agree to sign a flawed agreement prepared by US on the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

Dr Sellah Nasimiyu, Kenya (responding to Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya): True. The colonial master also compartmentalized us into ethnic/clan groups resulting in skewed employment within African countries.

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Please put your questions to Degan here.

Here is a question for you Degan. We have many Africans who act as enablers of the racists because they don't want to lose salaries and benefits. What can we do?

Dr. Sellah Nasimiyu, Kenya (responding to Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya): We should unpack these narratives and if possible, package the reality like what you are sharing.

Degan Ali, Somalia & Kenya: So, on the COVID-19 issue some thoughts from me...in the beginning like everybody else we were panicking and thinking that whatever they were telling us was the truth. That if they cannot handle it in the West, then we certainly can't handle it in

Somalia where there is no health system in place and even maybe in Kenya. We were panicking to be honest. Then slowly we started seeing in Somalia that people were not changing their behaviors, similarly in Northern Kenya. It's very difficult for cultural reasons for people not to touch and hug each other. They were still going to the mosques as usual no matter what the government tried to do in Somalia, there was no way they could social distance or anything like that. People refused to put on masks.

It was a very great example of what not to do if a country did not pay attention to poverty. We saw the numbers were not going crazy. I did not see people dying from my network which is large, both professional and personal. I heard the same thing from other people. I kept asking them and they said they were okay. Maybe we have been losing our sense of taste and smell and getting sick for a day or two but people are surviving. So, we then did a research and nine local organizations came together in a platform called NEXUS in Somalia. We did a research funded by ourselves. We were seeing again that the numbers were not that high or the infection rate according to the symptoms was actually quite high by the death rate wasn't.

So this begs the question again like COVID-19 to me is a great example of not having sovereignty over your public health system. This is a virus that they had very little information about, very little. They basically turned the whole world into a jail because the CDC, WHO and Northern controlled entities basically said the virus is killing white people in America and Europe. We are saying no we are not taking it. What is going to happen to the average poor and uneducated woman who is told that you have to take this vaccine to your 3-year-old child or he/she may die of the virus. I wouldn't blame her for saying yes. It is really quite shocking and scary.

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Question 3: There are many ways of exploitation for example white people come as interns and then they get promoted earning bigger salaries than locals within a very short time. They are also put up in expensive homes and hotels.

Do you know if anyone has developed a list of methods of exploitation which we can add on and begin circulating so that the political education you have spoken for Africans on ways they are exploited by humanitarian and aid workers begins?

Christine Mutimura, Rwanda: Thank you Degan.

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: We have many Africans who act as enablers of the racists because they don't want to lose salaries and benefits. But what can we do? Sadly, it is true. There are such people and there are there in every single country and community. I don't think there is much to be done by them except that we need to outnumber them so as to marginalize them. I think you just need to understand who your allies are and who your enemies are. Do not assume that your enemies are always the people that you think are your enemies. Sometimes the people who are your enemies are those you least expect and they are actually your own people. This has been one of the most shocking recognitions of the problem.

It is painful that I have to fight my fellow Somalis sometimes even more than the white people in the system. It is what it is. It is the reality but that doesn't mean I am going to let them be a barrier to what I need to do. I just need to accept it and move on and find Somalis who are going to be my allies. Even who I can educate and sometimes it is a lot of education that has to be done for this people. We've all been severely brainwashed and colonized mentally and this is where we need to do a lot of mental decolonizing and deprogramming that has to occur of our own people first and foremost.

Diana Demba, Chad: What are the common indicators of racism for a layman to quickly identify?

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: The exploitation where white interns come in and they earn big salaries over night. It is true. There was a white man that held a very senior position in the UN. He was a guitar player and we used to laugh about it. We were shocked as he was uneducated and my mom would say; they send the 'trash to us'. Sorry to be so hard but that is what she would say. That the people that would never succeed in their own countries are the ones who come to us and move up the ladder, getting these big jobs. Sadly, I have seen it with my own eyes.

