

Decolonising management knowledge and practice: learning from and with the global south

Author: Clara Kansime, Faculty of Business and Law, Liverpool John Moores University, UK, email address: C.Kansime@2024.ljmu.ac.uk

1. Introduction

Decolonisation has gained traction in development discourse mostly among the Southern scholars who critique the fallacy of universalisation of the Western/Eurocentric mode of progress and knowledge without taking into consideration the unique impact of colonisation and colonialism on the colonised (e.g. Mignolo, 2007; Mudimbe, 1988; Ndlovu-Gatsheni; 2013). In Africa, decoloniality as an epistemic approach is growing steadily more so in South Africa; but there is inadequate literature on the subject concerning different actors on East Africa as a region. NGOs heralded by some as important actors in African development (e.g. Murray, 2011) and criticised by others as tools of the imperialist West through their donors in the continuity of coloniality on the continent (e.g. Sakue-Collins, 2021) are important actors to focus on decolonisation on the continent. Hence, a study to examine the existing colonial legacies within NGOs; identify relevant knowledge systems that can guide decolonisation of NGO management; and actively engage with the local led development actors in understanding and embracing decolonial partnership situated in Uganda is a pertinent contribution to African knowledge and management liberation agenda.

1.1 Research Question

In the field of international development, decolonisation and localisation have become a priority for all actors (e.g. bilateral and multilateral organisations and NGOs), which have committed themselves to enhance the inclusion and agency of local actors in the development system Harris and Tuladhar, (2019). But this commitment has not yet been realized in practices and programming in Ugandan NGOs as noted by Kaijabwango (2020). Indeed, Girei (2023) observes that the framing of what NGOs are and how they do their work are largely influenced by the northern perspectives foreign to the African knowledge and culture. NGOs alignment with foreign donors in their practices and discourse contributes to their shaky relationship with the government of Uganda that accuses them of advancing imperialistic agendas at the expense of the local interests (Khisa,-2019). This study will contribute to decolonisation debates by focusing on management of indigenous NGOs operating in Uganda by examining the colonial legacies, learning with and from NGOs in working to legitimise the local realities and agendas in the context of globalised partnerships.

1.2 Aim

This study will provide much-needed empirical evidence on how colonial legacies can hamper locally-led and sustainable social transformation, and how this trend can be contrasted by identifying locally-led avenues for management theory, practices, and policies.

1.2.1 The main objectives are to:

1. identify the colonial legacies of mainstream NGO management.
2. identify and explore what theories, practices, and policies can guide decolonisation of NGO management.
3. explore how decolonising NGO management can contribute to locally-led development.

1.3 Study justification

NGO work and activities have been criticised for following their donor templates on accountability; and being detached from the realities of the communities where they operate (e.g. Sakue-Collins, 2021). As a Ugandan researcher with insider and outsider perspectives, this study is an opportunity to work with different stakeholders to co-produce management knowledge that can influence the current major dilemmas faced by NGOs guided by decoloniality approach.

2.0 Brief literature review

In recent times, scholars (like Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013) have advanced the notion of ‘decoloniality’; understood as scholarship and practice committed to engage and learn from the perspectives and realities of local communities, and more broadly those silenced and neglected by Eurocentric ways of knowing and doing. Despite the arguments for decoloniality of Africa, there are still noted gaps for such good intentions to be realised. For instance, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) argues that the current problems faced by Africa are largely a result of continued coloniality of the continent by different actors such as multi-lateral and bi-lateral institutions, and NGOs that continue to advance Eurocentric policies that are forced on the continent. Yet the spread of NGOs as actors in international development especially in Africa was on the normative foundation of being sources of alternatives meant to advance the interests of the “powerless” global and local citizens (see Mitlin et.al, 2007). This study will focus on indigenous NGOs to draw empirical contributions on how they can address coloniality for the purpose of strengthening decolonial voices and practices in managing such organisations.

3.0 Theoretical basis for the study

This study will be guided by decolonisation and indigenisation of knowledge production and management practices (see Mignolo, 2007; Absolon, 2020). Decolonisation is aimed at interrogating and addressing the colonial matrix of power that focuses on control of the economy, control of authority, control of gender and sexuality, and control of subjectivity and knowledge production while indigenisation aims at replacing the colonial knowledge systems and practices with the indigenous perspectives that are part of the African way of life rooted in their cultures, traditions and world views. I will focus on interrogating the coloniality within management of organisation, with the view of analysing possibilities of domesticating the Northern knowledge along with the indigenous one, to work with indigenous NGO actors in addressing the colonial matrix of power.

