

Foreign Aid for Africa's Development and the Real Hope It Portends: A Philosophical Consideration

Akaninyene Pius Ekpe, MSP

On May 28, 2013, the billionaire and philanthropist Mr. Bill Gates attended a Q&A session at the University of New South Wales.¹ During the session, according to Tarik Kasbaoui and Abdelhamid Nechad, a lady asked Bill Gates about Dambisa Moyo's book: *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How There is Another Way for Africa*. The lady drew the attention of Gates to the striking statement by Moyo that more and more aid to Africa did not alleviate poverty over the course of the years, instead more aid continued to cripple the economy and governments kept asking for more aid.² In the book, Moyo maintains that a cycle of aid giving has resulted in nothing productive. In fact, Kasbaoui and Nechad made it clear, based on Moyo's point, that aid has not been used to solve immediate problems and the money is not being used to make businesses sustainable in Africa. When this point was put to Gates, he stunningly responded that "Books like that are promoting evil."³ Why he said so was immediately clear to Kasbaoui and Nechad. However, they interpreted Gates' response as another belief that showcases aid as humane, virtuous and helpful to the global poor.

In Kasbaoui and Nechad's view, Gates' position on 'anti-aid literature' is equivalent to something evil. Thus based on the whole account of the Q&A session with Bill Gates, Kasbaoui and Nechad reckon that critical books on aid seem to make the issue of assistance to poor countries much talked about. It is on this note that this article attempts to examine the written truth about foreign aid in connection with Africa's development as espoused in some

¹ Tarik Kasbaoui and Abdelhamid Nechad, "Spectrum of Aid and the Illusion of a Marshall Plan for Africa," in *Economic and Social Development: 29th International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development*, ed. Mirosław Przygoda, Lana Lovrencic Butkovic, Elzbieta Szymanska (Rabat, May 10-11, 2018), 133-144 at 133.

² See Ibid.

³ Ibid.

significant scholarly works. This article seeks to reconsider reasoned theoretical arguments on whether or not aid is still necessary for African development. This contribution pays attention to some pertinent questions confronting African states today: Why are African states still receiving foreign aid when it is reckoned that billions of U.S. dollars have been plunged into Africa since independence? Is it possible to redesign aid to strike at the root of poverty in many African states? What are ways to effectively deliver aid such that African institutions of governance can be transformed into agents of development? How really can underdevelopment in African states be addressed meaningfully? My major concern and emphasis will be on whether it makes sense for African states to continue to receive aid and what real hope does it portend. To ascertain this, I would like to review views regarding the impacts of foreign aid in Africa's development.

Understanding Foreign Aid

How can one understand 'foreign aid'? Zhangxi Cheng and Ian Taylor suggest that foreign aid is described according to the perspective it is utilised. For them, foreign aid is primarily broken in two categories: Project Aid and Programme Aid.⁴ While project aid is directed to supplement budget for particular development in recipient countries, programme aid is the assistance giving to support particular development plans in recipient countries. Cheng and Taylor view programme aid as beneficial for import allocations, budget subsidies, allowances for balance of payments, debt repayment and regional development planning. However, their assessment of programme aid places it outside building or organizing specific projects. Be that as it may, the most common categories for foreign aid are industrial aid and agricultural aid.⁵ Two institutions reveal the beginnings of foreign aid to needy countries. They are: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These institutions are often called the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) because they were created just after the end of World War II at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire and their

⁴ Zhangxi Cheng and Ian Taylor, *China's Aid to Africa: Does Friendship Really Matter?* 1st ed. (London: Taylor & Francis Group Ltd, 2017), chapter 1.
⁵ Ibid.

objective was to assist member countries in reconstructing their economies and their economic development after the war.⁶

Despite the noble intention behind the creation of the BWIs and their objectives, foreign aid has always been greeted with mixed feelings and reckoned to have mixed impacts. The editorial of *The Guardian* of June 14, 2011 believes that aid “can harm as well as help development” and that it “takes the focus away from other more important things rich countries should be doing to spur development.”⁷ According to the editorial, aid-giving is not actually a great act of generosity. Rather, it “buys things donors want (such as political support and economic advantage, whether directly for donor businesses or indirectly through policy change).”⁸

Negative views regarding Foreign Aid for Africa's Development

The impacts of foreign aid in the development or underdevelopment of African states has been a subject of intense discussion and debate. In his book, *Foreign Aid and the Future of Africa*, Kenneth Kalu observes that Africa has received more aid than any other region of the world. That even with aid, Africa remains neck-deep in poverty. In fact, Kalu's arguments for the mixed impacts of foreign aid are based on case studies of Angola, Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Nigeria.⁹ African states really do rely on foreign aid for survival. Without foreign aid, it would seem that most African states would necessarily be underdeveloped or less developed. However, the earnest desire in scholarly works is to establish what real hope is there for African states in the light of foreign aid.

