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Evidence to the Effectiveness of UK Aid.

Sazani

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Introduction.

I am Mark Proctor, CEO of the Sazani group (Sazani), two not for profit companies with academic development practitioners, based in Carmarthen and working globally, extensively across Africa. Sazani, over the last fifteen years, has undertaken what might be considered traditional aid work with communities and governments, developing quality education and rural/coastal livelihood programmes. We are most recently published (¹The Bloomsbury Handbook of Global Education) regarding our work at combating the development of Islamic extremism in Zanzibar. Over the years this work has been sponsored directly and indirectly by DFID and Comic Relief although now abandoned due to changing funding priorities. Sazani also work with the global extractive (mining) and hydro-sectors, developing rural livelihood programmes, supporting the discharging of corporate entities obligations to lenders with regards to communities and generally supporting social licence to operate or what one might call social acceptability. I am finalising my PhD on this very subject and have also been a mid-ranking civil servant as well as having worked with private investments overseas.

I am contributing as I am very frustrated by the current situation, although I recognise that there is some incredible UK aid delivery and often this is difficult for non-specialists and the general public to understand in terms of outcome. This make it difficult for politicians to endorse.

Sazani general position on UK Aid

Our general position on aid reflects that the International development sector has moved from a paradigm, echoing the Marshall Plan in post war Europe, focused on economic growth and productivity in the global South, toward a more human centric position based on influential thinkers like Sen. This perspective stresses the need for development assistance to focus on supporting people's capabilities where their lives unfold to improve things for them. Notably, this perspective arose through the failure of thirty years of international development aid having little positive impact on the global South.

Bilateral aid to States with poor governance does nothing to support local in country capabilities, rather it undermines them, it is however easy to do. The UK aid industry, as we refer to it rather pejoratively, currently perpetuates mediocre, larger scale interventions with large scale aid administrators (organisations). The centralism containing the current UK aid system, is due in part to the processes generating knowledge of what aid is and how it should be done, by a small cadre of people processed through a small number of UK

universities. The specialism or myopia driven by this method of knowledge production, leads to an inability of the system to engage with wider UK business or FCO. In fairness, my own experience of both FCO overseas and UK business development systems, in terms of facilitating business opportunities, is one of exasperation and now avoidance. Knowledge creation across all these sectors which should drive UK strategy, does not have the range of mechanisms needed to generate anything responsive nor creative.

General position on DFID aid strategy.

Design, assessment and evaluation of DFID aid programmes appears to reflect an obsession with log frames and Theory of Change (ToC). Access to resources appears governed by professional, non-practitioner colleagues who appear to work in a system that discourages dissent and proposals no doubt scored by algorithm. There appear to be little flexibility or intellectual critique of their own systems. As someone who works in social theory, it is obvious that trying to design a ToC and capture a complete complex social process, utilising traditional management theory, is ontologically flawed. ToC becomes, as all constructs of predicted social changes are, a game of constructing future imaginings, utilising a range of packaged concepts such as “scalability” and “impact”. This approach to delivering change is as useful as Dante’s Inferno is at supporting personal change, useful to reflect on but ultimately rather too clever to be of any real use other than something to utilise for reflection. Applying for DFID funding as a small not for profit entity, is akin to that fateful journey.

Does HMG want to resource a closed industry utilising and circulating accepted terms or does it want to facilitate UK development entrepreneurs to deliver change overseas based on their hard-earned experience? This is not a problem unique to DFID. I have spent too many days of my life writing funding applications trying to justify why it is important people have access to clean water.