Is there a list of methods around exploitation that we can identify with? No there isn't! We need to create these lists. Please let's do that. Eventually I want to write a book on my experiences and one of the chapters I am thinking of calling it, 'uneducated educated' white people. These supposedly educated white people get massive consultancy contracts or these large positions and then they can't do their jobs so they have to go to 'lesser educated but more

experienced'. I would not say lesser educated actually because they are equally educated and more experienced national staff or people like us in local NGOs who have wealth of wisdom and knowledge. They extract knowledge from us and then repackage it and then take it as their own. The appropriation of information and knowledge in this sector is shocking. I can't tell you how many ideas of mine have been stolen. The hours I have given to consultants who have turned in amazing reports that people are referencing and it is information from us-the local NGOs that don't get funded. It is an epidemic, sorry to say.

Christine Mutimura, Rwanda: Powerful on the need for continent wide mechanisms!!!

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia (responding to Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya): Let's outnumber the enablers and let's have a decolonization of the mind—absolute Degan!

We have another 15 mins to wrap up the discussion please feel free to send in one or two more questions and then we close.

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: One of the common indicators of racism for a layman to quickly identify? That is hard. I just thought it would be understood. I guess when someone questions your intelligence, capacity and sometimes it is very subtle. I have had so many situations in America where I am sitting having lunch with someone and a waitress will come and automatically give the bill to a white person I am seated with. Why? She thinks I cannot afford it! These things used to happen to me when living in US.

They don't have to be overt and aggressive like what I have talked about with the white male donors trying to publicly humiliate you in meetings. It is things like code words such as neutrality. I don't know if you have heard or seen how there have been thousands of current staff, ex staff and board members of MSF talking about systemic racism. That doesn't shock me because agencies like MSF, IFRC, ICRC e.t.c are very heavily invested in this idea of neutrality. To me this is an idea that basically says we outsiders i.e. white people, the saviors can come to your country, be neutral and objective and can negotiate access with all the parties to the conflict and get access that you as a local can never get. Of course, we know that it is not true. It is a lie but that is the way to justify white savior-ism.

So, I really can't give you kind of personal ways or list of how I identify racism but definitely paternalism when they look down on your capacity. When they say we are going to 'help' you. We're going to fix it for you. It is as if you are not capable or you are ignorant or we can't trust your numbers and so we have to verify. They think that you are basically clan or tribal and that is a big notion they have on Africa. Aren't they themselves tribal? They don't support their own people and only give them big jobs? It is hypocrisy. When they do it for each other it is called networking but when we do it each other it is called corruption and nepotism. These are some of the indicators of racism.

Mandiedza Parichi (PhD): Thank you Degan. I totally understand the need to be independent in-order to negotiate and put systems that purely speak to African challenges and solutions. My question is most counties in which CSOs proliferate there are conflicts, underdevelopment and abject poverty. Without resources how do you balance the two?

Stella Sabiiti, Uganda/Ethiopia: Very interesting indeed.

Patricia Nyaundi, Kenya: And the educational system socializes communities to be subservient and not challenge this. It is accepted as the natural dynamic in the relationship. The other socialization is that there is a general shortage of resources and therefore competition: the more 'compliant' the higher chances of securing support.

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia (responding to Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya): This is insightful Degan, thank you for the tips on the indicators of racism.

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: I don't know what country other than Somalia there are very few countries in the category of Somalia such as South Sudan or Afghanistan that are considered to be in conflict or 'fragile' state failures. I would argue that in Somalia the INGOs, the UN and the aid system as a whole has made us the locals complacent, creating more dependency. I would argue that we have actually not helped the people, we've put them into more problems and created more poverty. Why do I say that? The thing we pioneered called CASH has become the go to easy thing to do to get funding.

So, if you are a UN agency or INGO, the thing you do is cash. Why? It is easy to implement. There are no large overheads and operational costs and anybody can do it. It is not complicated. Of course, for them it is not because they do bad targeting. What we see happening is that the cash transfers are just given to urban centers so that you do a pull factor. You pull people from the rural to the urban areas so that they become beneficiaries of the CASH program. The people then leave their farms and livelihoods in rural areas.