Despite fifty (50) years of foreign aid to African states, there is compelling proof that they are still weighed down by the problems

⁶ See Koichi Sakamoto, *Japan and China: A Contest in Aid to Sub-Saharan Africa* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Ltd, 2018), 2.

⁷ Jonathan Glennie, “Giving aid to poor countries is hardly a great act of generosity” *The Guardian* UK Edition, June 14, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/jun/14/aid-is-hardly-an-act-of-great-generosity-effectiveness> (accessed December 23, 2018).

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Kenneth Kalu, *Foreign Aid and the Future of Africa* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 1-21.

of extreme poverty, over-population, under-education, environmental degradation, disease, civil disorder, and crumbling public infrastructures. According to Stephanie Itimi, some scholars have evaluated the nuances of foreign aid and development in Africa. Her conclusion suggests that foreign aid is a form of neo-colonialism because the Highly Developed Countries (HDCs) can exploit Least Developed Countries (LDCs) under the cloak of aid.¹⁰ From Itimi's analyses of theories in this regard, one of the highlights is that the purpose of aid is to help LDCs adopt a Western model of industrialisation so that economic development and growth can be actualised. Discerning from Itimi's view just pointed, aid as a problem in Africa can be seen from its purpose. That is, giving of aid by donor countries fails to consider the existing economic model within African states. This is the failure to understand what measures and policies would be suitable for development on the platform of aid.

Examples abound on aid to African countries. For example, Itimi hints that British aid to Botswana was like a means of exploitation because the British gave aid to Botswana under the condition that it would trade 60% of its diamonds to the UK.¹¹ For Itimi, aid and the ideology of neo-liberalism has been detrimental to African states. Although, it could be claimed by donor countries to Africa that there are cases in which aid has propelled development, for instance, China's aid to the DRC. Other examples highlight many nuances that exist with foreign aid. At this juncture, it might be necessary to note Itimi's reference to the use of Chinese aid for political means such as the ostracisation of Taiwan; and for economic interests such as employing its citizen as labours and insisting on the use of their domestically produced equipments.¹²

Other poor impacts of foreign aid on African states would include even the desire by donor countries to force poorer countries to submit to their dictates. This may sound incredible, but come to think of it: donor aid has also emerged as a symbol of dependency.

¹⁰ See Stephanie Itimi, "Is Foreign Aid a Facilitator of Neo-Colonialism in Africa?", https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327847826_Is_Foreign_Aid_a_facilitator_of_Neo-Colonialism_in_Africa (accessed May 5, 2019).

¹¹ See *Ibid.*

In fact, Iai Kabonga believes "donor aid has emerged as a nuanced form of dependency on western countries."¹³ Such is the distrust for donor aid that Kabonga believes it is no "exaggeration that donor money that is being extended to Third World countries, has created more employment, demand for goods and services in richer countries than in poorer countries, thus perpetuating underdevelopment in the latter."¹⁴ From this viewpoint, receiving aid becomes a burden on LDCs that unknowingly service self-interests of donor countries. Do African states know this? If they do, are they suspicious of the aid they receive?

While arguing based on suspicion of donor aid, Kabonga insists that dependency on donor aid is an issue still relevant in today's world. Proponents of the dependency theory have argued that dependency on aid has impoverished developing countries. With emphasis, Kabonga holds that there is an affinity between donor aid and dependency such that any argument that evaluates the affinity between donor aid and dependency as redundant is myopic and preposterous in a number of ways.¹⁵ With this strong view of suspicion of donor aid by Kabonga, an African would readily view aid as the embodiment of the dependency of African countries on Western nations. Thus it would be that African states are compounding their problems since they have to look up to Western nations for solution to their multifarious problems. With these negative views regarding foreign aid for Africa's development, is there still a reason African states should continue to receive aid?

What Real Hope does Foreign Aid Portends for Africa's development?

Part of the new approach to Africa's development in the light of foreign aid is the issue of sovereignty. In other words, in the politics of aid, sovereignty should be reasserted in the negotiation for aid.¹⁶ This is clearly an issue of practical judgement. I venture to refer to

¹³ Iai Kabonga, "Dependency Theory and Donor Aid: A Critical Analysis," *Journal of Development Studies* 46, no. 2 (August 2017): 1-11, at 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶ William Brown, "Sovereignty Matters: Africa, Donors and the Aid relationship," *African Affairs* 112 (April 2013), 262-282, <https://academic.oup.com/afraf/article/112/447/262/79194> (accessed May 4, 2019).

Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* that aims to establish the governing principles of reflective judgments. For Kant, judgments have either reflective or determinative powers. That is, different people may determine different judgments depending on their contingent experiences. This is Kant's concern about interest in contingent experiences such that when one person loves the tone of wind instruments, another that of stringed instruments, Kant would refer to these as personal preferences which cannot be universalised. Thus, Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* is significant for both donor countries and African states. The lesson is the aim to be disinterested, that is, "if one is acting only according to one's inclinations, one is not acting morally."¹⁷ Simply put, choosing to uphold the moral law and believing one is doing so in the right spirit without guarding against egoism is tantamount to saying that "we can never, even by the most strenuous self-examination, get entirely behind our covert incentives."¹⁸ Donor countries and African states should endeavour to allow moral law interpret the situation in Africa for them. Both parties as moral subjects must transcend their motive of whatever kind and be free to discuss Africa's progress.

I see in Robert Calderisi book, *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn't Working* real hope that foreign aid portend for Africa's development. His ten ways of changing Africa make a lot of sense if donor countries and African states work for real change to Africa's development. The ten ways are: 1. introduce mechanism for tracing and recovering public funds; 2. require all heads of state, ministers, and senior officials to open their bank accounts to public scrutiny; 3. cut direct aid to individual countries in half; 4. focus direct aid on four to five countries that are serious about reducing poverty; 5. require all countries to hold internationally-supervised elections; 6. promote other aspects of democracy, including a free press and an independent judiciary; 7. supervise the running of Africa's schools and HIV/Aids programmes; 8. establish citizen review groups to oversee government policy and aid agreements; 9.

¹⁷ Paul Daniels, "Kant on the Beautiful: The Interest in Disinterestedness," 202, https://www.academia.edu/5054217/Kant_on_the_Beautiful_The_Interest_in_Disinterestedness (accessed May 5, 2019).
¹⁸ Ibid.

put more emphasis on infrastructure and regional links, and 10. merge the World Bank, IMF and United Nations Development programme.¹⁹ For Calderisi, any of these proposals would contribute to changing the human environment of Africa. Reading the proposals, the first question that may come to mind is: who are those to implement these proposals? It is still the donor countries. According to a Nigerian adage, they have the knife and also the yam. The proposals come across as a lecture to African states on what they (donor countries) can do to facilitate development in Africa. On a second thought, numbers 1, 5, 6 and 8 seem operational in Nigeria. Are they yielding fruits? Or should Nigerians comfort themselves believing the dividends of democracy are materialising slowly? Calderisi's encouraging words about the African spirit as strong is commendable; but as he puts it, it could simply be the stubbornness for survival. Well, it is time for African states to break the cycle of terror, poverty, and mediocrity that keeps us subdued.²⁰

As regards Africa's development, Dambisa Moyo, in her book, *Dead Aid*, believes "there is more (much more) that needs to be done to undo the ills that have gone before, to rectify what has been an unmitigated disaster, and to get Africa onto a solid economic footing."²¹ Moyo insists that Africans need to eliminate aid for an effective development. This is a sharp critique of dependence on aid because it has not worked. Moyo challenges Africans to desire and push themselves for "a greater degree of innovation, and a generous dose of honesty about what works and what does not as far as development is concerned."²² There is no reason anymore for self-doubt. Let Africans heed Moyo's call for a new level of consciousness; and if I may add, more self-consciousness in planning to make development happen. There are certainly powerful groups within Africa that may be opposing all movements

¹⁹ See Robert Calderisi, *The Trouble with Africa: Why Foreign Aid Isn't Working* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

²⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 230.

²¹ Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How There is Another Way for Africa* (London; New York, NY: Allen Lane, 2009), 153.

²² *Ibid.*, 154.

²³ Mogobe B. Ramose, "The Struggle for Reason in Africa," in *The African Philosophy Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 1-8.

and plans to achieve change. This admonition, notwithstanding, might constitute a problem. Yet, Africans should brace up and stop feeling ill-prepared to help themselves. Why should donor countries continue to think that Africans have defied all attempts to be helped and to help themselves with aid? At this juncture, I think being decisive about change is not enough. Real hope also lies in urgently promoting more critical reasoning as regards Africans' view of aid. On this note, the next and final section offers a thought-pattern for an ethical view of aid for Africa's development.

