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GLOBAL POVERTY AND POWER RELATIONS

INGO workers' perception of poverty in the Global South and their approach to sustainable poverty reduction



ABSTRACT

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Global poverty and power relations: INGO workers' perception of poverty in the Global South and their approach to sustainable poverty reduction

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Poverty continues to be an extensive issue in the global sphere despite growing living standards around the world. Despite decades of poverty reduction efforts, several countries in the Global South continue to accommodate the world's poor. In this thesis, the aim is to shed light on the factors behind such a phenomenon in which poverty is widespread in one part of the globe more than the other and to explore the connections to our current global structures. The intention is also to learn about what kind of actions are currently being taken to address poverty in the Global South in a sustainable way.

The research was conducted using a qualitative research method in which people from five International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed applying a thematic analysis method through which five main themes were derived from the participants' answers; Historical legacy in today's structures, Perceived powerlessness in the face of the global poverty issue, Promotion of localised approaches, Multidimensionality and diversity of responses to poverty, and The INGOs' and their workers' motivation in their work.

Ultimately, the main results indicated that all participants recognised the connections between the current global order of division of wealth and poverty and past as well as present power relations in the global sphere, their responses being predominantly in line with the literature framework that founds this thesis. All participating INGOs had for the most part adopted and implemented some of the key principles in order to shift power toward the Global South.

Keywords: Global South Poverty, Global Power Relations, Global Political and Economic Structure, INGOs' perspective and approach

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1 INTRODUCTION

As the Nobel Prize Winner Angus Deaton mentioned, inequality in the world has increased significantly during the past three centuries (Deaton, 2013, p. 24). It is said how redistributing only 1.28 per cent of the global income would eliminate poverty among people who live at or under \$2 per day. Concluding from this, it is not a question of lack of resources at a global level (Hulme, 2010, p. 39.) Furthermore, still today, children younger than age five die due to easily treatable diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria (Raworth, 2018, p. 5). Such injustices are often explained with conventional reasons behind global poverty that primarily refer to issues involving countries' education levels, health care systems, unemployment, or lack of access to clean water or sanitation. Merely based on the challenging experience of searching for academic articles and reading material on the topic of a broader political framework that is connected to influencing poverty in the Global South, the other framework of the role of global power relations in the prevalence of global poverty seem to remain rather disguised from laypersons.

This thesis is aimed to examine what the factors are behind such a phenomenon in which poverty prevails at a global level in one part of the Earth more than the other and what the connections are to our current global power structures. Moreover, it is intended to also explore how the issue of poverty is being addressed in a sustainable way through the intervention of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs). Through this thesis, both professionals in the field, as well as other people interested in the topic of poverty, may learn about how INGOs working in the field of development, aid, and charity perceive the issue of poverty in the Global South and what are their actions to contribute to its sustainable reduction without a relation of dependence. The audience to this thesis may also gain an understanding of the multiple dimensions of the existence of poverty and its historical roots, while professionals in particular may gather ideas on what they can do to improve their practices and programmes in their fields of expertise and what may be holding them back from making such change.

2 THE OCCURRENCE OF POVERTY: POLITICAL ASPECTS AND POWER

In this chapter, the theoretical framework and key concepts in this thesis will be explained. The concept of poverty will be defined, its ways to be measured will be introduced, and poverty in the context of Global South will be described. Following this, the political context of power relations that are linked to poverty are elaborated on and an idea of how to shift power and how this is connected to the work of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) is introduced. Ultimately, the concept of poverty in this thesis is explored from the perspective of power relations between the Global North and the Global South, and how they may have an impact on poverty still today.

2.1 Poverty in the Global Context

The United Nations defines poverty as follows:

Poverty entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. (United Nations, 2022)

Based on a definition by Merriam-Webster dictionary, the term *global* ‘involves the entire world; [meaning] worldwide’ (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Therefore, *global poverty* refers to the kind of poverty that affects the whole world and is widespread all over the globe. Moreover, according to St. Clair (2006), global poverty is a complex social problem that is highly politicised.

Global poverty is commonly estimated in terms of absolute poverty, in which poverty is measured in absolute standards e.g., the price of a food basket that is necessary to fulfil an individual’s basic needs. This is appropriate in the global context since in most low- and middle-income countries the issue of poverty deals with the fact that people are not able to meet their basic needs in terms of nutrition and health. (Dhongde, 2010, p. 4.)

The World Bank measures poverty at a global level using the International Poverty Line which has been raised from \$1.90 to \$2.15 per person per day in September 2022, based on 2017 PPPs (The World Bank, 2022b). The latest estimates on the occurrence of poverty around the world using the International Poverty Line stated by the United Nations (2022) was 10 per cent of the world's population that was living on below \$1.90 a day in 2015. However, as the poverty line is raised, the number of poor people grows significantly. As high as 46 per cent of the world population lived on below \$5.50 per day in 2015 (United Nations, 2022).

Suggestions have been made to raise the International Poverty Line up to \$5 per day to include e.g., considerations on the nutritional contents of the food people eat (Hickel, 2017); a \$5 per day line can be regarded as a more realistic representation where one's basic needs could be met as well as one's 'social and economic rights minimally fulfilled' (Woodward, 2008, p. 57). Andy Sumner, a Professor of International Development, argues that the problem with setting the poverty line at a very low level may convey a misleading impression that poverty has nearly been eradicated. As Sumner puts it, '... global poverty reduction since the Cold War has been mostly about moving people slightly above a very low poverty line.' (Sumner, 2019, p. 418.)

The estimates of the number of people living in poverty globally are highly dependent on the perception of poverty, methods of estimation, and what is being measured when determining a global poverty line e.g., income, consumption, or food consumption. Other factors include i.a., Purchasing Power Parity rates (PPPs) used in measuring the occurrence of poverty. Despite the variety of different methods and approaches to measuring poverty, the exact number of poor people globally remains obscure. (Dhongde, 2010, pp. 1, 7-8)

When looking at the map of various poverty estimates, one can notice something that is in common between many of them – higher poverty levels are located in the same geographic regions within the Global South (see the World Bank: Maps. *Poverty head-count ratio (%) at US\$1.90 a day in 2018 (lineup, 2011 PPP)*). Using the term 'Global South', as explained by Dados and Connel (2012), involves the regions of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania, particularly to refer to regions outside of Europe and North America. This term has a connotation towards areas in the world that are often low-income and marginalised in a cultural or political way, pointing out the change of

focus from development to power relations that are geopolitical (Dados and Connel, 2012, p. 12.) Therefore, using the term *Global South* is relevant in discussions on poverty from the perspective of power relations within the world.

