

How Not to Develop Africa (à la Curtis Keim)

History of Development Efforts:

1. authoritarian help – (c. 1960 – mid-1980s)

Here Keim describes the period right after independence in African countries (1960s-70s) when people thought that the way to develop was through industrialization – building factories and heavy industries like steel mills and other emblems of "modern" industrialized countries. Some countries wanted to follow a socialist model of development and their governments took over existing industries. Such nationalizing of enterprises often meant over time that they were less well run.

This was the period of the Cold War, and African leaders could (and did) play the West against the Soviet bloc to get aid, weapons and other goods. Some leaders proved to be corrupt and not accountable to their people, though there was still economic growth in Africa – until the oil crisis of 1973 raised the costs of all economic activity, which had an enormous negative impact on African economies.

Meanwhile African countries, which had been controlled by the colonial powers (France, Britain, Belgium and Portugal), continued all the social welfare benefits of their European masters: unemployment protection, forms of social security, government-funded health care, support for schools, allowances for children of government workers, generous pensions for government workers, etc. Continuing to pay for these services was a huge expense that African governments met by borrowing from western banks.

2. market help – (1980s to present)

By the 1980s, with prices of tropical cash crops like cocoa, coffee, and peanuts falling, and with failed industries unable to function, many African countries went into very serious economic decline. The World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) told African countries that they could not continue to borrow to meet routine operating expenses. Taxes would have to be raised and/or levels of spending would have to be cut. Markets had to be opened to outside goods that African countries had formerly taxed through tariffs. Payments on national debts had to be regular. Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) were negotiated with governments that were effectively bankrupt, unable to pay even government employees without further loans and therefore willing to accept SAPs in order to continue to function. Corruption was reduced and more accountability was imposed on governments. Meanwhile, the cutting of government services to save money – especially schools and health services -- hurt African countries' abilities to produce populations able to help themselves. Over time, SAPs became synonymous with suffering and reduced opportunity.

3. Conversion help
4. Gift-giving help
5. Participatory help

The attitudes and directions of development assistance (numbers 3, 4, 5) co-existed with the authoritarian and market forms of development all through the period since independence in the 1960s.

Conversion help refers to the idea that Africans should be encouraged to adopt western lifestyle values similar to those common in western industrialized countries. The new perspectives, it was assumed, would motivate Africans to transform their countries into "modern" westernized societies.

Gift-giving is associated with foreign aid, with the funding of projects of various kinds. Keim criticizes gifts with strings attached that require African nations to adopt policies they might not otherwise wish to adopt, or that are designed to meet needs that those nations might not consider to be a high priority.

Participatory help refers to relatively small projects in local areas in which local people participate. In principle participatory help involves local people deciding what project will be undertaken. Keim believes that participation is essential, though he says that often only lip-service is paid toward consulting local people on their needs and desires.

Keim's Other Alternatives – How to Help

1. Work in the US for Africa
 - Try to shape US government policies toward Africa
 - Work to be sure American corporations work fairly in Africa
 - Study and learn about Africa
 - Support NGOs really doing participatory development

A few Issues:

- Debt relief for Africa
- Farm subsidies in western nations
- Fair prices for cash crops
- Brain drain to western nations
- Immigration policies of western nations