

Conference: Colonialism and Reparation
Organised by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung 27-28.06. 03
at the Werkstatt der Kulturen, Berlin.

Can Development policy work?

Reparation- in what form?

Thanks to the Heinrich Böll foundation for organising a conference on global and sensitive issues (colonialism and reparation).

I am writing this essay with regard to some of the issues discussed at the conference. First, the issue of “development policy” that means aid given to the developing countries. Second, the issue of reparation.

The concept of development policy was one of the very sensitive issues discussed at the conference. The raw about development policy began after Hon. Ströbele, a member of parliament and a member of the Green Party, delivered his speech. He was more centred on German development aid to the South and he made a link between development policy and reparation.

Thanks to Toyin Falola a professor in History at the University of Texas at Austin. He delivered a very interesting and sound lecture on colonialism. His lecture treads on very sensitive issues from the era of colonialism to post colonial times. The loss of human resources, Africa not able to fit into the geopolitical structure, the economic structures of the world, and the lack of coherent regional foreign policy are some of the consequences of slavery and colonisation. This has made Africa a toothless bull dog in foreign matters with the UN, WTO, IMF and so on, even though a big continent. My main concern in this essay is to comment from a social scientist’s point of view on two of the issues stated above that were discussed at the conference. Can development policy work? The answer to this question is to take a look at the conference discussion.

Amongst the speakers on the high table is a distinguished politician. Honourable Christian Ströbele spoke like politicians do. He is indeed one and a brave one too. Political speeches in most cases are influenced by the circumstances of the day. In the conference whilst the main focus of discussion was based on reparation and colonial trauma, Hon. Ströbele’s speech was more centred on development as a means of reparation. He made things clear at the start of his speech that he was not there to talk on behalf of the German government nor on behalf of the Green Party. That means he was mainly there to give his own personal view on the subject at hand. He was criticised from the podium for what some members described as an “off track” position. Moreover his glorification of German development aid to the developing countries left the audience somewhat surprised.

Second, his point on Euro-Africa relationship, which one of the members of the high table described as a father and son relationship, was also very strange. In this case, Europe the father, Africa the son. But this is a euro centric view. Whether he was

taken out of context or not remains to be seen. Criticism came from the podium for his speech on development policy. Conditionalities and using development aid as a means of reparation became the centre of criticism. He did not say that he is supporting conditionalities attach to development, but he said, based on his experience, he is in doubt if he will continue to criticise conditionalities attach to development. The criticism that came from the podium sent a clear message, that majority were against conditionalities as a policy to development aid. I also believe that some members were even questioning the concept of development.

On the following day of the conference a group presented a workshop paper on development policy. They came up with views which they are supporting the Honourable's position. This was a complete contradiction of the majority's view. First, the paper claimed that Africa is not developed and tried to justified European development policy in Africa. Second, the paper went further to ask for increase in development aid. Because this is, as the paper claimed, the only way for Africa to get it's underdevelopment problems sorted. The paper did not go uncriticised from the podium.

As a member of the conference, I was left in an academic limbo which side of the battle about development policy was correct. Having seriously considered the subject, I have decided to pen down my thoughts and share it with whoever may be interested. My views in the subject are neither a blue print nor a gospel of the truth. They are subject to any constructive criticism.

The issue about development is a long-standing problem. It goes back 200 years. In the last 50 years it has become a contested issue amongst scholars of the subject. Post-development scholars have claimed that development has failed. They went further to argue that the development concept is a cover up of the violent damage done to the so-called developing world and its people. The other schools of thought, involving governments and inter-governmental organisations continue to adopt ambitious developmental programmes, e.g. The UN target to reduce poverty by half by 2015. In the developing world poverty means lack of development. That means development will have to be in place first to alleviate poverty. But development can take different forms. So what kind of development programme will the UN have to look at to alleviate poverty? The feeling I got from members of the conference is that development has done nothing to alleviate poverty in the South. This is practically true. At this point I notice that we are putting two different concepts in one pot. Historically, it is possible that development can occur without alleviating poverty. It is even possible that in the process of development, poverty can be worsened. So the question I'm asking is, development in whose interest? According to a famous scholar in the subject, Karl Polanyi, writing in 1944, an official British government document from 1607 set out the problem of change in one powerful phrase:

...The poor man shall be satisfied in his end: Habitation; and the gentleman not hindered in his desire: Improvement.' This formula appears to take for granted the essence of purely economic progress, which is to achieve improvement at the price of social dislocation. But it also hints at the tragic necessity by which the poor man clings to his hovel, doomed by the rich man's desire for a public improvement that profits him privately.

(Allen T, and Thomas A. (2000), p, 3)

From this quotation, development does not necessarily mean a good change for all in any particular society. Therefore it is difficult to use development as a means to alleviate poverty. Development can take different forms. But in general terms development means:

...a process of changes occurring at the levels of both social change and the individual human being at one and the same time. Changes in society have implication for the people who live in that society and, conversely, changes in how people think, interact, make their livings and perceive themselves from the basis for changes in society.

Another definition is, "development generally implies an all-encompassing change, not just an improvement in one aspect". (Allen T. and Thomas A. (2000), P, 24).