In this thesis, the focus is on poverty in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South. While countries categorised by low income comprise economies with a GNI per capita of \$1,085 or less, middle-income countries are divided into two categories: lower middle-income economies with a GNI per capita between \$1,086 and \$4,255, and upper middle-income economies with a GNI per capita between \$4,256 and \$13,205 (The World Bank, 2023). The reason for including middle-income countries of the Global South in this thesis along with low-income countries is due to the fact that 62% of the world's poor population resides in these countries (The World Bank, 2022; Raworth, 2018, p. 164).

2.2 Aspects of Global Poverty

Lockwood outlines the reality of how wealth is divided in the world by stating, '...income is far more unequally distributed globally than it is within any state.' (Lockwood, 2021, p. 421). According to Hardoon et al. (2016), as of 2016, the richest one per cent owned more wealth than the remaining 99 per cent of the world put together. Moreover, as they further state, the economic system is being distorted by those in positions of power and privilege in order to widen the wealth gap (Hardoon et al., 2016, p. 1.)

Usually, when existing poverty in the low- and middle-income countries of the Global South is discussed, the most common factors of poverty explained include reasons to do with the country's internal challenges, economics, and development. According to lists of reasons behind global poverty, the most conventional reasons mentioned involve issues such as lack of education, unemployment and lack of livelihoods, conflict and instability, lack of access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene as well as nutritious food, poor healthcare systems, marginalisation and inequality, et cetera (Concern Worldwide U.S., 2022; Human Rights Careers, 2023; InterAction, 2018; ReliefWeb, 2020; World Vision Canada, 2022).

However, there is another framework through which the occurrence of poverty in the Global South can be viewed – the global political framework. Mba (2022) states, ‘There is a strong but underexplored linkage between the current global order, world poverty and the politics of aid’ (p. 103). Concluding from this, there lies a political context to the global wealth division, as well, which involves power relations between the Global North and the Global South. In this context, what is conveyed by power according to Lukes (2005), is ‘the ability or capacity to act or to exercise influence’ (Hafford-Letchfield, 2015, p. 4). As further stated by Blackwell and MacKay (2006), ‘...the greatest concentration of power over our lives is the power exerted by our fellow men and women, through national and, increasingly, global politics’ (Blackwell & MacKay, 2006, p. 2). Poverty being viewed from a set of chosen political aspects of power exertion by the Global North will be discussed in the following subchapters

2.2.1 The Impact of Colonialism

‘Colonialism is both a political economic system and an ideology that allows a country to assert control over a people and territory beyond its boundaries’ (Basset & Winter-Nelson, 2010, p. 109). Butt (2013) further stated the main features of colonialism involve a people dominating another people externally, the colonised people being forced to adopt colonial norms and culture, and exploiting the colonised through e.g., extraction of natural resources and slavery (Crook et al., 2018, p. 299). Basset and Winter Nelson (2010) elaborate on how European colonialism had a profound impact on the economies of numerous countries that battle against hunger vulnerability today, with famine having become widespread in regions of Africa where it had been uncommon before colonialism (pp. 109-110). According to Táíwò (2022), the present-day global order with its social, economic, and political structures is established on the unjust gains from trans-Atlantic slavery and colonialism (Mba, 2022, p. 103), which historically benefited the colonising power at the expense of the colonised (Basset & Winter-Nelson, 2010, p. 109).

Former Special Rapporteur at UNHCR, Hilal Elver, states ‘Many of the LDCs [Least Developed Countries] worldwide, and all of the LDCs in Africa, are former colonies of Western countries’ (Elver, 2011, p. 8). Though former colonial powers have withdrawn from their former colonies decades ago – countries that suffered from the scramble of Africa, for instance – Elver exhorts that ‘the western world still exerts

considerable control over the continent' (p. 8), with the exploitation continuing even after former colonies had gained independence (Elver, 2011, p. 9.) The legacy of colonialism can be detected in patterns such as Africa paying more to the International Monetary Fund than what is given to them in aid annually. The West has hindered Africa's development by imposing economic policies that operate as a precondition for receiving aid as opposed to the alternative of contributing to the recovery from the consequences of colonisation (Elver, 2011, p. 8.) This disbalance of the flow of money is away from the funds to address the widespread poverty that continues to persist.

Moreover, as Basset and Winter-Nelson (2010) add, the economic structures of several former colonies are fragile and prone to instability and crises due to their economies having been created for the purpose of serving the interests of an external country rather than the locals (p. 109). This phenomenon can be demonstrated by the fact that many former colonies still rely on the export of primary goods and is seen in the vast number of people who still live in extreme poverty (Basset & Winter-Nelson, 2010, p. 110.)

2.2.2 Capitalism and Poverty

Karl Marx related capital to 'money which begets money' and thus without any limits (Raworth, 2015, p. 272). As Jahan and Mahmud (2015) further put it, 'The essential feature of capitalism is the motive to make a profit' (p. 44), and therefore to 'gain' is the impelling incentive of a capitalist economy (Raworth, 2015, p. 272).

As highlighted by Sullivan and Hickel (2022), it is an undemocratic system in society, where the decision-making on what is produced and how the profits are spent is dominated by a few controlling people (p. 15). Several economists – such as Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and John Stuart Mill – share a belief that the benefits produced by economic growth are rarely felt by the poorest part of society. Furthermore, Karl Marx (1872) argued in his piece *Das Kapital* that 'in a capitalist society inequality between rich and poor will widen as workers will always receive poverty wages and will be exploited for surplus value' (Dhongde, 2010, pp. 1, 3.)

Furthermore, Jahan and Mahmud (2015) state how the foundation of almost all modern-day economies lies in a level of capitalism (p. 44). Harvet (1990) formulates

capitalism as a global economic system generating poverty and sustaining inequality while it accrues wealth for people who are wealthy and privileged in the first place. Therefore, as Trauger and Fluri (2019) argue, achieving international goals, such as the SDGs, would go against the capitalist logic of maximising profits, and hence a system that is steered by global capital determines the path of development, as well, to adjust to the prevailing system (Trauger & Fluri, 2019.)

The leaps in economic growth within a country may have somewhat been boosted by the exploitation of the less privileged, poor people – as articulated by Sullivan and Hickel (2022). For instance, economic growth achieved by Western Europe between the late 15th century and 19th century largely relied on acts of dispossession, such as enclosures of lands, colonisation of the Americas, and enslavement of African people (Sullivan and Hickel, 2022, p. 3.) Furthermore, ideologies associated with free-market capitalism, such as neoliberal capitalism is one of the widely criticised ideologies with principles and policies to deregulate the economy, privatise enterprises owned by the state, opening trade and industry, and cutting subsidies, increasing inequality with an aim to recentralise power to the elites (Christiansen & Jensen, 2019, pp. 279-282, 287; Ganti, 2014, pp. 91, 94).

