

International Development Committee inquiry into the Philosophy and Culture of Aid

Sub-inquiry: Racism in the aid sector

Written evidence submitted by Brian Drummond

Summary

I briefly note, on this page, responses to six of the questions asked in the sub-inquiry. The following pages give relevant quotes from the literature relating to these topics. The cited sources are listed at the end. Much of my response last month (to the Committee's previous call for evidence in this inquiry) is also relevant to the questions asked in this sub-inquiry, but none of that material is repeated in this submission.

1. **Structure of the aid sector**

What historical processes have led to the global north dominating the international aid sector?

- 1.1 The north imposed production and trade patterns on the south under colonialism, which enriched the north and impoverished the south. The north has continued to impose these south-impoverishing trade patterns in the post-colonial period.

What are the practical implications of the concentration of funding and resources in the global north?

- 1.2 Northern-donor-driven aid is not well matched to the needs of southern recipients. It also undermines both good governance by southern governments and the political agency of southern populations.

2. **Racism in the aid sector**

Why do we need to have a discussion about racism in the aid sector?

- 2.1 Aid masks the north's deliberate perpetuation of structural differences in power between north and south, and implicitly devalues and disrespects the south.

What are the practical implications of racism in the aid sector?

- 2.2 In practice, some aspects of aid's implicit devaluation and disrespect of the south become explicit.

How does the language used by aid actors relate to discussions around racism and power dynamics?

- 2.3 The term "aid" itself is inappropriate in the context of the structural injustice imposed by the powerful north on the south.

- 2.4 "Development" is an intrinsically inappropriate concept which ignores the northern source of the south's problems, and denies the south its right to chart its future.

What steps should the UK Government take to address racism in the aid sector?

- 2.5 The UK should work: to end the discrimination between north and south on agricultural subsidies; to reform international law so that it effectively governs the right to food; and to reform WTO, IMF and World Bank processes to allow fair and effective southern participation.

1. **Structure of the aid sector**

What historical processes have led to the global north dominating the international aid sector?

- 1.1 The north imposed production and trade patterns on the south under colonialism which enriched the north and impoverished the south. The north has continued to impose these south-impoverishing trade patterns in the post-colonial period.

“As a consequence of the plantation-based production and trade patterns imposed under colonialism, most developing countries entered the world economy as producers of natural resources and consumers of imported manufactured goods. Specialization in agricultural exports is economically disadvantageous due to the volatility of world market agricultural prices”. [6]

“the term imposition (or its synonyms) remains the key word when discerning African leaders and scholars describe the African continent's relationship to international institutions or to the North. ... Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo ... noted: ‘when we [Africans] thought we had regained control of our destiny, and when we believed that we had earned our rights to join the rest of the world as equal partners and discuss mutual co-operation on basis of equitability, we discovered that the position of our continent in the world order had been disadvantageously fixed and predetermined.’” [11]

“The root cause of food insecurity in the Global South is the imposition through trade, aid, and financial institutions of an agricultural development model that undermines rural livelihoods ... by dumping agricultural commodities on world markets at prices below the cost of production. The devastating surges of cheap imported food ... discourag[ed] food production in developing nations. ... In the course of a few decades, net food-exporting developing countries were transformed into net food importers as a consequence of ... structural adjustment programs, the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, and ... free trade agreements.” [5]

What are the practical implications of the concentration of funding and resources in the global north?

- 1.2 Northern-donor-driven aid is not well matched to the needs of southern recipients. It also undermines both good governance by southern governments and the political agency of southern populations.