I have seen people who are basically taking advantage of the system. They are enrolling in 2 or 3 or 4 different kind of NGOs or UN agencies cash programs. So, you take 30\$ here, 50\$ there and before you know it, every month you are turning in over 100\$. If you are getting that in an IDP setting, why do you need to go and risk your life and go to Al-Shabaab areas? Why do you need to work extra hard as a farmer when you can get that money sitting at home in an IDP camp? So we have created serious dependency and we are complacent in that. I actually would say that the proliferation of the CSOs and the NGOs and the INGOs and the aid system generally is actually a big problem.

Sometimes I feel like if we would all leave Somalia to the people i.e. Somalis and get this whole aid architecture that has become real disease in the country, probably the people would do much better. They would be more creative and they would actually help themselves in a different way. I think that sometimes there is more human capital and more wealth in human beings' capacity and resources. It is far more than we think it is we are just bought into this idea which I am guilty of as well because I'm part of this NGO machinery that is about generating money and let's help them. Let's quickly fundraise and get money to them. However, people have an amazing capacity to help themselves and when you handicap them and cut off the knees, hands so just they sit and wait for you to come, the human capacity and potential is destroyed. That is the disease I am talking about and I do think that we don't have to be participants of that any longer.

Patricia Nyaundi, Kenya (responding to Mandiedza Parichi, PhD): Indeed, Mandy but the relationship is framed as donor (savior) with recipient (doomed). Part of the process of decolonization is in being clear that we are collaborating and the challenges are shared and sometimes created by external actors, have global consequences and we should think of this as resolving global and not African issues.

Degan Ali, Somali & Kenya: I think the whole terminology of aid we need we need to question or develop. We are not underdeveloped or under-resourced. We are not incapable. The conflicts often times are created by them particularly in these 14 countries I have talked about i.e. coup after coup are sometimes orchestrated by France and other countries. We know what is happening in the Congo and what these multinational companies from Europe and America are doing in terms of contributing to the conflict. These conflicts are not solely on us. We don't need to be developed. What we need is for them to give us sovereignty so that we fix our problems ourselves.

Give us full real independence and sovereignty. Then we can fix the politicians who are your brothers. You can fight with them and argue with them. You can mobilize and educate. It is a hard and uphill battle when you are trying to do that and you are always having external hands coming in. I don't believe aid is altruistic at all. Aid is soft power. There is hard power in the idea of military and other things and there is soft power. That is what aid is for. I actually think we should start talking about reparations and how much resources have been looted and taken from the continent. I don't think it is something that we should feel grateful for. What would have Africa have looked like if these countries had actually exited properly when we got independence and completely left us on our own? I think we would have been 1000 times better off than we are right now.

Mandiedza Parichi, PhD: Thank you Degan, thank you Patricia for the response to my question.

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Some last questions to you Degan.

- a) What are the steps we can take immediately as a collective to support the work you have been doing on calling out racist aid systems?
- b) What is the answer we can give to enablers who keep saying some white people are good yet we know they are maintained by a system that benefits them directly?
- c) What kind of messaging would we need to give our political leaders who hardly call them out?

- d) How can we get the average person to understand, like the waiter you mentioned who gives the bills to white people assuming black people can't pay, what steps can we take to re-socialize Africans?

Diana Demba, Chad (responding to Degan Ali, Somalia & Kenya): Well taken.

Salim Omar, Nigeria (highlighting his earlier question): My question is not answered.

Barrister Ladi Madaki Nigeria: Following

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia (responding to Salim Omar, Nigeria): Thank you Salim, Degan kindly tackle this question

Degan Ali, Somalia & Kenya: Wow! Ok! Those are 4 major questions. I don't know if I can answer them well. To support work that I am trying to do, I would love to share information with you guys as I go down through this process. **Anybody who is part of a local organization would be great to see if you guys can also become members of the NEXUS network which we founded but it now has its own secretariat.** I can share the information with you all and my email address too. It would be great to see if maybe this group can start doing some work on some of the key issues that we have just come to find out.