2.2.3 Debt Bondage

At present, former colonies are left in weaker positions of power in comparison with wealthy countries and their former colonial rulers – this is portrayed in economic engagement between lenders and borrowers (Basset & Winter-Nelson, 2010, p. 112). As Guérin and Venkatasubramanian (2022) express, ‘the socio-economy of debt’ views debt as both a material transaction and a power relationship (p. 174). ‘In 2019,’ Federspiela et al. (2022) states, ‘...54 LMICs [Low- and Middle-Income Countries] spent more on servicing their debt to foreign creditors than on financing their health services’ (p. 9). This indicates directing money from low- and middle-income countries’ government budgets to public and private moneylenders in high-income countries (Federspiela et al., 2022, p. 1).

According to the World Bank (2013), the external debt of countries in the Global South was nearly \$5 trillion in 2012 (MacCann & McCloskey, 2015, p. 98). As further stated by MacCann and McCloskey (2015), the amount of debt repayments by loan recipient

countries is far greater than the aid they receive – more money goes back to donor countries through debt repayment (p. 99).

The contribution of colonialism to the lack of economic development and poverty in the Global South as well as economic crises in former colonies induced these countries to turn to loans i.a., through International Financial Institutions (IFIs) (MacCann & McCloskey, 2015, p. 99; Basset & Winter-Nelson, 2010, p. 111). *Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)*, conditional loan agreements arranged by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), are a form of lending driven by neoliberalism (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2006, pp. 235-236; Wamala, 2012, p. 93). Between 1981 and 2000, the World Bank had established 422 SAPs around the world while the IMF had arranged 414 agreements (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2006, p. 236). Based on neoliberal economic theory, these programmes diminish the role of the borrowing government in the economy by setting up conditions for receiving a loan, such as requiring the recipient countries to liberalise their economies, make reductions in public employment and cuts in spending on health and welfare programmes as well as on education, and abolishing price subsidies for services and commodities (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2006, pp. 233, 235, 236; MacCann & McCloskey, 2015, pp. 97-98).

Nosrati et al. (2022) explain how the privatisation of enterprises previously owned by the state can detriment the health of the population through growing unemployment and social insecurity while deteriorating the public provision of social services and weakening access to healthcare during the SAP reforms (p. 2). The lives of the poorest and most vulnerable citizens in the borrowing countries were severely impacted by structural adjustment (MacCann & McCloskey, 2015, pp. 97-98), with these policies possibly having ‘deepened poverty and increased hunger vulnerability’ (Basset & Winter-Nelson, 2010, p. 111). One possible reason why countries like China have succeeded in poverty reduction and economic growth among its population may have been due to the avoidance of Structural Adjustment Agreements arranged by the World Bank and the IMF (Abouharb & Cingranelli, 2006, p. 236).

2.2.4 Controversial Trade

As explained by Trauger and Fluri (2019), ‘The global capitalist economy is anchored in economic divisions that are driven by the production of industrial goods (cars,

clothing, consumer goods) that rely on low waged labor and the consumption of these goods by individuals earning higher wages' (Trauger & Fluri, 2019). MacCann and McCloskey (2015) further state that in trade with the Global North, the Global South receives less than the full value for its primary goods in exchange for manufactured goods that are overpriced (p. 80).

Issues regarding i.a., free-trade policies also may lead to settings where trade gathers more wealth and development in richer industrialised parts of the world and induces higher poverty and underdevelopment in developing parts of the world (MacCann & McCloskey, 2015, p. 80). During colonialism, colonial powers attempted to be in control of the colonies' natural resources and labour and to orient their markets to serve the needs of European businesses, citizens, and colonists (Basset & Winter-Nelson, 2010, p. 109). Today, poorer regions 'always seem to end up producing and trading commodities that the richer regions either need or desire in exchange for products that the richer regions produce and control' (MacCann & McCloskey, 2015, p. 78).

A practical example is given by Fairtrade America (2022) on banana exports which have a history linked to Western colonialism, affecting banana farmers until today. According to Fairtrade America (2022), farmers continue to face low pay and hazardous working conditions, with widespread child labour, while corporations benefit from poor labour law enforcement in the exporting countries, maintaining their own unscrupulous business practices (Fairtrade America, 2022).

2.3 How Power Could be Shifted

What is the approach of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs)? How do they view their role in either changing or maintaining the current power structures in terms of global poverty? In the following part, the concept of decolonisation is introduced which has been topical in the field of international development and humanitarian aid in terms of reforming the system of power in a Global North – Global South dimension.

In November 2020, an online consultation between 158 participants from diverse ethnic, national, age, and gender groups was held. This consultation was arranged by

Peace Direct who collaborated with Adeso, Alliance for Peacebuilding, and Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security to discuss the topic of decolonising development, humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding. The original meaning of ‘decolonisation’ was the event of a state ‘withdrawing from a former colony’. Participants identified a secondary meaning to decolonisation, as well, connected to the action of unravelling colonial ideologies that convey the superiority of Western knowledge and means (Peace Direct et al., 2021, p. 13.)

Based on the findings of the consultation, the urgency of decolonising development, humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding is founded on the fact that until today, various practices and norms fortify colonial dynamics and beliefs. This can be seen from the image International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs) may create through, e.g., fundraising techniques as well as decision-making and aid flows that derive from the Global North, imitating the past colonial relationships between the former colonisers and their colonies. INGO staffing has inclined towards white Westerners, Western-based values and standards in the aid system, organisational structure, and implementation of programmes, undervaluing local skills and knowledge among Global South practitioners – attitudes which all stem from the colonial times (Peace Direct et al., 2021, p. 4.) International commitments to ‘shift the power towards local actors’ have taken place to address the issue of persisting colonial dynamics, yet they have not been sufficient enough to address the root issue lying beneath the system in order to invoke change at a structural level (Peace Direct et al., 2021, p. 8.)

It was also brought to light how there are misconceptions about modern aid and development systems being historically and geographically neutral – development and aid being separated from their historical context (Peace Direct et al., 2021, p. 20). Countries that were struggling against colonisation in the past are now worse off with crippling debt loaned by former colonial powers, and development aid only reinforces the system that it claims to be changing (Peace Direct et al., participants’ accounts, 2021, pp. 21, 27, 30.) It was emphasised that INGOs should realise the value of indigenous knowledge and reassess their organisational culture, policies, and relationships with local actors so that they could identify possible oppressive practices or norms in their work. To decolonise the aid system, local people’s voice in what they regard as important should be the focal point of the promotion of human welfare. All this is necessary in order to change the current global power dynamics and guarantee the

sustainability of humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding efforts (Peace Direct et al., 2021, p. 37.)

In relation to the concept of decolonisation, what is the position of INGOs? As mentioned in the report, a legacy of colonial times may still be detected in the policies, attitudes, and strategies carried out by some INGOs. Through understanding the importance of this issue, the actions of INGOs that address poverty as well as what kind of notions drive their poverty reduction and development programmes can be evaluated by reflecting on the idea of decolonisation. Furthermore, the efforts, perceived capabilities, and role of the INGOs in fighting against poverty in the Global South can offer insight into their concentrated focus on either relieving the current conditions of poor people living in the Global South or a point of sustainability of their efforts that have an impact on the internal or external structures that impede poverty eradication.