While the two definitions may be trying to explain the same thing, the second definition is short and very straightforward. It talks about development in all aspects of society.

So now Hon. Ströbele thinks development aid can be used as a means of reparation. This is an off track thought- (please read reparation below). But if so, the question is, development in whose interest and in what aspect? For the Green Party, surely it's on environmental aspect because it is a global concern and moreover the environment is an important political tool for the Greens. Industrialisation in the West is at the expense of the environment. Therefore, the West is rich and Africa is poor. So what if Africa would say we will save the environment, but please we want technology transfer as a means of development. What will be the outcome? In Asia the Americans conquered and occupied Japan. The Japanese were smart to learn technology from the Americans. They were more business minded. When they succeeded, they helped South Korea, Taiwan, and the other developing countries like Malaysia. Can Africa benefit from the new technological age without or with few conditionalities?

The answer to the question 'can development policy work?' depends on the specific targets of projects, but there is no clear-cut answer to that. Perhaps clearly defined guidelines can serve as an answer. They should be defined with clear agenda, less bureaucracy, and a good motive. Development is always at the expense of social dislocation in one form or another. It can even be at the expense of a country's foreign policy. For example, prior to the Iraq war, USA development policy was based on support for war. They went to Guinea, Cameroon and Angola to ask for support for the war on Iraq in return for development aid. The danger about this policy is there is no clear agenda, no specific project targeted, and weakening of the foreign policy of those countries. Having looked at development from a common sense context, it will be good to look at areas where Africa has improved after colonialisation.

Workshop Paper.

My problem with the workshop paper is that they bluntly say that Africa is not developed. This is for me a narrow way of assessing the continent. A fair assessment would be that Africa on average is not as developed as the western world, which has also taken time to reach its current state. The first world is not necessarily Western

Europe and USA only, but also some countries in the Asia Pacific such as Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, South Korea and so on. In my view, the reason why Japan, Malaysia, South Korea and Singapore can be classified as first world even though they claimed to have what they called the 'Asian way' is because their economies and standard of living can be compared to that of Western Europe. They do not encompass all western values, but they are no longer marginalized when it comes to decision making with regard to global economy. Their economies are stronger.

Regardless of the loss of human resources as a result of slavery and colonialism, we are moving some steps forward from where the colonialists left us. Let us give credit where credit is due. Looking at key areas of development in Africa, first of all, the areas developed such as roads by the colonialists are connected to mining so that they can extract raw materials for export. Some African governments have reversed that policy. I am not looking at specific African countries but rather generally. Moreover, development does not mean that poverty has been alleviated. Poverty is a whole concept on its own that has to be looked at separately from development. Perhaps it will be helpful to look at Africa's development from sector to sector.

The Educational sector: As far as I know, the number of educational institutions has increased across the board and the curricula taught in schools and universities have been modified to fit into the African system. It is no longer the case of Mary and John are going to school, but Abu and Mabinty are going to school. Many modern day Africans who excel in elite institutions around the world have their basic education from post-colonial institutions. Those who went to colonial schools and are now influential politicians or bureaucrats are the ones corrupting Africa today. A new political dispensation is a threat to them because it is not in their interest. They prefer to hold on to power as long as they are alive. They were taught how to dictate because that was the order of the day during colonial times. This has a serious impact on us thanks to Prof. Falola.

On the issue of culture, it is no longer the case (if it ever was) that African culture is barbaric and backward. Our culture has been suppressed right from slavery even into post-colonial time, but we have emerged from this struggle with a strong sense of cultural identity. Perhaps, not in a large scale but in a small scale, African food culture can be found in major cities around the world. Major educational institutions are now interested in teaching some African languages such as the Yoruba in Nigeria, Zulu and Swahili from southern and Eastern Africa respectively. Our music is widely loved and respected around the world. By learning about Africa in whatever form is by trying to know a culture that was once declared barbaric and backward. On the cultural aspect development has taken place.

The Economic and Technological aspects: These aspects with regard to development in Africa differ from country to country. I cannot compare my country Sierra Leone to Libya, Morocco, Tunisia or even the Ivory Coast. Those countries are far more developed than Sierra Leone not because they are democratic but because of national consciousness. In fact they are not democratic. What makes them more developed than others in the continent is, the commitment of these governments regardless of their political structures. While European aid is important, it is often just a part of a larger national development programme and it is not a lasting solution for any country that wants to emerge strong and maintain national pride. Therefore, I

don't want to believe that only European aid, as the workshop paper claimed, can help Africa to see light at the end of the tunnel.

I think if African leaders commit themselves to nation building, respect for human rights, respect for African values and making use of the resources Africa has, and not merely European aid, these are starting point for long-term development. Despite all the diverse forms of government in Africa, some countries have maintained political stability and have improved their economies from colonial time to now. To a large degree, development is not in the interest of the giver. To prove this view wrong or right is to look at the conditionalities always attached to development aid. In particular those which may compromise a country's own moral standing. Then we start to wonder why Africa cannot develop a consistent foreign policy in line with African values. IMF will go to Africa and introduce a system called "structural adjustment programme" without taking African social systems into account. So is this reparation Mr Honourable? As I mentioned earlier on, the continent is not as developed as other continents. Therefore technologically we are still behind, and this is one of the areas we have to invest heavily in. It is not in the interest of the aid givers to see us technologically self-sufficient. Africa is a place for raw materials and market for finished products from the industrialised world.