For example, how do we put pressure on the AU and our regional bodies to take some of these issues seriously? I'm happy to brainstorm with you all and figure out what you guys can do collectively as a group. I think a lot can be done. What is the answer to give those who keep saying some white people are good yet they are maintained by the system that benefits them directly? The shocking thing is I have been having conversations with white people about racism in an honest way and calling them out for it for the first time in my 20 plus years of history. This is all because of Black Lives Matter Movement. The movement happening in the US has actually shocked aid system for the first time.

So, there is momentum gathering and what happened with MSF is happening quietly and sometimes not so quietly with INGOs. I am not sure with UN. Maybe it will happen with it too but they are just going to ignore it and get away with it as they usually do. There is momentum building but the thing is people focus on the wrong things. For example, us focusing on statues in London and US. That is irrelevant to me. I don't care about a statue of a racist guy who had

slaves. George Washington, Jefferson and others were racists and had slaves. That is something we all accept. However, removing their statues is not going to help me now and the next generations of our children in the continent. What will help is if we start talking about these economic, financial and monetary systems that are enslaving us. People are focused on superfluous kinds of issues and not the real ones. The real ones of course are the ones that are the most conflicting. Everybody wants to distract you to focus on the light stuff. The easy stuff like statues and not focus on the heart of the matter i.e. the real problems. That is where we need to have laser vision and say this is our goal.

Our goal is to have an AU that has independence and sovereignty and funded by African countries. It should have independence and sovereignty and be funded by African countries. It should have independent monetary and financial policies outside of the current EU, US and China control. That is the hard thing. But I hope it is possible. However, we have a lot of grass root mobilizing to do to get there. On the enablers, I think you just do what you can to educate them and if they don't want you just push them out of the way and move on. If the white people become allies and they want to work with you and help you, welcome them. If they are not going to work with you just ask them to move out of your way. That is it. You just have to have an external vision and be focused on the goal or price. We get so easily distracted.

What kind of messaging will we need to give our political leaders who hardly call them out? Well this is where it gets dangerous like when Corona virus started in Kenya, there was a lot of police violence in enforcing curfews and mask wearing. Nobody questioned it but you know if you don't have a mask, the police will harass you and want to take money from you. In the process of all of these, there were some chaos and a child was killed. People demonstrated on the streets. They were mostly community organizations from Mathare and other slum areas. The middle class, the working poor and supposed activists, NGOs and civil societies were not the ones demonstrating. It is only the people from the slums and very local community-based organizations. That is really sad. I asked a Kenyan why aren't we more people demonstrating i.e. the youth coming out to say enough is enough to the violence. She was like because we will be killed and we are scared.

There is a real fear about holding your political leaders accountable in places like Kenya and other countries. There are cases of excessive police brutality and harm that can come to you for

doing what needs to be done. But nothing worth having has ever been easy. So I don't know but that is definitely a risk. How can we get the average person to understand?

Communist countries like Cuba have been very good at political education from the time one is young, they understand the politics. They understand that the world and especially America is trying to destroy what you have built. So, 10-year olds there are very political savvy. I think it has to do a lot with the education system. How we groom our children to understand the world around us. And what kind of information is fed to them. So, I was shocked at my children when they were going to a certain Muslim British school and I got frustrated with the teachers. I asked why they were not being taught about African history on Mau Mau and other amazing African warriors and kings. Instead they were being taught about kings and queens of Europe! Our children need to have a sense of pride in our history and who we are and our future. We glorify and think that having your child taught in a British system in Africa is a sign of wealth and success. What is happening with that child? The child is getting brain washed in the process and losing all sense of pride and confidence in himself or herself and her people. It really has to start with how we are educating our children and not just deal with adults later.

The question from Salim on the old adage of 'he who pays the piper, dictates the tune'.....there are peculiar challenges in developing countries. How can we have a respectable stand considering the fact that in most cases we are looking up on our colonizers for assistance? I didn't answer it directly but I think I touched on issues regarding it. First and foremost, we need to stop thinking of ourselves as resource poor, developing or people who need help. We need to change our mindset and realize that actually without the continent Africa, the world would not exist in a way that it currently does. Our resources are the engine driving the global development in so many ways. So, we need to start thinking about how to get control of our resources, economies and the political leaders to act in the best interest of our people. This requires serious level of organizing and political education that we are currently not doing.