3 THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE OF THE THESIS

The purpose of this thesis was to shed light on the factors behind such a phenomenon in which poverty prevails at a global level in one part of the Earth more than the other and what the connections are to our current global power structures. The power structures that contribute to this current global order were taken as a viewpoint to reason out and consider their role in global poverty. The motivation was also to discover what is being done at the moment to address the occurrence of poverty in a sustainable way that would have a lasting impact on the issue of poverty instead of dependence of the poor countries of the Global South on the wealthy countries of the Global North through power relations.

This qualitative research was aimed to delve into how INGO workers who operate in the context of development, aid, and charity in the low- and middle-income countries of the Global South view the various factors of global poverty. The intention was also to explore how and whether they see the existing power relations that play a role in the current global order of division of wealth between high-income countries of the Global North and low- and middle-income countries of the Global South. The aim was also to understand how relevant actors like INGOs endeavour to address poverty in a sustainable way in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South.

I believe the benefit the thesis ought to offer both to my work-life partner as well as other INGOs and international institutions is the general representation of how people who work in INGOs that have interventions in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South view the complex issue of poverty and the power relations connected to it. Through this research and its theoretical background, the audience will learn about the multiple dimensions of the existence and further persistence of poverty and its political nature. As for working life practices, this research will further provide essential information and offer insight into what all people working in the field of development, aid, and charity should assume to ensure the decolonisation and sustainability of their practices.

In this qualitative research, the two following research questions were formed:

1. How do INGO workers view the factors behind poverty in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South from the perspective of global political structures?
2. What is the INGOs' approach to addressing poverty in a sustainable way in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South?

The first research question was formulated for the purpose of exploring the reasoning, thinking, and perspectives of INGO workers on the factors behind the prevalence of poverty in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South and do they place more emphasis on internal or external reasoning behind poverty as well as how they view or understand the connection between the global power structures and the phenomenon of poverty in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South. Through the second question, it could be discovered what kind of actions INGOs take in order to address global poverty in a sustainable way. This was analysed from the point of view of long-term sustainable actions, with an example of decolonisation of aid and development work.

4 DATA COLLECTION, DATA, AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Research Environment and Target Group

This thesis was carried out in collaboration with Fingo, a larger Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) platform with expertise on global development (Fingo, 2022). Fingo has a vast network with multiple international and local organisations and, therefore, was a suitable work-life partner in the implementation of the research due to the opportunity to interview people who work in INGOs. Fingo also provided major support in structuring the thesis, offering guidance and generating ideas as well as contributing with literature to support the theoretical background.

The target group consisted of five INGO workers who operate in the context of development, aid, and charity in various low- and middle-income countries of the Global South, with varying focuses, such as child poverty and children's rights, women's rights, funding and sponsorship, et cetera. The participating organisations were chosen from my work-life partner Fingo's list of partner organisations and were chosen based on their focus of work and the countries in which they work.

The participants in this research were contacted via email, and their contacts were acquired with the help of my contact person from Fingo. Many of the participants had diverse work experience in the field of development, aid, and charity, having worked in government institutions, international intergovernmental organisations, local NGOs in the Global North, and other similar INGOs to the ones they work for at present. Their work experiences within the current INGOs ranged from five to ten years, with up to 30 years of experience in the field of development work.

All five participants were from Global North countries, of which a majority currently reside in Finland. Many of the participants, however, also had worked in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South in the past, with one of them being currently employed in the country of intervention. Their roles and duties in the INGOs included i.a., supervising professional teams as well as country directors, managing financial and administrative tasks such as monitoring and evaluating projects and acquiring funding, and overseeing international voluntary work.

4.2 Data Collection

A qualitative research method was chosen for conducting this research. Since the aim of the research was to learn about the perspective of INGO workers on the factors of poverty and how they endeavour to address poverty sustainably, a qualitative research method was found the most suitable way due to its descriptive and reflective nature and its attempt to gain an understanding of a phenomenon in a holistic way (Fischer, 2005).

The data for this research was collected through conducting semi-structured interviews with Fingo's partner organisations via online platforms and physical meetings. A semi-structured interview is a hybrid method for collecting data, using features from both structured and unstructured interviews. Due to this, semi-structured interviews often progress from predominantly open-ended questions toward questions based in theory (Delve, n.d.; Galletta, 2013, p. 24.) Prior to the data collection, I created a framework of primarily open-ended interview questions (see Appendix 1.) as well as included some additional probing questions in the plan to support the exploration and understanding of the given responses with the intention to delve deep into the data (Delve, n.d.). The nature of the first interview questions were rather wide and open-ended from where I progressed towards more theoretically driven, specific questions. Through semi-structured interviews, it was possible to acquire the flexibility of open-ended questions and follow-up probing questions while maintaining a focus on the chosen theme as well as the structure of predetermined questions (Newcomer et al., 2015, p. 492; Delve, n.d.). Thus, semi-structured interviews allow better opportunities to understand the answers given in a more in-depth way through the possibility of elaboration on a topic discussed by the interviewee.

The research topic was briefly introduced prior to the interviews without further revealing the interview questions or research questions in advance, allowing the participants to answer spontaneously without having prepared and formulated answers. The beginning part of the interviews had more emphasis on open-endedness, and in the progression of the interviews, more guiding questions were included to bring up the perspective of existing power relations in order to specifically discover the INGO workers' thinking regarding this issue – if the perspective did not yet emerge spontaneously.

The interviews took place between 16th March 2023 and 4th July 2023. The interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams Meeting both in online and face-to-face interviews, and then converted from video files into audio files using VLC Media Player, and further transcribed into text using Microsoft Word Online transcription service. The texts were then gone through while simultaneously listening to the audio files, fixing periods, commas, misspellings, and misinterpreted words, with the purpose of making the text more readable and comprehensible for further analysis.

The recorded interviews altogether lasted for 4 hours and 12 minutes, with an average duration of 50 minutes per interview. The transcribed interviews ranged from 10 to 14 pages of text or 21,098 up to 31,283 characters, with the average being 11.6 pages long or 23,680 characters with no spaces.

4.3 Data Analysis

For analysing the text, I chose a thematic analysis method which is a ‘process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data’ (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Using thematic analysis in this qualitative research, therefore, is good for mapping out patterns of meaning, similar values, beliefs, or attitudes that different INGO workers share as well as diverge in. Thematic analysis is generally implemented in six phases according to Mihas (2023) and Maguire and Delahunt (2017), which are as follows; becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching and generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing them up.