An Ethical Framework for Reasoning on Aid

Mogobe B. Ramose's "The Struggle for Reason in Africa,"²³ challenged me to reflect on the fact that discourses on Africa have been dominated by non-Africans. It should not continue to be so. Defining the meaning of truth and experience as it affects our opportunities for development in Africa ought to our own right.²⁴ No doubt, African scholars often call for more African discourse about Africa. They proffer ongoing pertinent questions on issues about Africa. Most of their conclusions are still reasonable. At this time in Africa's history, most African scholars resist views that imply that most African culture and philosophical perspectives are developing in isolation.²⁵ In fact, African scholars are open to critical dialogue with other traditions, particularly Western philosophical views about the African worldview and the state of Africa. With this in mind, aid is still considered by most African scholars as a means of exploitation. Ali A. Mazrui's pertinent question in his article "Neo-dependency and Africa's Fragmentation,"²⁶ remains a significant question for Africans. He asks: "how can Africa overcome her economic weakness without first going through the stage of economic dependence on others?"²⁷ This is a dilemma that generations would contend with if Africans and their leaders do nothing to get themselves out of the dependency on foreign aid. So

²³ Ibid., 1.

²⁴ Cf. Lebisa J. Teflo and Abraham P. J. Roux, "Themes in African Metaphysics," *The African Philosophy Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 161-174 at 173.

²⁵ Ali A. Mazrui, "Neo-dependency and Africa's Fragmentation," in *The African Philosophy Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 528-545.

²⁶ Ibid., 541.

how can Africans think of getting themselves out of the 'suffocating' dependency on foreign aid? What kind of thought-pattern should we adopt?

I offer forthwith a pattern of reasoning here to guide thought regarding aid in Africa. In the first place, the relations between rich and poor countries have often been dictated by search for profits. Musambi M. Ya-mona, in his "Primacy of the Ethical Order over the Economic Order: Reflections for an Ethical Economy,"³¹ refers to this as a problem with implications that have not rudely woken up African leaders. Perhaps, African leaders do know about the costs and burden of dependence on foreign aid. Probably they should hope and call on humanity's conscience. Will this be enough? We can ponder on Ya-mona's challenge to Africans and developed economies to consider seriously "universal collaboration."³² It is not as if what he refers to as "universal collaboration" is not happening. After all, there are international organisations that are working for an in-depth understanding of conscience as it concerns the equality of all people. What is paramount to note in Ya-mona's insightful opinion is that "the strong call for universal collaboration must now become a true moral duty."³³ Ya-mona enjoins rich countries to avoid the rule of domination as the guiding principle of their relations with the Third World because when they operate in this regard, they "commit immoral acts along with the political leaders of the poor countries under their control."³⁴ His reason for such categorical position is that both transgress the duty of universal co-participation and collaboration based on justice. To this extent, he declares all acts which tend to use aid as an ideological weapon as immoral.³⁵

Considering Ya-mona's position, foreign aid, if necessary, must be in terms appropriate to Africa's needs for modernisation. As wonderful as this view of Ya-mona is, Africans should look inwards

³¹ Musambi M. Ya-mona, "Primacy of the Ethical Order over the Economic Order: Reflections for an Ethical Economy," in *The African Philosophy Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 331-342.

³² *Ibid.*, 337.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 338.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

too. Within Africa, there is the growth of commerce and industry, including the industry of modern politics. With this in mind, the proposal for the need for a practice of mutual aid among African countries should be a welcome development. This too can help countries looking up to developed countries most times in need. Moreover, Africans must task their governments as regards conscious practicable choices on the use of resources within the exigencies of urbanisation and commercialisation. The ideology of mutual aid, pointed out in Kwesi Wiredu, "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture," can be adopted by African leaders in a spirit of cooperation.³³ This neighbourhood solidarity could be channelled into a strong movement of modern cooperation among African countries. On the international level, strong mutual support amongst African countries could cause developed countries to feel rebuffed when they perceive a strong resistance to aid initiative on their part. Should Africans collect their aid-package if they really present the need to help? It is time Africans insist that Western countries heed the guiding reasoning of ethical economics, strongly bearing on their conscience: *fundamental values of justice, love and solidarity as precise precepts to start with in the dispensation of aid*. This ethical guide need to have and operate a framework of conscious reasoning based on humane sensitivities.

Conclusion

Foreign aid, as articulated in this contribution, has been a means for the underdevelopment of Africans because it has served the interests of the donor countries more. Noble, as it seems, one can argue that at this stage in the history of Africa, the billions of dollars poured into Africa for development should bring Africa out of the terrible poverty confronting it. Yet, all the blame does not go to aid donors. After all, African leaders collect it when they are offered. This article has argued that Africans (including our leaders) should be wary and careful about aid, while intensifying the effort of educating ourselves on the fundamental values of justice, love and solidarity as precise precepts starting with the dispensation of aid. Above all, the generality of Africans must arouse their thought pattern with critical questions about Africa's development.

³³ Kwesi Wiredu, "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture," in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1969, 7, 1, 1-20.