

Why stopping aid to Africa is important

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The Western world has become accustomed to helping stance whenever they think about Africa. It does not help matters when those that colonized Africa use “guilt” as part of the reason why they must help. The African head has been pinned on to the ground by bullets, artillery fire and bombs of development money from the West. It is time that aid was stopped, to allow Africans to lift their heads and look around them and determine their own destiny.

The West’s key reasons for dropping bombs of development aid on Africans are to ensure that they (Africans) do not scale up the walls and migrate to Europe and the so called developed nations. Others are keen on ensuring the safety of their grand children. And the business types are looking for a healthy market to consume their products. They rob the African person’s humanity and individuality and reduce him/her into some dependant animal; awaiting each day for the master to serve it with food.

Major industrialized countries that include Germany boast of membership that command over 65% of Gross World Product; leadership in global exports; host the largest stock exchanges by market value and also posses the world’s most powerful military hardware. These are economies that thrive on promoting the culture of measurements, knowledge and ingenuity among its people. Unfortunately for Africa; these economies do not find it of strategic interest to give freedom to Africans to exercise similar approach to development – they simply opt to lull African minds using aid money.

Ironically, Africa made up of 53 countries boasts of a population of close to one billion people and over 14% of world’s known oil reserves. Rich nations are currently engaged in a massive land grabbing spree to plant bio fuel crops and food for their people. Immense quantities of sub surface wealth that power industries in the developed economies are shipped out of the continent daily. Why should the West focus on aid to Africa and not give Africans an opportunity to tap into the wealth below their feet and around them to improve their own livelihood? The aid industry attempts to make Africans in the image of the Western world; unfortunately with over 60 years of this experimentation, it is becoming increasingly clear that one cannot export development to other countries. Development is about people.

Development is the ability to interpret/understand the World and creatively/competitively/efficiently respond to challenges that confront humanity in order to increase levels of human comfort on earth. What the aid industry has done is to suspend the African’s ability to seek to understand how the world works and has effectively robbed him/her the ability to creatively respond to the challenges that confront the continent. What the aid industry has done is to put Africans in the Malthusian trap, that is, population growth outstripping food supply. Following Rev. Thomas Malthus arguments of 1798, Prof. Gregory Clark in his book, *“A Farewell to Alms: A Brief*

Economic History of the World,” points at the importance of value addition and industry in order to safeguard any population against this predicament. Aid has kept the African alive, but has failed to have him engage in industry and value addition in order to beat the Malthusian trap hence the projected 300 million faced with starvation on the continent.

If one wants to help Africa, they must start by recognizing that the global market system as currently constituted favors industrialized countries and is not designed to enable Africans to develop their economies. The concept of “aid” that is, rich nations assisting poor nations to develop is based on the wrong premise that one can export development.

To claim that one can aid another society to develop is synonymous to attempting to define the world for another society. If one was to succeed in such an experiment, then the targeted group will have lost its identity and assumed the identity of the “developer” – that is not development, it is domination and slavery.

My recent visit to a farming village in Zambia triggered questions in my mind about the elusive goal of development in Africa. The village resembled my childhood one of 1977 in western Kenya. That was the period where one had to walk through forests, thickets and cross over river Lusumu on tree logs to access Mumias town. Land was plenty and all one needed to do was to scratch the soil and plant. Whenever soil fertility failed, all one needed to do is to move to another piece of land.

Over 30 years later, my village is now 4 kilometers away to the closest tarmac road, electricity is a 100 meters away, it is surrounded by 6 primary schools, 3 high schools, a series of churches and one mosque. The route I used to trek to Mumias over 20 kilometers away is now a feeder road complete with a bridge; one can now access Mumias town using (*boda boda*) motorized and human powered bicycles. Hundreds of my village mates have accessed education and speak “good English.” The use of a hand held hoe can no longer guarantee food security in my village. We are running out of land.

Sons and daughters seek employment in order to subsidize the economy of my village. The majority end up in Nairobi’s Kibera slum to work as casual laborers in construction sites, industrial area manual jobs, security guards and house helps. Some end up working in tea estates, flower and vegetable farms whose products are mainly for export. Those who remain at home will work as laborers in Mumias Sugar Cane out-growers outfit either as cane cutters, weeding and tractor drivers. The highly educated type are high school professors, salesmen, priests, lawyers, think-tank type like myself whose principal activity seems to inadvertently perpetuate the global economic system!

While in Zambia, driving past grass thatched huts I found myself exclaiming prophetically to my hosts that in thirty or so years to come; they will have a scenario similar to our village. Will they have developed? In my village, one is confronted by three things: high crime rate; over 100 idle youth by the roadside who demand for money and a growing sense of disillusionment about the education system. High unemployment rates in my village make the economic model currently being pursued akin to the

infamous pyramid scheme on the verge of collapsing. That is, only those who joined the scheme earlier benefitted, and late comers loose out!

A similar predicament faced in my village is played out nationally in Kenya where marauding youth popularly referred to as *mungiki* violently impose own taxation system in order to earn a livelihood. Kenya is now faced with a scenario whereby the country dreads its own children. Kenya mirrors Africa in its population structure that has close to 65% aged below 25. Yet again, if one visited Nairobi, the capital city, he/she will be impressed by the growing city's skyline and good highways. A peep at the city's backyard will reveal a sprawling shanty that is home to over 800,000 people living in deplorable conditions.

The current global market system is designed to create labor and simply increase "purchasing power" of under developed nations in favor of industrialized economies. The youth in my village are idle precisely because the education system that was designed to get labor out of them has not adjusted to the new job market requirement. Over 45 years of independent Africa, school graduates are yet to be prepared to interpret and understand the world around them in order to efficiently interact and produce products that enhance human comfort.

What current development model has done is to sustain Africans on the "scratch the soil" level while they (industrialized economies) import raw materials and add value to them. Adding value to African raw materials enables importing countries to grow their industries, financial and knowledge sectors – the African is left with a hoe in hand scratching the soils for minerals and crop. Please note that even chicken in Western Kenya scratch the soil... so little ingenuity is needed in the scratch the soil model! Any genuine individual and organization keen to help Africans must help create room for them (Africans) to lift their heads up amid the clutter of aid artillery and bombs and start taking leadership roles in improving the continent's economy and institutional structures.

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