I began the data analysis by familiarising myself with the text (Mihas, 2023). This was also partly done during the preparation of the transcribed text by skimming through the transcripts and marking words and sentences that stood out from the text. During the second read, I began marking interview questions and answers with colours to create clarity of what has been answered and to organise the data. After this, I moved all the marked text into a digital form, from where I further continued organising the data, grouping similar ideas, and coding the text, where codes are assigned to topics and used to indicate contextual categories (Mihas, 2023). I then again returned to a paper form, creating a mind map of all the data and their codes and raw versions of themes, collecting and summarising everything in order to shape the larger framework of

themes. Subsequently, I wrote the main themes into a Word document and began elaborating and describing them, connecting them with relevant extracts from the interview transcripts. I used both inductive and deductive approaches in generating the themes, where an inductive approach involves generating codes based on the collected data while through deductive coding ‘you start with a set of predetermined codes and then find excerpts that fit those codes’ (Delve, n.d.).

As a final part, I reviewed the themes by going through the summarised and combined interview transcripts, marking down in a table each time a theme indeed emerged from the data and counting how many times a certain code surfaced and by how many participants was it shared. This phase is crucial in order to ‘ensure that each theme has enough data to support them and is distinct’ (Delve, n.d.). Following the reviewal of themes, I began describing the themes and selecting extracts from the interview transcripts to support the discovered narrative.

Ultimately, five themes were determined based on the data; Historical legacy in today’s structures, Perceived powerlessness in the face of the global poverty issue, Promotion of localised approaches, Multidimensionality and diversity of responses to poverty, and The INGOs’ and their workers’ motivation in their work. The acquired data was abundant, broad, and comprehensive, and thus it was essential to distinguish which topics seemed to have more emphasis in the participants’ accounts and which concepts, thoughts, and words frequently emerged throughout the interviews. After all, in the process of the thematic analysis, more attention was paid to what a majority shared in their thoughts, giving less focus on what the participants diverged in in their accounts.

In the following tables (Table 1 and Table 2), examples are presented of extracts from the interviews, codes, and themes into which they were divided.

Table 1. The process of data analysis: Research Question 1.

Extracts	Codes	Themes	Research Question
<p>‘Also, the unjustified models of how to rule nations were still remained there and enforcing them this kind of Westernised models.’</p> <p>‘But you can still see that the global money flows are still flowing to the North.’</p>	<p>Remnants of Colonisation</p> <p>Continued exploitation</p>	<p>Historical Legacy in Today’s Structures</p>	<p>How do INGO workers view the factors behind poverty in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South from the perspective of global political structures?</p>
<p>‘But I don’t know if (the organisation) or other INGO, if we can change these power structures. These are more like a global, like questions related to the global economic structure.’</p> <p>‘I mean you are trying to do whatever best you can from your position.’</p>	<p>Doubt in one’s ability to influence</p> <p>Lack of control</p> <p>Limitations</p>	<p>Perceived Powerlessness in the Face of the Global Poverty Issue</p>	

Table 2. The process of data analysis: Research Question 2.

Extracts	Codes	Themes	Research Question
<p>‘These area programmes, they’re also holistic, so we will try to develop many things in the area, not only like water and sanitation or livelihoods. But we try to address the child protection, livelihoods, health, these are all interconnected.’</p> <p>‘So, we now work on very much around trying to improve government programs, and to also influence government policy.’</p>	<p>Addressing various aspects of poverty</p> <p>Direct service provision and structural interventions</p>	<p>Multidimensionality and Diversity of Responses to Poverty</p>	<p>What is the INGOs’ approach to addressing poverty in a sustainable way in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South?</p>
<p>‘So that is a sustainability factor if you try to kind of strengthen local entities.’</p> <p>‘... it’s not us who plan the projects ... but the activities are planned by our (local) partners because they are the experts of their own communities and their own countries.’</p> <p>‘So they (the staff) are local people who understand the local contexts, local language, local traditions.’</p>	<p>Supporting local organisations and authorities</p> <p>Giving power to the local people</p> <p>Valuing local knowledge and expertise</p>	<p>Promotion of Localised Approaches</p>	
<p>‘...it’s Christian values that are basis of our work.’</p> <p>‘The UNCRC Commission for Rights of the Child. So that it’s our like guiding framework.’</p> <p>‘It is right to help. It is right.’</p> <p>‘I guess anybody who works in Development Cooperation thinks that the current system is unfair and unequal and there should be a better way to organise things.’</p>	<p>Organisational motivations based on religious values and agreements</p> <p>INGO workers’ personal morality</p>	<p>The INGOs’ and their workers’ motivation in their work</p>	

5 RESULTS

The participants presented extensive reasoning on the whole topic of poverty during the interviews, elaborating on diverse factors and aspects when it comes to poverty and how the INGOs in which they work attempt to respond to these issues. Five themes were derived from what the participants discussed during the interviews; Historical legacy in today's structures, Perceived powerlessness in the face of the global poverty issue, Promotion of localised approaches, Multidimensionality and diversity of responses to poverty, and The INGOs' and their workers' motivation in their work. The themes will further be discussed in the next sections based on the order of the two research questions as well as the perceived prominence of a theme, with the two first themes relating to the first research question and the latter three to the second research question.

5.1 Historical Legacy in Today's Structures

When thinking of the question *Why is there poverty in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South*, participants' responses included multifaceted reasons ranging from external factors to internal factors connected to poverty in the Global South. While some reasons were mentioned regarding countries' internal issues, such as low educational levels, detrimental social norms, unemployment, or poor governance, 80 per cent of the respondents placed a greater emphasis on the historical legacies in today's structures that play a role in poverty, mostly connected to colonialism.

The historical legacy of colonialism was regarded as a leading cause for current global power structures and the global economic order among participants, with factors associated with i.a., hierarchical, externally brought Western society models, structures that mimic the history through relations that continue to benefit the Global North e.g., through Western-favoured trading practices and global money flows, issues to do with countries' internal governance, and inequality in the share of resources partly due to the way state boundaries were formed during colonisation.

Participant 1 expressed the traces of colonialism in the following way:

What are the consequences of the colonisation in the global South? Clearly that has an impact, it has had impact to the government structures of the countries, it has had impact to the education levels of the countries, how the power has been upheld by small elites in the countries, kind of how it's being structured. So there's definitely historical roots to building hierarchical societies and also kind of putting the power to the hands of a small elite.

Discussing the inequality within countries, Participant 2 stated, 'In Africa, many countries were just split into the nations regardless of the natural social boundaries between the people in the continent, causing a lot of inequality about the share of the resources.'

There were factors mentioned that kind of fall in between internal and external factors, such as corruption. While corruption was often mentioned as a country's internal challenge, Participant 2 connected it as an external aspect, as well. 'Also many governments are extremely corrupted due to the colonial systems...And then the habit was starting to really come that we just take what is needed for us and not for the entire population.'

