Naming the elephant in the room

innovative online training offer on

Developing a decolonial lens in the German global health research context
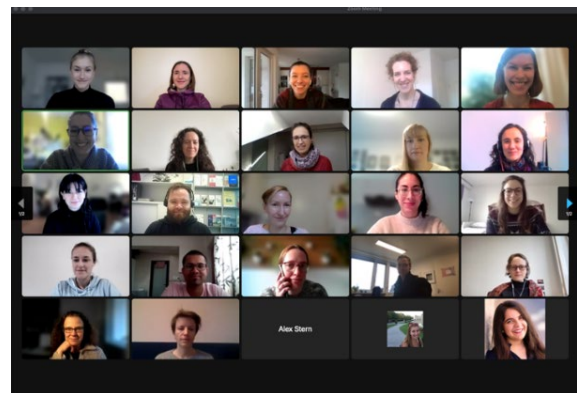
Summary of the training

Training overview

A group of early-career researchers at Bielefeld University and the University of Education Freiburg ran an online training entitled *"Developing a decolonial lens in the German global health research context"*, with financial support from the German Alliance for Global Health Research (GLOHRA) and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF).

The objectives of the training were:

① To build a **foundational understanding** of coloniality and decolonial approaches in global health research,

② To create a **space for reflection and discussion** on coloniality/decolonisation of global health, and

③ To build **skills and capacities** to develop a decolonial lens and allyship practice in global health research and institutional settings, generally and in Germany.

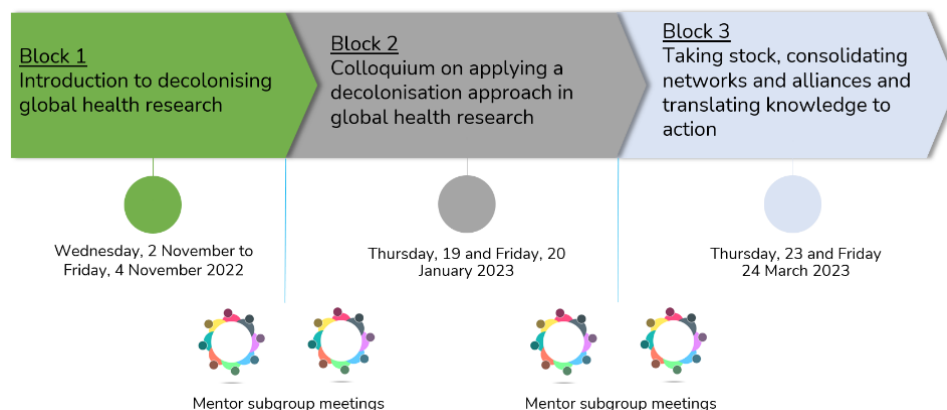**Training organizing committee**
(alphabetical order)

- Hannah Eger
- Dr. Nora Gottlieb
- Dr. Stefanie Harsch-Oria*
- Dr. Hanna Lütke Lanfer
- Dr. Yudit Namer
- Diana Podar
- Victoria Saint
- Dr. Lisa Wandschneider*

*Block 1 & 2

Training participants included **50 researchers** from diverse disciplines and institutions in the field of global health in Germany and beyond. More than 70 people applied to participate, demonstrating the significant importance of and interest in this social justice agenda.

Running from November 2022 to March 2023, the training consisted of **three blocks** in workshop format. Valuable and diverse inputs and perspectives were provided by the nearly **20 guest speakers** who participated, from countries including Canada, Germany, Malaysia, Pakistan, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda, and from academic, governmental, non-governmental and multilateral institutions in the global health and development fields.

Block 1
Introduction to decolonising global health research

Block 2
Colloquium on applying a decolonisation approach in global health research

Block 3
Taking stock, consolidating networks and alliances and translating knowledge to action

Wednesday, 2 November to Friday, 4 November 2022

Thursday, 19 and Friday, 20 January 2023

Thursday, 23 and Friday 24 March 2023

Mentor subgroup meetings

Mentor subgroup meetings

Between the blocks, small group exchanges took place with six mentors to facilitate deeper reflection on and engagement with concepts and issues. The blocks are described in more detail below.