We need to stop being passive and start being active and really do our best to decolonize our education curriculum and the future generations and take charge of what our children are learning and how they are being currently indoctrinated. We need to start doing political organizing across the continent. And start holding entities like AU accountable. I do believe we've a lot of wealth; human and financial. For example, World Vision which is a 3 or 4B\$

agency, they told me about 5 years ago that they get 30% of their global funding from people and private sector companies in the developing world in global south. Majority of that is Asia, particularly India and Philippines and these middle-income countries.

Why? They have realized that the money in the North is fading and there is money coming from the global south as countries become more developed. The wealthy individuals want to give charitable contributions. So, they are trying to get access to these private sector companies like TATA in India and get their 2 % donations that the government has mandated all private cooperations to charitable giving from their profits. These kind of government rules on incentives for charitable giving of private cooperations which are very positive means that there is proliferation of INGOs and UN agencies coming into the countries like India to take that money instead of going to indigenous local Indian civil societies.

So, there is a big problem. I just learnt a few months ago that World Vision is trying to figure out how to do local philanthropy and fundraise in Zambia. They found that there is potential to fundraise in Zambia. They went to a Zambian community foundation and said tell us what your trade secrets are. They said that of course they are not going to copy but that is what they are doing. They are doing research trying to understand how they can fundraise in Zambia. Soon they are going to do that in Kenya, Uganda and all these countries like Nigeria. What I am saying to you is that we have huge amounts of wealth. What we don't have is visionary leadership to recognize these opportunities and grab them and create infrastructure. This is so that this wealth can be harnessed for our purposes before these big INGOs and UN agencies start coming to the continent and they will come in a very big way. So, let's organize, take advantage of what we have in Africa and appreciate our own wealth and let's get out of this sense that we are resource poor. it is our mind and mindsets that need to be changed.

Thank you all! I need to pray!

Emebet Getachew Abate, Ethiopia: Thank you all so much for your active participation, your questions and many thanks to you Degan for enlightening us with your wisdom and for showing us your strength in challenging the system through your direct lived experiences with racism and for continuing to speak truth to power.

I really would like us to continue this discussion and although it is an old issue, hope we can sustain the discussion.

With that I would like to handover to you Mandy to close us off.

Degan Ali, Somalia & Kenya: I want to thank you all for inviting me. It has been a pleasure. Happy to assist where I can in the future.

Mandiedza Parichi, PhD: Thank you very much Degan Ali for the fruitful discussion which has made us reflect on not only our situation but also that of future generations. The importance of turning around the situation through looking into national and regional meaningful solutions to development was underscored by Degan Ali. Thank you.

Thank you so much Emebet Getachew Abate for the preamble, moderation and managing the discussion with such poise. Thank you CVPP family for the great and insightful interactions with the Degan and Emebet. Without you there is no CVPP. We are grateful for your unwavering dedication and support to grow the network.

Selina Kwamini thank you for your efforts in creating a useful repository for all of us and future generations. To Alice Wairimū Nderitū thank you for your continued commitment and sleepless nights spend striving to make peace a way of life. Enjoy the rest of your weekend my brothers and sisters.

Selina Kwamini, Kenya: Thank you, Degan, Emebet and Dr. Mandy, for leading the session. Kindly if you feel you need/want to present, remember to inbox me your name and topic you would want to tackle. We will gladly slot you in. The other issue to note is that we shall pick up ideas for implementation from what you've discussed.

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3. Analyse and give your view or perspective on a subject with respect.
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12. CVPP exists because members make what we do possible through their voluntary work. We wish to thank you most sincerely for being members of this CVPP family.