With the persisting advantage of the global structures for the Global North, several participants mentioned how 'global money flows are still flowing to the north', as said by Participant 3, and how 'development aid of the...Global North countries' are 'just small fraction of the total money flows. More money is coming from developing countries to developed countries', Participant 4 added. Participant 3 said how 'many of the countries in the global South were sort of forced to shape their economies in the way that the Global North wanted', further being demonstrated by Participant 4: 'if we start analysing the trade and investments and, I mean the flow of even the private funds from developing countries are coming to the -. And this imbalance is benefiting developed countries than developing.'

Ultimately, many of the participants stated that 'all of this is all connected' (Participant 3), and the issue of poverty and its persistence in the Global South is a 'combination of things' (Participant 5).

5.2 Perceived Powerlessness in the Face of the Global Poverty Issue

What echoed throughout most of the interviews was an expressed feeling of perceived powerlessness or lack of control regarding the complexities of poverty eradication and the changing of the global systems that contribute to poverty. When questioned about the persistence of poverty, many of the participants conveyed doubt about how much power they possess in changing the structures other than within the organisations they work for and through their individual actions. As Participant 4 said, 'We can't change the whole system but we can try to make impact...on the poorest areas of particular country.'

The contribution of development cooperation was also deemed as 'only very little' (Participant 4) or 'quite small' money (Participant 3), that 'there may be other reasons that are beyond or outside the control of development cooperation' (Participant 4). However, nearly all participants exhorted how important development cooperation is and that in their work they advocate for the government to avoid cutting the funds. Participant 3 stated, 'I think the problems lie elsewhere than in the development cooperation' with 'global political structures...working against the things that we're trying to achieve with development cooperation.'

Another participant expressed this issue of lack of control by saying, 'But I don't know if (the organisation) or other INGO, if we can change these power structures, these are more like a global, like questions related to the global economic structure.' (Participant 4). Three participants also explained how the power also lies in the hands of the countries themselves, that 'unless the government system totally changes and improves' (Participant 1) and without the governments and societies of the countries taking matters into their own hands, the persistence of poverty cannot be addressed fundamentally (Participant 2).

Participant 5 formulated this issue as indicated in the following excerpt:

They have to drive it, it cannot be done from outside. We can support it, we can provide training, strengthening capacities, supporting them on the journey for that. But we can't enforce it, I mean it has to come from the countries themselves. And if that's not happening then it is like pouring the money to the well.

As Participant 5 further said, 'You are trying to do whatever best you can from your position', expressing a sense of commitment in their work as well as a limitation of what you can do as an INGO worker.

5.3 Multidimensionality and Diversity of Responses to Poverty

During the interviews, the participants elaborated on what the INGOs they are working for are doing to address the issue of poverty in a sustainable way. The INGOs' actions can be viewed from three perspectives.

The importance of collaboration with diverse local and international stakeholders emerged in the participants' answers, including cooperation with local governments, organisations, institutions, and leaders, while also connecting their work with possible international institutions like the World Bank, as disclosed by one participant. As Participant 4 said, 'In order to ensure that sustainability, local authorities, local governments...are involved. That's also one way to ensure the sustainability of the results of the work.' In one INGO, Participant 2 said that they partner with local organisations, in which the local 'team knows in best way how to tackle the work and how to collaborate with the local...NGOs, the local partners, the government, and then they design the programs.'

Another aspect of sustainable poverty reduction was INGOs working at a structural level, such as advocacy work to influence government policy and international aid, as well as at a direct service provision level, to support vulnerable populations e.g., through education, social protection, livelihoods training, or providing tools. Structural level actions included influencing government policy and decision-makers as said by Participants 5 and 3, and improving government systems, lobbying activities, and sending 'advocacy messages to (Finnish) government, to stakeholders in order to fight' for not losing all international aid, as expressed by Participant 2. Another INGO attempts to 'influence the policies and budgets', as mentioned by Participant 1,

As for direct service provision, all of the five INGOs' activities involved some kind of direct assistance in the countries where they work, such as providing sponsorship,

working in humanitarian settings, supporting education, working in health care, supporting local partners in providing funds for their projects, etc.

The third aspect that stood out in the interviews, as mentioned by three participants, was the diversity of actions and how they should be holistic in a way. Participant 2 expressed this in working strategically, where ‘you work in policy setting, you work with the teachers...you work with the schools...you try to enhance the girls’ education.’ Participant 4 said, ‘You can't solve education if you don't at the same time develop wash or livelihoods. In order to reduce, you have to tackle, address many issues, many challenge at the same time’, further elaborating that the regional programmes of the INGO are ‘holistic’, with the effort to ‘develop many things in the area, not only like water and sanitation or livelihoods’ but also ‘child protection...health’ which are ‘all interconnected’. Participant 5 also added to ‘look at the other aspects of poverty’ in their intervention.

5.4 Promotion of Localised Approaches

One large theme that manifested in all of the participants’ accounts of how to ensure the sustainability of their work and how to decolonise their work was the concept of localisation. Through localisation, participants emphasised prioritising local people’s opinions, knowledge, expertise, and culture in the country of intervention, in addressing local issues of the country. Participant 4 said that their ‘approach is...localised, it's local solutions, local people’. Localisation is also connected to decolonisation as it attempts to give power to the local people and have the staff of the INGOs primarily comprise local professionals, with the ‘national organisation...implementing the programmes’, as said by Participant 4, and the staff being ‘90 per cent local’ as Participant 1 revealed. As Participants 1 and 4 explained, the local staff know the contexts, the issues, the language, the people, and local traditions. Participant 5 also mentioned how their ‘whole idea is to make the local context stronger’, adding that ‘there aren't so many people who are from Finland that will set outside, it's mostly local.’

Through localisation as well as decolonisation, the INGOs deemed it important to give the power to the local people to determine what they consider essential and ‘useful to them’, as Participant 3 said, this way being the most sustainable approach to poverty

reduction. As Participant 4 highlighted, ‘We don't talk for others but other people, we let them talk. We don't try to be voice of anyone but giving the voice to the people.’

To collaborate with the local people and authorities is crucial, as briefly mentioned under the previous theme, and Participant 2 put it in the following way:

Working together with the local people in order to find the best solutions to help the vulnerable population, and if you do it well with respect, with no traces of this kind of colonial track, that you really listen to people and enhance their own views and cultural richness and don't try to impose your values on them.

Another thing the INGOs stressed was the importance of programme designs and paradigms originating from the country of intervention, not being brought from outside. As Participant 3 said, ‘It's not us who plan the projects...but the activities are planned by our partners because they are the experts of their own communities and their own countries.’ Participant 4 in harmony with this idea said, ‘It's not something brought from outside. But it's local problems, local solutions for local problems.’

Participant 5 said their INGO also has an aim to ‘strengthen the organisations in the country’ and ‘strengthen local entities’, this being viewed as a component of sustainability. Moreover, as for INGOs with an agenda of, for instance, promoting children's rights and women's rights, as in the case of Participant 2 and 1, or stopping female genital mutilation (FGM), as Participant 4 brought up, or other detrimental norms as added by Participant 1, it was regarded essential to establish programmes into the local systems and to build them ‘deep into the culture and systems of the local people’ (Participant 2).