Organised by   Supported by

UNIVERSITÄT BIELEFELD
School of Public Health

Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg
Université des Sciences de l'Education · University of Education

GLOHRA
globalhealth.de

Federal Ministry of Education and Research

Block 1 | Introduction to decolonizing global health research, 2 – 4 November 2022

The training kicked off with an inspiring keynote lecture by **Prof. Agnes Binagwaho,** former Rwandan Minister of Health and current Vice Chancellor of the University of Global Health Equity. Participants explored how colonial continuities remain deeply pervasive in global health and academia, with insights from **Ceporah Mearns, Themrise Khan, Dr. Angela Schuster, Muneera A. Rasheed** and **Emma Rhule**. The German context was critically examined and key challenges identified, including lack of awareness and structural and bureaucratic dynamics. The need for systematic change was highlighted, requiring capacity-building and resources, which are strongly linked to funding, decision-making and representation and inclusion. A key take-away was that long-term thinking and reflection is essential, individual and institutional change is incremental and everyone can play a role.

"We have to fight for deep, drastic, systematic change in our lifetime."
Prof. Agnes Binagwaho

Block 2 | Applying a decolonisation approach in global health research, 19 – 20 January 2023

"Lean out and be allies: check your privileges, we might (unintendedly) be excluding."
Poornima Thapa

Focusing on "the how", the second workshop looked at tools, initiatives and experiences for addressing and applying decolonisation lenses and approaches. **Dr. Hannah Strohmeier, Dr. Caroline Mtaita**, and **Poornima Thapa** provided insights on implementing change in the German, Indian and African contexts. Journal editors **Dr. Catherine Kyobutungi** and **Dr. Sabine Kleinert** discussed the efforts and challenges of ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion in academic publishing. A key theme was that reflections about power, privilege and identity are indispensable and that shifting power must be an active goal from the onset to the end of projects. Gaps between rhetoric and reality must be bridged, in particular in terms of research being intersectional and participatory, acknowledging the lived experiences of the people involved and the importance of locality and conditionality.

Block 3 | Taking stock, consolidating networks and alliance and translating knowledge to action, 23 – 24 March 2023

Aiming to foster sustained change, the third workshop addressed how to translate knowledge into action. In her keynote, **Shehnaz Munshi** emphasised the power of collectives and action by every individual. The artistic project **KUIR Poetry** ran a session that provided participants with insights into the powerful ways in which artistic and creative work can investigate and express anti-colonial thoughts and intersectionalities, and foster reflection on positionalities. The training closed with a symposium, attended by approximately 65 participants, to present and reflect on the training, lessons learned and initiatives being taken forward by participants. It included a roundtable with **Prof. Dr. Melanie Böckmann, Huzeifa Bodal, Prof. Dr. Walter Bruchhausen, Anne Jurema** and **Dr. med. Hans-Friedemann Kinkel** to hear about and explore linkages with other initiatives in the German global health landscape.

"Dominant narratives represent a largely singular voice, which privileges certain modes of knowledge and deems particular experiences as legitimate."
Shehnaz Munshi

Looking forward

Training participants were supported to develop their own ideas and projects related to decolonizing global health research in Germany, which they plan to take forward in the coming months. These include:

- Mapping systematic challenges to advancing decolonisation approach in German research
- Tackling resistance and push back against decolonial approaches in your work and institutions
- Integrating decolonial content into teaching
- Integrating decolonial perspectives and approaches in research project design
- Research project to explore decolonial and equity considerations in German research grants

In addition, the organizing team are working with an illustrator to capture and present key issues from the training. Further outputs will be disseminated through GLOHRA and other channels later this year.

Contact the Organizing Committee at: decolonizing-gh@uni-bielefeld.de.