Good night all and blessings galore! Selina Kwamini

Below are some of the key recommendations gathered from seminar 14 on racism and neo-colonialism in humanitarian aid systems:

1. **Redefine the metrics of success in the humanitarian aid system:** While being big, with a large number of staff, donors and high income are not necessarily bad, there is a need for the system to give more focus on the impact, efficiency, and effectiveness and whether or not you have achieved your purpose and can you now leave the people. It needs to be more sustainable and not temporary reprieve.
2. **Shift to people and communities-centered systems:** The INGOs, NGOs and now the local NGOs have been seen to be oblivious of the problems they are trying to solve. They are more donor driven rather than community driven. For instance, Degan gives a simple example on how the food aid sent to Somalia is not culturally appropriate because they were giving maize to pasta and rice eating people. There is also the challenge with food aid. It doesn't improve the economy unlike cash which also restores the locals' dignity through the power of choice. Also qualified locals are not given the opportunity to head the programmes in their backyard considering they are more knowledgeable and familiar with their own people. Instead foreigners continue to head programmes regarding a people they know nothing or little about. There are several other instances she mentions throughout the presentation.
3. **Develop independent economic, monetary and financial system in African states:** This is that, first; the prices for a bid are not jacked up by the Western states with influence over these policies. Secondly, this is so that African states maintain some level of sovereignty and independence. Otherwise, many African states continue to remain in poverty consequently relying always on foreign aid.
4. **Create mechanisms to continue connecting as Africans because as it is we were already divided into small unsustainable units:** This has therefore adversely affected our negotiating and bargaining power. Degan gives an example of Burkina Faso negotiating trade matters with China and poses a question on how that is fair. She recommends that we form coalitions and organise across Africa and the oceans with people from the South facing similar problems. The power of many will avail much. In this regard Degan invites individuals to join NEXUS network which now has its own secretariat.
5. **Education reforms:** There is a need to reform our education systems to allow children understand their African background and also assist in decolonisation of our mindsets so as to stop aiding and facilitating the aid's complacent system. We also need to understand that these are political issues that require as to be politically savvy. That way we outnumber the enablers of the system.

6. **Advocate for the empowerment of the AU so that it attains independence and sovereignty:** This will include funding it properly and sufficiently and taking it seriously and respectfully just as we do the EU. African heads of state should stop undermining it. Instead we should inject more resources into it. Give it power to carry duties such as developing continental economic policies outside EU, US and China so as to gain autonomy and freedom from outside interference due to the aid that is injected in it. Moreover, we should get regional bodies like SADCs, ECOWAS and EAC working.
7. **Financial sustainability efforts:** The local actors in the humanitarian aid system should aim for financial independence and sustainability. It is okay to be small and nimble. There is a need to emulate Abbas Gulet's Red Cross model of running businesses and enterprises like hotels so as to support and fund their programmes.
8. **Fund researches independently:** Covid-19 shows that due to our lack of sovereignty we rely on what the West have told us about the disease. The entire world has been turned to a jail due to the impact of Covid in the West. In fact, a French scientist proposed Africans to be the first to have the vaccine tested.
9. **Identify a list of methods around exploitation of any manner and document it.**

BIOGRAPHIES



Degan Ali

Degan is the Executive Director of Adeso. She has more than 20 years of hands-on experience in the humanitarian and development field. Degan is a strong believer in transforming the current aid system to give more power and voice to local communities and civil society organizations. Following this belief, Degan continues to innovate and develop new solutions to build the infrastructure that will truly shift power and resources, including co-founding the Network for Empowered Aid Response (NEAR).



Emebet Getachew Abate

Working experience with local and international NGOs, Emebet Getachew Abate is an expert on peace and security and good governance in the Horn of Africa. Emebet has more than six years

of experience engaging the African Union Commission and African Union Peace and Security Council and the different sub-regional mechanisms include peace and security.

Emebet is currently working with Life & Peace Institute as Country Manager for peacebuilding work in Ethiopia, promoting inclusive peacebuilding projects in Universities involving youth in different parts of the country. Previously, Emebet served as Representative to the African Union, coordinating international, regional and sub-regional advocacy efforts on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts across conflict zones, particularly South Sudan, Sudan, Burundi, Cameroon and DRC. Emebet worked with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Addis Ababa focusing on promoting peace and Security in the Horn of Africa and the African Union. She also worked as Research Intern with Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in Sweden, African Rally for Peace and Development in Addis Ababa.