5.5 The INGOs' and their Workers' Motivation in their Work

Motives behind why the INGOs do what they do were mostly based on international agreements and plans, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, and the universally recognised human rights. Many of the INGOs' values were founded on religious, Christian values. As for the INGO workers' individual motives in their work, many of them expressed moral-based thinking and modals throughout the interviews, with expressions of ‘it is right to help’ as said by Participant 2, or Participant 4's reasoning of ‘Because it's not

right'. During the interviews, the participants' personal opinions were scattered at various points of the interviews regarding the current affairs in the world. Participant 3 said, 'I guess anybody who works in Development Cooperation thinks that the current system is unfair...', while Participant 2 stated, 'It's all continuing...how the wealth is divided still today it's not fair deal at all.' Participant 5 also accorded with this, saying, 'It seems a little bit unfair because you also have lots of poor countries'. The words 'fair', 'unfair', 'fairness', and 'right' occurred multiple times in many of the interviews, conveying the participants' personal feelings about the current global order and how it does not align with their moralities.

6 ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RELIABILITY

There are ethical considerations and recommendations in research that should be regarded throughout the process of research. In this chapter, ethical aspects to be considered as well as the efforts done to follow the recommendations and principles of ethical conduct of research in this thesis are described.

In this qualitative research, the participants – in this case, INGO workers – were entitled to an informed consent which is ‘a central ethical principle in research with human participants’. This also involves the right to voluntary participation as well as the right to opt out of the research at any point of the study without consequences (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2020.) The consent to research participation was acquired through an email from the participants responding to the invitation to participate in the research, since using a separate consent form was considered unnecessary in these research settings. In the invitation email, the participants were provided adequate information on the research topic, the process of handling personal data and how long it would be preserved – which was set until the end of the conduction of the research – as well as what the practical implementation of the research was going to be (Business Research Methodology, n.d.; Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2020.) The topic was introduced briefly, however, by only introducing the detailed research title which represented the summary of the topic. The reason more information was not disclosed, such as the research questions or the drafted interview questions, was due to an aim to receive spontaneous, not fully prepared answers from the participants.

As it is explained in *Ethical Recommendations for Thesis Writing at Universities of Applied Sciences*, ‘When reporting on their work, the thesis writer must consider the implementation of privacy protection and whether other individuals could be indirectly identified through those participating in the research’ (Arene, 2018, p. 14). Thus, the anonymisation of the interview answers was an important step in ensuring that based on the results, the participants could not be identified from the data or their answers could not be connected to specific organisations. It was guaranteed that revealing details about which organisation said what or other linkages were either erased or anonymised in the thesis paper. Personal data on the participants, such as names, gender,

or ethnicity was not documented at all, and revealing accounts of their job titles, education, or experiences were not included.

However, due to the choice of target group that comprised of INGO workers and not a group of vulnerable service users as well as the research topic not dealing with dangerous settings, any significant risks or potential harm affecting the research participants was deemed rather low (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2020). This is the primary reason a consent form was not considered necessary, as well. In terms of social harm, such as placing the research participant, their family members, or other people close to them at risk of harm from the research results, it was indispensable for the researcher to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, as discussed above (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2020).

The qualitative research approach is subjective due to its reliance on the researcher's own interpretation in the analysis of the data. A researcher's bias may also have an impact on the results (Mwita, 2022, p. 618.) Therefore, it is essential to assess how this might affect the reliability and validity of the research. To avoid this, it is crucial to regard the ethical issue of research misconduct which 'distorts and falsifies research-based knowledge' and can mislead the audience. The researcher should not present fictitious findings, manipulate the data, or practice plagiarism (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, 2023.) In addition, researchers have their own personal experiences, prejudices, and ideas that may constitute one's bias in conducting research. There lies a possibility for a researcher's bias to have an impact in any phase of the research (Smith & Noble, 2014, p. 100.) A bias occurring during data collection can manifest in the form of e.g., a manner of asking interview questions which may further affect how the participants respond (Smith & Noble, 2014, p. 101.) During the data collection, I attempted to keep the interview questions as much in the same phrase with each participant as possible, despite the flexibility of semi-structured interviews.

As for potential aspects that could have influenced the research results during the data collection process, it is good to note that the participants' input prior to the beginning of the interviews and during the interviews may have affected what kind of additional, less structured, and clarifying questions I asked. Also, a participant's request to remind

them about the topic of the research may have affected the rewording of the topic and how much it may have steered their answers in the latter interview questions.

During the data analysis stage, it is possible for the researcher to subconsciously focus more on parts of the data that accord with one's personal experiences while disregarding data that is not consistent with one's personal beliefs (Smith & Noble, 2014, p. 101). Therefore, it is relevant to state the possibility of how the data analysis process may have been influenced by how I approached the data, how I perceived the task, and what kind of connections I have personally discovered.

7 DISCUSSION

As the research findings implicate, INGO workers identified multiple links between poverty in the Global South and the history of colonialism in today's global political and economic structures of power as well as present unjust practices. As for the first research question *How do INGO workers view the factors behind poverty in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South from the perspective of global political structures?*, the participants' responses involved multifaceted reasons including both internal and external factors to poverty, with all of them having mentioned the external factor of power context in global poverty at some point of the interview. The participants brought up this perspective of global power structures to varying degrees. Some participants began the interview with the context of e.g., colonialism and how it has influenced how well former colonies are doing in the present, as explained by Basset and Winter Nelson (2010) who reflect on the fact of European colonialism having significantly affected the economies of several nations that struggle with hunger vulnerability today (pp. 109-110).

In four out of five of the interviews, colonialism was also connected to its historical legacy that manifests in the functions of the current global power structures and the global economic order where countries of the Global South were put to shape their economies according to the needs of the Global North. As Táíwò (2022) puts it, today's global order of social, economic, and political structures has a foundation in the gains from trans-Atlantic slavery and colonialism (Mba, 2022, p. 103), with the economies of former colonies having moulded into a kind that serves the interests of an external country (Basset and Winter-Nelson, 2010, p. 109). Moreover, the unjust practices of trade or investments and global money flows that benefit wealthy countries more than poor countries were also connected to the history of colonialism, as seen in the pattern of Africa paying more to the International Monetary Fund than what is given to them in aid annually (Elver, 2011, p. 8). The recreation of the practice of funnelling resources to the hands of some (small elite) and not for the whole society can also be connected to the idea articulated by Harvet (1990) who argues capitalism to be a global economic system that gathers wealth for the already wealthy and privileged (Trauger and Fluri, 2019), with neoliberal practices that have the aim to recentralise power to the elites (Christiansen & Jensen, 2019, pp. 279-282, 287; Ganti, 2014, pp. 91, 94).

