

Submission to the Sub-Inquiry on the Philosophy of Aid
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Who I am

I am a CEO and long-standing senior manager in the charitable sector of international development. Since 1992 I have worked in international development not-for-profits: Scottish European Aid, Mercy Corps, SCIAF, Mary's Meals, EMMS International and Thrive. I lived and worked in Ethiopia from 2006 to 2008.

I have an MA in Russian and French (1985, University of Aberdeen), an MSc in Social and Public Policy (2000, University of Edinburgh) and a PhD comparing development discourse of the West and Russia (2017, University of Edinburgh). I studied at Leningrad University in the USSR from 1982 to 1983 on a British Council scholarship, and taught English in China from 1986 to 1987, employed by the Chinese government. From 1989 to 1992 I managed conversions of software into Russian and East European languages, and travelled frequently to Russia for work and holidays, while the Eastern bloc was dismantling.

Thus I have experience of international development and of socialist and post-socialist states. I have a Routledge book contract for my PhD thesis plus new research on contemporary Russian media discourse on Africa, aid and development.

Why I am sending you this evidence

Understanding someone else's perspective helps us to understand ourselves better, and shows us a range of possible attitudes to a topic. In my PhD I compared perspectives and attitudes of Russia and the West towards Africa, aid and development, over 100 years.

Russia's perspectives arise from geographical location, changing ideologies, non-colonial history with Africa, Cold War, alternating aid status of recipient and donor, and a historical view of Africa in a tripartite relationship with the West. The West's perspectives arise from our geographical locations, relatively smooth changes in ideologies in the last century, colonial history with Africa, relatively recent and continuous status as donors, and confidence in our high international status. While Western development discourse was evolving to produce a large aid apparatus accompanied by depoliticised discourse on Africa, the USSR's discourse on Africa was political. Soviet public discourse portrayed Africa as needing the USSR's political support in its agitation for freedom from colonialism, and used Africa as a rhetorical proxy to make political points. Soviet discourse also established the USSR's position above Africa in the international hierarchy. Both Russian and Western representations of Africa, development and aid convey Africa as of low status and weak.

Soviet Russian public discourse conveyed the following beliefs which are different from dominant Western public thinking, and which are worthy of consideration:

- freedom is an overriding aspiration of all countries and peoples;
- all countries, including ours, are developing;
- thus although Africa is eternally developing it shares this activity with all countries;
- development is natural;
- there is a weak link between development and aid;
- aid has mainly humanitarian rather than developmental value;
- our country (Russia) and Africa are comparable and in some ways similar; and
- Africa is our (Russia's) friend and ally, for historical reasons.

Comparing different donors' discourses while also valuing Russia's viewpoint as a recent aid recipient have shown me a variety of views. This is why I am sending you evidence.

Fundamentals of aid

- What do you think international aid should be for?

International aid should be for international cooperation for all countries to tackle global problems together. Our global problems demand that we drop rhetoric of culprits and victims, developed and developing, aid and charity, and work together from our different countries to tackle today's biggest problems, because they are existential: climate change, international tensions coupled with nuclear and bio-weapons, and pandemics. Other major problems demanding international cooperation are male entitlement and serious organised crime.

- Is international aid effective at reducing poverty?

Good aid certainly reduces poverty in the short term for the people whom it targets, but it doesn't benefit everyone, it may distort the delivery of services by government, and it distorts the politics of recipient countries. For example, if donors fund HIV prevention, host governments' policies on HIV prevention are driven more by donors than by the media and electorate, and governments may develop expertise in ensuring that donors pay for HIV prevention. Indeed, not paying for the most urgent needs is one means of persuading some donors to do so. In some elections, politicians may aim to appeal to the electorate with their ability to win donor funds. Such outcomes may make countries appear dependent on aid, but the main problem is political distortion, in which the electorate and media are not keeping government in check, and government may commit crimes (called corruption if it happens in an aid recipient country).

Of course, poverty may reduce without aid, as in Asia in recent decades.

- How should the rules and norms of international aid be set?

Aid is an expression of hierarchy, whether a conscious expression or not. Giving a gift beyond the recipient's capacity to reciprocate may wound (Mauss, 1950), but recipient countries also hold power in accepting or threatening to accept funds from competing countries (e.g. from the USA and from China). We can learn from recipient countries turned donor countries, as their donorship is informed by their recipient-ship, but once they have become donors, they too donate in part to position themselves in the international hierarchy.

We should stop talking of aid, and instead talk of international cooperation to solve global problems, because these are our problems too. Donors must monitor expenditure of their money, and so hierarchy must remain, but we must start to see all countries, including our own, as needing development and improvement in human rights, and treat this as one endeavour, living by the universality principle of the SDGs. Since money must pass between countries in order to achieve such joint working, all countries need comparable standards of regulation of government and companies, so that theft, tax avoidance and corruption are equally unlikely in all countries.