“The short-term political and strategic interests of donors have always been a major determinant of the allocation of official aid ... the amount of aid given by official aid donors is characterized by its unpredictability and volatility, which makes it more difficult for recipients to plan to use such aid effectively.” [13]

“Aid ... is too unpredictable, too loaded with political, economic and social conditionality, and much too dependent on the strategic interests of the donor countries to be a reliable source of financing for critical areas of public expenditure such as the provision of basic services.” [16]

“EU budget support appears to ... compensate the recipient regime for lost

tariff revenues upon the implementation of free market reforms. Nevertheless, by facilitating premature liberalisation, it damages the economic interests of local industrial producers and agricultural smallholders. ... a collective (neo-)colonial influence seems to be exerted ... as EU donors ... entrench donor norms of free market liberalisation. ... such neo-colonial relations underscore the paradox of 'poverty reduction' budget support — as regressive liberalisation closes down genuine avenues for poverty alleviation.” [8]

“EU trade liberalisation agendas [are] embodied in the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) ... Brexit will ... augur greater competition between the UK and the EU-27 in what can accurately be deemed a 'new scramble for Eurafrica'. Already the UK government ... has expressed clear intentions to replicate the EPAs. ... Eurafrican ideology ... lies at the heart of the neo-colonial agendas of the UK and the EU-27 in their trade and aid dealings with former colonies.” [9]

“donor funds are channelled to NGOs. ... The so-called NGO activity has diverted the energy of the people from demanding structural reforms”. [2]

“even as the international community takes responsibility for global poverty ..., it is not accountable for actions taken in the name of that duty ... even as that sphere of action expands, in ways which often work against the interests of the world's poorest people.” [12]

2. Racism in the aid sector

Why do we need to have a discussion about racism in the aid sector?

2.1 Aid masks the north's deliberate perpetuation of structural differences in power between north and south, and implicitly devalues and disrespects the south.

“While ... notions about race have been shifted across time and location, ... race as function of power has since eighteenth century 'become a dominant lens through which humans see and understand themselves'.” [4]

“while there has been an active struggle against colonialism and apartheid, poverty dehumanizes half the planet to a chorus of utter indifference.” [43]

“international agencies rarely fund experts from Africa, Asia and Latin America to advise the British voluntary sector on their national development work. The idea that British NGOs might learn from people from those regions is novel to many and unconvincing to some. This has led to a failure on the part of most development workers to recognise the ability of 'recipients' of aid to identify the issues that concern them and to manage their own resources ... a new form of professionalism ... fails to acknowledge its cultural specificity or location. It constructs homogenising discourses of, for example, gender and development or project planning, that masquerade as universal but are, in fact, particularly Western.” [7]

“the emergence of participatory approaches to development ... has ironically reinforced the centrality of Western knowledge and expertise. ... participatory development has become increasingly professionalised through training manuals and skills workshops whereby only those trained in the preferred methods and techniques are acknowledged as authorised facilitators. Thus, the power and authority of the ‘outsider’ or the facilitator are confirmed.” [7]

“Policy is set elsewhere by those who hold the purse strings while, we the local counter-parts, as we are called, ... are simply paid juniors ... of Western consultants paid by the West... In this game of euphemisms, Western paymasters are called development partners; ... development work is dutifully executed by a Western team leader called ‘development practitioner’.” [14]

What are the practical implications of racism in the aid sector?

- 2.2 In practice, some aspects of aid’s implicit devaluation and disrespect of the south become explicit.

“There are ... potential adverse sociocultural impacts when rich foreigners run projects in poor communities. ... for the poor, there may be the simple daily frustration of seeing rich foreigners maintain a lifestyle (expensive vehicles, leisure and good food, travel abroad) that they and their families will never attain.” [19]

“Despite genuine efforts at inclusiveness and antiracism by [aid] organizations ... there is an entrenched discrimination in the value attached to international (mostly Western) and national staff. This is most clearly seen in the decisions made regarding who is evacuated in a crisis and who is left behind; whose death, injury, or kidnapping makes for an institutional crisis, and whose doesn’t.” [3]

How does the language used by aid actors relate to discussions around racism and power dynamics?

- 2.3 The term “aid” itself is inappropriate in the context of the structural injustice imposed by the powerful north on the south.

“Those who have profited from unjust structures have no right to their wealth. If they return it to those who have been deprived, they are in effect returning stolen goods to their owners. ... charitable giving can protect structural injustice ... donors ... deceive themselves about the injustice they exploit. ‘Look how generous we are!’ they say to themselves, while continuing to extract wealth unjustly from others.” [20]

“The ... problem of poverty is ... that many people do not have what is rightfully theirs, ... The effort to eradicate poverty should focus less on aid and more on institutions, policies, and structural constraints.” [10]

“Aid is ... a form of discourse that is disempowering to developing countries looking to escape the poverty trap.” [16]

2.4 “Development” is an intrinsically inappropriate concept which ignores the northern source of the south’s problems, and denies the south its right to chart its future.

