

## TRADE OR AID? WHAT IS THE SOLUTION TO POVERTY IN AFRICA?

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Q: Do we have a moral duty to provide aid for the development of underdeveloped nations? What consideration would such a duty be based on?

The question at hand is truly a perplexing one where many arguments for and against have been formulated. Hardin tells us that it is our duty not to give aid<sup>1</sup> while Singer shows that it is our duty to<sup>2</sup>. While both sides have some valid points I side with Singer's view as aid as a moral obligation. I come to this view through my readings in history, geography, policy and of course philosophy.

Underdeveloped nations did not exist before the colonial times. True, nations were more or less developed than others, but nations only existed if they had the ability to provide for themselves through domestic production or trade. As the more developed nations undertook expeditions in search of more land and resources for their kingdoms they moved into the less developed nations and took control, usually through force or threat of force. The less developed nations could not defend themselves against gunpowder and other technological advancements, so they allowed their country to be controlled. The more developed nations started to remove resources and ship them back to the motherland and gave the countries where the resources were removed from nothing or very small, unfair payments<sup>3</sup>. After World War Two there was a colonial exodus from the conquered countries and they were left without the infrastructure to continue to extract resources, if there were any left at all to extract.

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<sup>1</sup> PY 223 WLU Course Pack VG pg. 40

<sup>2</sup> PY 223 WLU Course Pack VG pg. 42

<sup>3</sup> PY 223 WLU Course Pack Lesson 7 pg. 10

When the argument of private property comes up as it did with Singer and Hardin, it seems clear that the following can be concluded: 1) without the raping of colonies much of the resources that we have today would not be available, and that the resources that helped build the colonial powers to the status they now presume would not have been available. The current world powers owe much of their fortunes to the colonies which they stole from and therefore should give back to the former colonies in the form of development aid without many restrictions (restrictions in using the aid for economic development only and not for military development is understandable as that would be against the self-interest of the state).

The problem with feeding the world is not if we have enough, it is in the distribution of the food<sup>4</sup>. Every year the USA, Canada, and the EU dump hundreds of tonnes of grain and other produce into the ocean or burn it in incinerators<sup>5</sup>. Instead of wasting all this food it could be distributed to the needy countries, and also the needy within the developed countries (which is another argument). The question as to who would pay for shipments is now obvious due to the above argument that the former colonial powers owe much of the fortune to the former colonies and they should pay.

The powers in the world do give billions each year (56 billion in 2002<sup>6</sup>) to developing and underdeveloped countries but this aid usually comes with specific stipulations. The developed world tells the countries where they can put their money or else they can't have it. The developed countries do have the right to their own self

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<sup>4</sup> I also recognize that some countries in the underdeveloped world have distribution problems themselves as warlords or dictators use food aid as a weapon of oppression within his own country or sells the food aid to other countries for military development, but this also is another argument.

<sup>5</sup> CBC.ca and europa.eu.int ← the European Union website

<sup>6</sup> United Nations

→<http://www0.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=8736&Cr=financing&Cr1=development>

defense but instead of telling the developing countries where they have to invest, they should be acting as guides telling them how they can accomplish the goals they have.

Now, in the developed world nearly everyone lives a life of luxury. We have clean water; a healthy food source; safe spaces in which we live; have the freedom to do as we choose (within legal boundaries of course) and can spend money on items that are not required for sustaining us. Luxury items such as alcohol, smokes, plasma televisions and vacations do offer entertainment but are not necessary for our survival. A lot of this would not be possible were it not for the exploiting of the colonies in past times. This I argue gives every person in the developed world, not just the countries, the moral obligation to help those in less developed countries to obtain the basic necessities in life. This will not sink our ship as Hardin argues<sup>7</sup> but will allow others the ability to stabilize their own country. When combined with the obligatory development aid, this will allow the less developed countries to develop and truly contribute to human prosperity. It is this point that Hardin and his sinking ship model does not take into account.

The carrying capacity of the world is not nearly met and predictions indicate that at our current levels of consumption that the world will be fine with 10 billion<sup>8</sup>. This is not predicted to be met until the year 2200 and this has into account the development of the underdeveloped countries. This view goes against Harding's sinking ship model and allows for aid to underdeveloped countries. With development comes empowerment and education. With more of the world fully educated more technological advances will arise and give chance to larger populations. It can be argued that we can not depend on discoveries that have not come to pass but it is easy to see that when the other 2/3's of the

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<sup>7</sup> PY 223 WLU Course Pack Lesson 7 pg. 4

<sup>8</sup> Human Geography Ed 4 pg.133

worlds population becomes educated in modern techniques, (those of the age of the microchip) more advances will be discovered.

The key to the whole problem is the education and empowerment of those in less developed countries. Family planning is known to lower birth rates, this planning plus the aforementioned development thus eliminating the Malthusian view<sup>9</sup> of starvation as a population control. When the colonial powers left the colonies they left them without the ability to sustain themselves. Attempting to educate the entire population of the earth, or at least those who wish to adapt to the world marketplace and can only help humankind; the former colonials have the power and money to accomplish this. As it was the colonials who interrupted the development of these countries through occupation and exploitation, they now have the moral obligation to aid in their development.

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<sup>9</sup> PY 223 WLU Course Pack Lesson Seven pg. 6