- Who decides what success looks like and how do we measure it?

Each country's national statistical service should measure progress, and peer review other countries' statistical services and progress. Achieving the SDGs in all countries should be the measure of success, with emphasis on the three existential problems (climate change, international tensions coupled with nuclear and bio-weapons, and pandemics) and other major problems (male entitlement and serious organised crime).

- Should aid be finite and, if so, what should be the trigger to ending it?

We should always give humanitarian aid. However, we should replace development aid with international cooperation to achieve the same aims in all countries, starting by addressing the major problems listed above.

- Should aid be conditional, and what should those conditions be?

Humanitarian aid should ideally be conditional on openness to international scrutiny, standards of national regulatory frameworks and national statistical service, ability of local media to scrutinise aid expenditure, and commitment to international conventions such as ending violence against women and girls and supporting other human rights. Commitment to improve in these areas could be shown by progress before humanitarian crisis struck, or if this is lacking, by progress during the period of humanitarian aid. In extremis, humanitarian aid must be given with few conditions, if the host government is unresponsive to conditions.

Development funds are best given through international cooperation. For this we must think creatively. A few examples are: inter-university research which must include universities on each continent and requires published papers by representatives of all participating universities in open-access, peer-reviewed journals; multi-NGO projects led equally by NGOs headquartered on each continent; initiatives led by international agencies' offices on all continents cooperating together (for example UN agencies).

- Is it helpful to distinguish between humanitarian aid and long-term development spending?

It's essential to make this distinction, as humanitarian aid will always be needed to respond to disasters, while the overt aim of development spending is to lessen inequalities between countries, making development spending redundant – in theory. Development spending's unintended aim has, unfortunately, been to retain a certain amount of inequality (hierarchy), and so we need to start counting global problems as solved only when solved for all of us. For this, we must incentivise our media to report more effectively on global problems.

- What are the benefits and motivations for donors and for recipient countries?

Donors are motivated to give by many factors: competition over ideologies (for example, funding democracy or anti-abortion activities), one-upmanship over a previous master (e.g. Poland donating to Former Soviet countries), to bring about change (e.g. in the twentieth century to influence socialism, the Non-Aligned Movement, oil price rises and EU expansion), for solidarity (e.g. South-South cooperation), or to leave behind the status of recipient country and instead join donors (Mawdsley, 2012). Other drivers are international relations (for diplomatic, commercial and cultural reasons) (Lancaster, 2007), self-image,

altruism, duty, logic, and gaining international respect. Donors also benefit people in their own countries, through paying salaries and other costs of aid agencies. I like to think that my motivations for promoting international cooperation are duty, logic and altruism.

In recipient countries, politicians and government staff decide when to allow large inputs of funds, likely seeking as much as possible, to impress the electorate, and limiting it to politically acceptable projects. Some accept it to increase their own access to benefits, as the money comes not from their own taxpayers but from foreigners. Intended benefits may be achieved. Beneficiaries of aid projects initially experience a boost to their spirits, but many come to detect a complicated system on which aid providers' existence and work depend (Anderson et al., 2012). Staff of services improved by an aid project may cease to maintain improvements when their work is not regularly monitored and they no longer receive personal benefits such as project allowances. Thus the real impact of an initiative may be best measured 5 years after it. That said, UK aid is as well designed as any aid can be.

- What are the risks and drawbacks for donors and recipient countries?

The above benefits and motivations for recipient countries are themselves risks and drawbacks.

Donor countries

- Should the UK have an aid budget? Why is this?

The UK should have a humanitarian aid budget. The UK should also have an international cooperation budget, because the world has major problems, and we are a wealthy country with a lot to contribute – well educated people, money, expertise, research results and technology. However, our international cooperation budget could be mainstreamed across departments if they are given remits and targets of achieving internationally as much as domestically. All departments have a role to play in international cooperation to tackle problems that affect us all, since global problems are local problems.

- What should be included in the UK's international development strategy and what does the economic growth model set out in the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy mean for the development strategy?

We need Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD), as it is useless to give with one hand while taking with the other. Development efforts must be consistent and mutually supportive across all government departments. For example, we should not license further extraction of oil from the North Sea while simultaneously advocating for reduced global temperature increases through reduced use of oil.