This intellectually rarefied, short term approach to development is particularly prescient with regards to education programmes overseas. Paraphrasing recent research in terms of DFID’s selection, funding and evaluation of educational programmes, (Mason, Crossley and Bond 2019) we have major misgivings towards the epistemological perspectives and language in such discourses. They not only reflect positivist assumptions characteristic of the natural sciences, but also privilege large data sets and the search for transferable ‘best practice’. While not rejecting the potential of such work, we recognize the challenges to the diversity of qualitative approaches to research, and to postmodern and post- colonial perspectives, that have been developed in the post-war era, because they work. This is a practical issue not an ideological one. Sazani’s track record of working with the educational system in Zanzibar carries no value. No value is given to embeddedness or depth of knowledge in a locality and the front loading of grant processing means that only large aid entities can succeed in competing for resources. This process does nothing to develop a mixed economy of smaller UK charities nor build on existing hard earned local knowledge and network building. In my experience, the UK still has fragments of good reputation in Africa and a diaspora that are a huge resource both for the UK and countries of origins. This is an opportunity for business that is being squandered.

Telling a man what he wants to hear.

This lack of ability or interest in engaging with small organisation like Sazani, that work closely with communities, will disable HMG in terms of capturing knowledge and scoping interventions. No outsider is going to be able to engage with anyone in a high context culture in a place like Zanzibar, other than the urban elite, who cannot afford the luxury of being seen to want change, even if they do. The lessons should be learned from places like Afghanistan and Liberia. This failure to reach out into rural areas and engage communities on livelihoods generates knowledge from urban elites and air conditioned offices. This produces a very fragile understanding of reality. Learning to listen and creating opportunities to learn from those operating broadly and deeply overseas, would be a useful step to improving aid outcomes. That learning needs to move across FCO and DFID and possible MOD. I suspect FCO are not adequately resourced.

Mechanisms are needed to align HMG priorities and processes.

The ineffective use of the aid budget for wider national benefit is apparent when one looks across regions and compare aid spend to priorities emerging from parliamentary select committees in recent years. The situation in the Sahel, the Balkans and in the two most recent wars we have lost; Afghanistan and Iraq, are examples used here, but there are others.

In the Sahel and the Balkans there has been a total failure to commit adequate long term resourcing to building up UK embedded expertise that, if correctly engaged, could inform and direct HMG priorities in those areas. In the Sahel, a failure to recognise the Tuareg and Polasario people as potential allies and abandoning European intervention to the French, has brought us where we are, since the disintegration of Libya. A failure to commit resources to engaging the Serbian establishment and local networks, means that Chinese and Russian investors are in a very strong position in terms of controlling strategic mineral resources needed to decarbonise Europe. Belgrade is closer to London in spatial terms than Moscow and the strategic importance of the western Balkans is outlined in the House of Lords Select Committee Report titled "The UK and the Future of the Western Balkans (2018). There are similar reports on the Sahel.

With Afghanistan and Iraq, despite the valour of UK men and women, we have driven outcomes in two failed wars and allowed the conditions to arise which have brought about the space for ISIS. Arguably, a failure to support local livelihoods and rural people's resilience was as much a factor in our defeat as a garbled message. This failure to support local communities in what matters to them, demonstrated UK and allies' impotence in terms of governing crucial aspects of people's lives. The UK must have clear vision for what it wants to achieve, that is about political vision and it must be tangible, sensible and have a clear defensible narrative. I heard a young Cabinet Office volunteer for the Stabilisation Unit, say emphatically in a HEAT training programme; "we are in Afghanistan to make sure girls have an education."

The failure of the stabilisation programme in Afghanistan is evident and well documented (see Plumb, Radha, Shapiro, and Hegarty 2017 as an example). Small scale local livelihood development, set within a larger national programme has been proven to be the most effective, if not totally effective way of producing stabilisation (ibid). This failure presents a

huge learning opportunity. I don't think anyone is learning as there is no institutional process to facilitate learning. If one needs persuasion as to the importance of local livelihoods look at the burning of crops in northern Iraq last Autumn, others recognise its importance with regards to political legitimacy.

An inability to align long term national political objectives with local level interests rather than through bilateral aid, is driven by a lack of understanding of nuanced political issues in complex localities. More relevance needs to be given to sustainable livelihood development for local populations. There are people in DFID who understand this, whether they are allowed or supported to create aid delivery mechanisms is contestable. Justine Greening spoke glowingly about the "Send a Cow" programme when she spoke in Cardiff as Minister for International Development. I asked her if DFID were supporting philanthropy or development and I never received an answer. DFID and wider HMG need to know what they want, window dressing or development.