“ ‘... for two-thirds of the people on earth, ... the word ‘development’ ... is a reminder of ... an undesirable, undignified condition. To escape from it, they need to be enslaved to others’ experiences and dreams [Wolfgang Sachs]’. ... development aid can entrench colonial forms. Aid is ultimately a problematic construct that should be replaced with solidarity.” [1]

“the institutionalised discourse of development repeatedly locates the causes of poverty only in local and present causes. ... this ... concentrates measures to address it in projects overwhelmingly directed at the transformation of the ‘developing’ society”. [12]

“the discourse of ‘development’ ... limits our thinking and action on the question of global justice and therefore should be abandoned. ... ‘development’ ... is based on the assumptions that there is just one vision of a good society and that social change occurs everywhere along very similar patterns.” [21]

“Development is predicated on the assumption that some people and places are more developed than others and therefore those who are ‘developed’ have the knowledge and expertise to help those who are not. ... forms of expertise ... are developed in part by reasserting (colonial) dichotomies that distinguish between the ‘modern’ and the ‘traditional’, whereby the ‘traditional’ culture, forms of social organisation, production and beliefs ... are seen as outmoded and in need of being succeeded by more ‘modern’, inevitably Western, attitudes and practices”. [7]

“The mantra of the chant ‘Make Poverty History’ is supposed to make us forget not only the history of poverty and the political economy of imperialist pillage of our continent but, and this is even more crucial, it is meant to demean our national liberation struggles. ... economic development ... requires a political decision.” [15]

What steps should the UK take to address racism in the aid sector?

2.5 The UK should work: to end the discrimination between north and south on agricultural subsidies; to reform international law so that it effectively governs the right to food; and to reform WTO, IMF and World Bank processes to allow fair and effective southern participation.

“Rich-country governments have ... inconsistencies in providing aid to help reduce if not eradicate poverty while at the same time pursuing policies the effects of which undermine that very effort. Examples include ... agricultural policies”. [13]

“Trade in agriculture is of profound significance for human rights in developing countries, many of whom depend on agriculture for their livelihood and subsistence. ... subsidies by industrialized countries ... result in falling prices and job insecurity in developing countries, and eventually become a matter of survival”. [18]

“What is required ... is a fundamental reorientation of policy at the national and international levels toward targeted and thoughtful regulatory strategies designed to respect, protect and fulfill the human right to food ... a holistic re-conceptualization of international law that integrates human rights, environmental protection, and trade and investment law rather than relegating them to separate spheres.” [6]

“the ... WTO trade ... regime ... is imbalanced. The poor nations are gaining much less compared to what they lose in the present trade arrangement. Due to arrangements such as TRIPS, poor countries are increasingly incapable of building competitiveness and balancing out their trade. ... unfair trading practices ... limit the free flow of goods from developing countries to the developed world, when goods from the developed world freely move into the less developed world.” [17]

“there is a need to establish international negotiating and decision-making processes that allow the meaningful participation of third world states. ... within ... the WTO ... undemocratic processes and measures are being used to get third world countries to sign on the dotted line. ... there is an urgent need to democratize the weighted decision-making process in the IMF and the World Bank”. [2]

“development in low-income countries requires ... the reform of the international economic system.” [16]

“trade-distorting agricultural subsidies ha[ve] made an important negative contribution to the continuing poverty of far too many Africans. ... agriculture remains central to the economic survival of most African peoples. ... countries of the North cannot continue to maintain these kinds of subsidy”. [11]

“There is ... extensive evidence to show ... that prevailing international rules, systems, structures, and processes impede poverty reduction within and across countries, and thus that these problems need to be addressed. ... What is required is ... to challenge and alter the core problems of the prevailing global system”. [13]

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My background and my reason for submitting evidence: Since 2011 I been independently researching international law, international relations and climate change. Several findings from my research are directly relevant to this inquiry.