I have said much above about what should be in our international development strategy (for example, high standard national governance, statistical services and media in all countries). With regard to the Integrated Review:

- I welcome the Integrated Review's inclusion of international development;
- I welcome its emphasis on global regulation of technology, cyber, digital and data;

- I welcome its emphasis on intelligence (given superpowers' interest in Africa) and on countering misinformation;
 - I welcome its intentions to work with regional development and trade organisations, and to use the UK's convening power on a range of issues;
 - I welcome its support of mutually beneficial trade, shared security and values in Asia.
 - However, we should extend these mutually beneficial aspects to all other continents;
 - We should welcome more people to Britain not just because of their skills but because they will send money home in remittances;
 - We should spread the benefits of UK hubs of expertise by agreeing with traditionally recipient countries to be part of disperse, international hubs;
 - The UK's admirable work on vaccines and other health research should include universities in traditionally recipient countries, to enable them to contribute as we do;
 - We should put considerable resources into Fair Trade;
 - While of course the UK Government must promote the interests of the British people, we should replace this rhetoric with a discourse of mutual interdependence and shared global problems;
 - I welcome the Review's emphasis on education and the Prime Minister's commitment to girls' education, not just for their own sakes but because the climate crisis demands education for subsistence farmers to escape dependence on rain-fed agriculture and for farmers (a huge proportion of the world's population) to learn sustainable farming.
- Should all donors work towards the collective aims set out in the Sustainable Development Goals or should they have flexibility to pursue their own priorities and development strategies outlined by recipient countries?

Ideally all countries would donate to the global efforts that we need, however much or little they donate, to build shared ownership and solidarity. There are 169 targets in the 17 SDGs, enough to appeal to all donors. Given the efforts made to agree the SDGs, we should stick with them, but increase emphasis on climate change, international tensions coupled with nuclear and bio-weapons, pandemics, male entitlement and serious organised crime. Prerequisites to receiving funding include a good regulatory environment, functioning free media and a competent statistical service. Recipient countries must include traditionally donor countries - for example, the world should tackle the US's child marriages¹ and lack of black voter registration.

- Is there a 'gold standard' that donors should aspire to and are there examples of best practice among donor countries?

Donors' roles can include promoting learning between countries and showing that we too are striving to achieve the SDGs for ourselves, in the UK – for example in female representation amongst elected politicians.

- How is the UK Government held accountable to the UK taxpayer and the countries and communities where the programmes it funds are delivered?

We need to strengthen the UK media to report better on development overseas and at home. This includes expectations that UK media will use more locally based reporters, vary their sources and abide by the same norms in reporting overseas matters as they do at home (e.g.

¹ <https://www.unchainedatlast.org/>

not naming or showing photographs of rape victims) (Seay, 2012). Net recipient countries can only hold the UK Government accountable if they have strong, free media.

International relations

- What impact does aid spending have on international power dynamics?

Aid is part of soft power, and it illustrates a country's international standing – donors are higher than recipients in the hierarchy, and so more democratic countries strive to be donors while less democratic countries' politicians strive to receive more donor funds. Whether consciously or not, donors reinforce their own high standing by donating, while recipients may play a complicated game of whom to ask for funds – for example, during the Cold War, African countries threatened both the West and USSR that they might take money from the other side.

- How does international aid interplay with other sources of income such as international trade, remittances, domestic tax bases and philanthropy?

International trade must be compliant with PCSD (Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development) and must be as ethical as possible, including as much Fair Trade as we can manage.

Remittances are an effective means of development, benefitting both host country and migrant' families, and we could usefully develop a reciprocal tax regime around this – perhaps low tax for the migrant worker in the UK with a requirement by the recipient country to tax the incoming money. While unpopular with migrants, this could encourage democratic tax accountability in countries receiving remittances. A condition of such reciprocal tax arrangements should be that countries have good tax systems, democracy and free media.

Philanthropy should be controlled by recipient governments deciding which projects they will allow to be funded and to go ahead; it is useless to withhold UK government funds from a badly run implementing partner if a philanthropist then rewards that bad management with a grant. Countries which are the subject of philanthropists' grants must have the competence to assess recipients and suggest redirection of philanthropists' funds to well-run organisations.

- What is the role of different development actors such as International financial institutions, multilateral organisations, large International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), small INGOs and national NGOs?

Each of these has its place. However, we need to reform them all such that all operate according to all the above suggestions in a coordinated manner – our existential problems demand this.

- What are attitudes towards aid spending in donor and recipient countries?

In Scotland, aid is generally seen as a good thing, perhaps because of close international relations (with Malawi, for example), but also because our media promotes it as a reflection of the population's fondness for aid. It is worth researching why this is, if development spending is to be made more acceptable to the English public.

Recipient countries too have differing constituencies – politicians who are re-elected if they win aid, middle classes whose jobs are funded by aid, and beneficiaries who get better services through aid.

- How does the UK's aid spending affect how the UK is seen by other countries?

The UK's aid spending is professional and as effective in poverty reduction as aid can be. It is also effective as soft power. We have skilled professionals in programme design and management, but we must remain innovative, taking bold steps to equalise international development spending, adopting an international cooperation approach.

I hope that this submission is useful. We need brainstorming of bold ideas at a time like this.

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