3.0 Description of the research design

The study will adopt a qualitative approach based on a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. More specifically, it will draw on participatory action research (PAR) (Bradbury and Reason, 2015), on the co-production of knowledge between researchers and participants, aimed at developing new, shared understandings and practices; through cycles of action and reflection in which research participants and researchers work collaboratively in an organisational change process to achieve specific objectives (e.g. the decolonisation of management approaches and systems). The proposed PAR will involve three indigenous NGOs (i.e. NGOs that are controlled by Ugandan citizens) and their stakeholders to allow exploration and analysis of how different knowledge systems, networks and funding systems impact NGOs’ management approaches, and help identify avenues for developing locally-led management knowledge and practices, sensitive and responsive to the specific contexts where NGOs work. One will be a well-established NGO with stable international relations and funding sources; another will be an NGO with erratic international relations and funding, and another will be an NGO that relies exclusively on local relations and funding. Consistently with a commitment to decolonisation and co-production, the research design will be agreed with the NGOs involved basing on participant observations (6-8 weeks with each NGO, organised around three action/reflection cycles), interviews (30-40) and focus groups/collective reflections (18/20) with NGO leaders, employees, community members, and donors. Self-reflexive practice will also be employed to produce a detailed journal. Data analysis will be informed by reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

4.0 Relevance of the study

Given the limited voices from Africa in management knowledge and practices, this study will contribute to epistemic pluriversality advanced by the decoloniality approach that aims at liberating the coloniser and colonised to continuously define and redefine progress in a meaningful partnership.

Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful to LJMU VCs studentship for this opportunity along with my supervisory team, including, Dr Emanuela Girei, Dr Olatunde Durowaju, and Prof. Tony Wall who are guiding me in manoeuvring this awesome PhD journey.

References

- Absolon, K. (2010) *Indigenous Wholistic Theory: A Knowledge Set for Practice*. First Peoples Child and Family Review, 5 (2), 74-87
- Bradbury, H. and Reason, P. (2015) *The Sage Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic analysis: A Practical Guide*. Los Angeles: SAGE
- Girei, E. (2023) *Managerialisation, Accountability and Everyday Resistance in the NGO Sector: Whose Interests Matter?* Critical Perspectives on Accounting vol. 92 (2023) 102418 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2022.102418> Bottom of Form
- Harris, V. and Tuladhar, S. (2019) 'Humanitarian localisation: Can we put values into practice?', Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations, pp. 33–55. DOI: [10.1108/S1529-209620190000022004](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1529-209620190000022004)
- Kaijabwango, C. (2020) 'Doing Good the Wrong way', Journal of Science and Sustainable Development, 7(1), pp. 61–72. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jssd.v7i1.6>
- Khisa, M. 'Shrinking Democratic Space? Crisis of Consensus and Contentious Politics in Uganda' 57:3 Commonwealth and Comparative Politics (2019) 353 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2019.1576277>
- Mignolo, W.D., (2007) *Introduction, Cultural Studies*, 21:2-3, 155-167, DOI: 10.1080/09502380601162498
- Mitlin, D., Hickey, S. and Bebbington, A. (2007) Reclaiming Development? NGOs and the Challenge of Alternatives. World Development Vol. 35, No. 10, pp. 1699–1720, Doi: [10.1016/j.worlddev.2006.11.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2006.11.005)
- Mudimbe, V.Y. (1988) *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press
- Murray, R., (2011) *The Role of NGOs and Civil Society in Advancing Human Security in Africa* in Ademola Abass (ed.) *Protecting Human Security in Africa* <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199578986.001.0001>
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., (2013) *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa Myths of Decolonization*, Dakar Senegal, CODESRIA
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., (2015) Genealogies of Coloniality and Implications for Africa's Development, Africa Development, Volume XL, No. 3, 2015, pp. 13-40
- Sakue-Collins, Y., (2021) *(Un)doing Development: A Postcolonial Enquiry of the Agenda and Agency of NGOs in Africa*, Third World Quarterly, 42:5, 976-995, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2020.1791698