An example of FCO and loss of UK reputation.

Zanzibar, a former British protectorate, is preparing for another election were it is likely those that win will again, not be allowed to take power. The simmering violent situation is poorly documented and with extensive experience and roots into rural communities in Zanzibar, we have been working to make our concerns known to HMG for several years. Like many local Zanzibaris, I too am convinced that the UK can't even be bothered to pretend it is interested in the fate of the local population. The loss of credibility may be difficult to measure but in my experience over 15 years, the UK has lost all credibility. Opposition political party members have told me they think that UK based investment in Tanzania is being protected by the failure to support their cause. The political opposition are regularly branded by the Tanzanian government as extremists yet they align themselves with the Liberal Democrats in the UK. An estimated \$1M every year for nearly two decades is invested to promote Salafist forms of austere Islam on an island famed for its beautiful, complex cultural mix of cultures from across the Arab world, middle east and India. The societal and cultural frameworks supporting tolerance are being dismantled and an island with mass youth unemployment. The situation has not been helped by massive tourism industry expansion, which not only does not benefit the local population but destroys their fragile, food supplying ecosystem, pushes up food prices and destroys their culture. After 15 years working there (1), with a huge growth in population (currently 250,000 primary school children), people in the north of Zanzibar still have very poor access to water but a new airport serving tourists. The failure of FCO to recognise, articulate and act given Zanzibar's strategic position, spatially, socially and culturally as the central to the Swahili coast which is deeply troubled with poverty and insurgency, is worrying. My own pursuit of action on matters such as extrajudicial violence in Zanzibar with two UK Ministers for Africa, courtesy of Mr Stephen Crabb who has always been supportive of our education programmes, ended with me being patronised in Chatham House by a young woman whose area of expertise was East Africa (ambiguous) and being told not to worry as, "people die on Africa." I was to be put in touch with the chap from the UK Consulate in Dar es Salaam, who goes to Zanzibar once for fortnight, strangely he never got in touch. I understand Chatham House are external to government but that is where the system took me.

Knowledge production, strategy and engaging with reality.

There are many routes for engineering change within the current system.

Firstly; there is a need to develop a think tank capability within the UK, focused on pulling existing experiences of FCO, aid sector, MOD and UK business, to look at developing a comprehensive collective approach to aid focus and delivery. This could be managed so that it gives intellectual rigour, pragmatism and doesn't generate another gravy train opportunity for those dominant voices within the existing system. I refer here to the few large aid entities. There needs to be a focus on good practice within the aid sector and the development of a narrative which is defensible and that will be understood across those the sector works with. This needs to capture people that don't apply to DFID but have UK interests and strong development values.

Secondly, financially there is a need to both develop a system for tax payers, like the 501C United States system supporting tax deductible contribution direct to not for profit and charitable entities. Facilitating existing UK entities to register for 501C status in the UK could be undertaken. This is relatively a straightforward process but requires several steps which could be resources by government. In purely business terms this is something government should do.

Lastly, the sector has a shortage of equipped UK people and the university system needs to be augmented to produce people with practical expertise. Two of the Sazani team, myself and Dr C MacCallum, are part of the international Canadian based Social Performance Forum, who are developing a practice base and accreditation around social license and social acceptability in mining. The problems faced by the extractive industry of gaining long term acceptance is not dissimilar to that facing stabilisation and aid sector. Local livelihoods and an understanding of how they relate to culture, space, time and conflict are critical to working in rural areas. The level of hands on expertise applied to this type of development not just by the UK but by all the countries of the global North is very poor. This is partly because it is very hard to find opportunities to gain experience in community dynamics, livelihoods, social practice, cultural issues and all the other skills one needs to develop to be an asset to the community. Training people for the aid sector in universities needs to target different disciplines and have a practical dimension. Delivering aid is not a theoretical concept.

Good Luck in your endeavours,

Mark Proctor.

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