Other participants raised the issue of global power structures when being steered towards the perspective of power relations between the Global North and the Global South through the latter interview questions, where power refers to the capacity or ability to exert control (Hafford-Letchfield, 2015, p. 4). In addition, while some interviewees centred power relations more at the heart of poverty in the Global South, others mentioned it as a side note yet remained more focused on the internal reasoning of poverty in low- and middle-income countries, such as lack of education, unemployment, or lack of livelihoods (Concern Worldwide U.S., 2022). Ultimately, all of them recognised the connection between the current global order of division of wealth and poverty and power relations in the global sphere.

The participants also met feelings of powerlessness in the face of this vast issue of global poverty while simultaneously committing to efforts for their own parts despite existing limitations. Most of the participants expressed feelings of injustice at the system in which poverty persists and affects populations in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South, manifesting their moral thinking about the issue of global poverty. Furthermore, many of the participants conveyed a lack of control over how global power structures impact poverty and focused more on what they can do and are doing at the current time to make structures more just within the countries of intervention, within the organisations they work for, and within the relationship between the organisation and their partnering countries of intervention.

Based on the findings, the INGOs take diverse and multidimensional actions in order to address the issue of poverty in the Global South. As for the second research question *What is the INGOs' approach to addressing poverty in a sustainable way in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South?*, what emerged in the participants' accounts included collaboration with various local and international stakeholders, tackling multiple challenges that support one another, and addressing poverty at a structural level as well as through direct services. The participants highlighted the organisations' approach of localisation which overlaps with the practices of decolonisation, discussing the importance of giving local people's ideas, knowledge, expertise, and culture a priority when tackling local problems. This idea is connected to shifting power 'towards local actors' which is essential in addressing and deconstructing the persisting colonial dynamics (Peace Direct et al., 2021, p. 8).

Based on the consultation by Peace Direct, INGOs should recognise the value of indigenous knowledge and reassess their relationships with local actors, which the participants also exhorted by expressing the primacy of local people's voice, their activities and projects being designed by the local partners as well as their staff consisting mostly of local people in the countries of intervention. The participants centralised localisation as something that will bring about sustainability in INGOs' interventions, the actions mentioned above being necessary in order to change the current global power dynamics and guarantee the sustainability of humanitarian aid, development, and peacebuilding efforts (Peace Direct et al., 2021, p. 37). All INGOs had for the most part already adopted and implemented some of the key principles of decolonisation or localisation within their internal functions with the attempt to shift power toward the Global South.

The connections between the research findings and the literature framework seem clear, with the participants' answers aligning with the challenges discussed in the literature foundation of the thesis for the most part. The participants' answers revolved around the political aspects of power exertion that are connected to global poverty – for some at their own initiative and more centrally while for others when using invoking questions and more at the periphery. However, all of them discerned the existing power relations that play a role in the current global order of division of wealth.

7.1 Professional Development

This thesis has greatly impacted my professional development as a future social services professional. It has expanded my knowledge as well as deepened my understanding of the issue of poverty in less wealthy countries of the Global South, this topic being a foremost motivation for my studies in the social services field due to an interest in working in the field of development myself.

Through conducting this research, I have gained competencies of Bachelor of Social Services, including critical and inclusive social skills, as listed on the website of Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, n.d.). Through the topic of this thesis, I have learned about assessing the significance of social phenomena and power dynamics and how they influence individuals, groups,

and communities in their functioning within society. I have also been able to practise the skill of analysing processes and structures that generate inequality and create disadvantage as well as ones that can prevent marginalisation and promote well-being among people. These competencies manifest in my increased critical thinking skills and the developed ability to detect a diverse network of factors in the phenomenon of poverty, further increasing my expertise in the field of development.

Another area of a listed competence involves research-based development and innovation skills which includes applying methods in research, development, and innovation, and analysing and producing data that promote well-being. Through conducting this research, I have acted according to the principles of research ethics and sustainable development through recognition of my personal biases and, therefore, avoidance of its impact on the various phases in the research process. (Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, n.d.).

8 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore how INGO workers who work in the context of low- and middle-income countries of the Global South view the factors of global poverty and to understand how INGOs address poverty in a sustainable way in these settings. The main results emerged as historical legacy in today's structures, perceived powerlessness in the face of the global poverty issue, promotion of localised approaches, multidimensionality and diversity of responses to poverty, and the INGOs' and their workers' motivation in their work. The results suggest that it is crucial for people who work in international organisations or institutions to be aware of the global power relations and the historical context of colonialism and their impact on the current poverty situation in order to actively decolonise their own thinking, actions, and decisions in the working life settings. This is also vital for ensuring that the interventions have a long-lasting impact and are sustainable to truly reduce or eradicate poverty in the long term, without a power exertion effect that would imitate the past colonial relationships.

Further research is needed to study how well organisations are succeeding at decolonising their actions and what kind of an impact it has on the local communities and partner organisations in the Global South. While the concept of decolonisation was a familiar topic among all participants in this research, a robust stance on reasoning the multifaceted issue of poverty from a global perspective would be beneficial to induce critical reflection on one's individual actions as well as the actions taken around us in order to continue improving the current services and innovate novel ideas on how poverty could really be eradicated and what it would require us to do so. Arranging seminars or workshops would be advantageous in which participants would be required to engage in tasks of idealisation of how poverty could be eradicated in the Global South context and how these ideal future possibilities could be achieved. This would encourage people to come up with concrete suggestions of how it could be done in reality and what kind of limitations exist and how they could be overcome.

What is needed from organisations and institutions is to orient their workers on the issues of power and global political structures to make sure that the relations between an INGO or an institution and a local organisation in the Global South remain

supportive and empowering instead of oppressive or patronising, and that anti-racist practices are enhanced while banishing any potential ideas of supremacy of high-income countries and whiteness. This could be done through e.g., prerequisite trainings, courses, or orientations that people in the position of exercising power in decision-making within the organisation or communication with partner organisations or local professionals in the Global South would be necessitated to complete.

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APPENDIX 1. Interview Questions

1. According to your thinking and knowledge/professional knowledge as an INGO worker, why do you think there is poverty in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South?

- Why do you think it still persists despite decades of poverty reduction programmes?
- Why is there poverty in these countries at all?

2. How does your organisation attempt to eradicate or reduce poverty in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South? How do you ensure the sustainability of your choices of action?

- Why do you operate in the way as you have explained?
- What are the values behind the way your organisation attempts to reduce poverty?

3. What is the position or role of your organisation regarding the structural problems behind global poverty in the context of power relations between the Global North and Global South?

- Do you think rich countries have benefited from these power relations?
- What do you think is e.g. Finland's role in World poverty?
- How do you attempt to address these issues?

4. How does your organisation ensure the decolonisation of your intervention in poverty reduction in low- and middle-income countries of the Global South?