Political development: I fall-in-line with a point made by Prof. Toyin Falola. He said, multinational firms from the industrialised world are not interested in seeing democracy flourish in Africa. A strong democracy means an end to the ugly attitude of some multinational firms. The disregard for the environment by these firms against local people's wishes will not happen in a strong democracy. In a weak democracy, like Nigeria, absolute force is use to put down any demonstration against Shell. Shell is one of the big firms that are contributing to environmental pollution in Africa.

In Sierra Leone we have rutilite and bauxite that were mined by American, Swedish and Australian firms. Probably, they have started mining again. With my own eyes I saw how the environment was damaged. By then I was in college studying government and history when I had an opportunity with a group of other students to go on an educational tour organised by the geography department. With my basic ideas about agriculture, what I saw was terrible. Rivers were polluted thus hampering people's livelihoods, trees cut down and not replaced.

Most of the leaders lack what I would call national consciousness, national pride, and the ability to develop consistent and stable African values and political ideology. The Asians call their values the "Asian way" why not call ours the "African way" and be proud of it. The problem with our leaders is having been taught in colonial schools behaves like the colonialists. The armies of Africa were trained to protect the colonial masters, but now they are protecting the few elites in power. But when relationships go bad between the army and the ruling elite, the army will stage a coup. It will either be called a good coup or a bad coup depending on the relationships with the West. Most of African coups are sponsored from outside by Western powers e.g. General Gaye's coup in Ivory Coast was called a good coup by the big powers in the West, the coup against Patrice Lumumba got support from the Americans and the Europeans. Charles Taylor of Liberia got support from America to wage war on president Samuel K Doe. Such strong interference in African politics will not give room for political development.

Let's call a spade a spade, the continent has made moves toward development, therefore it is part of the developing world. In my view and I think the views of millions of Africans and Friends of Africa, is for a transparent fair trade with the rest of the world. Fair trade is in the best interest of Africa. Once this is done, Africa will move faster toward development and Africa will be able to contribute as equal partners to major global issues. Marginalisation will no longer be the order of the day.

The issue of reparation, in what form?

Thank to Mr Brima Conteh who has thrown light on this issue. Reparation is a subject that is full of emotions, anger and in diplomatic terms should be an attempt to correct injustices. Personally, after listening to Mr Conteh's lecture, I became fully aware of the controversy that surrounds reparation. Looking at films such as Amistad has influenced me to say there is no figure that can be put on reparation. How much will the slave master pay even for one life? When man (please in generic term) looks at another man and treats him 'like an animal'. Animals are much better treated in some cases.

Slavery has existed in all societies, and Mr Conteh pointed out its various forms and the level at which it was taking place. When Hon. Ströbele talked of using development aid as a means of reparation, it sounded not only cheap, but also laughable. We all know in whose interest development aid is use for. But one thing is certain and that is, every philosopher, even the most abstract, is deeply influenced by the circumstances of his day. If development aid is to be used as a means of reparation, that means it has failed. So what next? Financial reparation in my view is a secondary issue. The first step should be acknowledgement of the wrong done. This has already been done at the Durban conference in South Africa. Attached to this should be, to try to correct the stereotypes attach to a black person. Nigger, a spade, showing a black man a banana, are just a few amongst many. All these stereotypes came from slavery time. These remind a black man of his history. It is the duty of modern day societies to correct these views. Technology, democracy, economic boom and social justices are not the only factors belonging to modernity, but common reasoning towards a fellow human being. So reparation in the form of money without removing these stereotypes is nothing. During the discussion in the conference I suggested for a "Slave Museum" to be built in all the major countries that took part. Namely Spain, England, Holland, Denmark, America- the list continues.

Having heard a lot about reparation and the method of payment, I put a question before a friend of mine, a political scientist working for one of the foundations of the Green Party, "What is your view with regard to reparation?" I asked. He said, jokingly, he only wished that African governments could stand together and say no debt repayment and in addition ask for payment for slavery and colonial damage. Period.

In conclusion, this essay has generally been a chance to look at development policy and reparation from a common sense view. Development policy and the concept of development itself need to be reconsidered and structured in a way that it can also address the issues of poverty. Development at the expense of poverty, social dislocation and political instability is a failure.

Reparation is a controversial concept, and very emotional. It has become a hot issue since the Jews started demanding reparation for an event that took place about 50 years ago. Slavery and colonial reparation is far older than this. Whilst we are waiting to look at an appropriate form of reparation, I suggest for a slave museum to be built in the countries concern to enable people to be aware of the manner in which slave were handled and the deeds of colonialists and the impact it has created on modern day Africa.

Reference:

Allen T. and Thomas A. (2002), Poverty and Development into the 21st Century, Oxford, Open University and Oxford University Press.

By Momodu Mansaray.