

Background

The African saying goes “if you want to know the taste of red pepper you ask those who have ever tasted it”. Like wise, if you want to know about poverty and its companions like disease, unemployment, conflict, illiteracy and their possible solutions, ask the sufferers. This saying is not cited to downplay the understanding of developing countries’ problems by foreign institutions, governments and individuals, but to demonstrate the fact that problems of HIV/AIDS, poverty, conflict, unemployment can best be explained by those who have experienced them.

Therefore, the World Bank essay competition 2006 gives me a great opportunity, as person who has experienced poverty, disease, unemployment and conflict and passed them ‘off side’ to study and attain a degree in development studies, to share my ideas, experiences and proposals with other people.

Living in conflict, poverty, unemployment and disease.

For the peoples of developed countries, thank God you may not have the following practical experiences:

- You have not experienced a situation where people suffer from hidden hunger for life or where children and adults are starving and emaciated as result of hunger like we have had in Ethiopia, Niger and currently in Kenya among other countries in Africa.
- You have not experienced a contemporary war situation like we have in Uganda where a rebel group kills civilians daily, has displaced about 1.6 million people after their villages were torched and pillaged and many of the youth and children kidnapped to be used as potters, fighters and sex slaves by the rebel commanders. This situation has prevailed for close to 20 years in Northern Uganda.
- Your societies’ do not depend on the second hand clothes from shirts and dresses to trousers and skirts and even underpants and bras. This is true of majority of the people in Sub Saharan Africa.
- You have not seen the worst form of corruption where even the aid that is sent to help the helpless like HIV/AIDS victims is looted by politicians and government bureaucrats, Like we have in Uganda where Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, malaria, Tuberculosis has been looted.

- You have not had contemporary leaders who come to power promising democracy, in few days they turn into opportunists and later graduate into dictators as we have had in most African countries.
- You have not seen youthful girls turning into prostitutes as a result of the desperation of unemployment and orphanage plus other associated vulnerabilities.
- You have not seen situations where HIV/AIDS kills parents and their elder children, leaving the rest of the children hanging in the world, only the lucky few to be saved by charitable organizations. In Uganda we have about 2 million orphans largely because of HIV/AIDS.¹

In summary, that is the kind of life that most of us live in Sub Saharan Africa.

Apportioning responsibility for the suffering: the youth perspective

Since childhood, the above question has bothered me so much and I have endeavoured to consult other youths and elders to find possible answers. I have received different views and perspectives that have led me to develop two schools of thought. The first one that I have named the ‘Pan-Afro extremists’, and the second one ‘Pan-Afro realists’. The former attribute our suffering to mainly three problems: colonialism, neocolonialism and the contemporary inequalities in the global economy. I have named these problems the ‘triple jeopardy’. The later majorly attribute our suffering to our selves (Africans). They contend that the failure by most countries in Sub Saharan Africa to have responsible leaders, corruption among other African evils, take more responsibility than the ‘triple jeopardy’. As a subscriber to the ‘Pan-Afro realists’ school of thought, I believe that the extent to which the ‘triple jeopardy’ can be blamed is increasingly narrowing and I regard the views of Pan-Afro-extremists to be dangerous. They negate the fact that life is a struggle, and that even the states they accuse for the ‘triple jeopardy’ struggled hard to achieve what they have. In fact they mislead people and make them believe that they have no influence to determine their development and above all create an attitude of despondency in the people. I believe inspite of the ‘triple jeopardy’ if, post independence Africa was to have responsible leaders, some problems like hunger, illiteracy and absolute poverty should have been expunged from the continent.² Imagine the women of Zimbabwe reaching at an extent of running short of sanitary towels and they resort to using leaves and papers, inflation neighboring four digits, yet Mugabe after 20 years is sticking on the helm of power that he is guarding land. Really if you have land that cannot save you from hunger what is the land for?

¹Uganda National strategic programme of interventions for orphans and vulnerable children (2005-2009)

² BBC News 14th/March 2006 17:30 GMT

UNEMPLOYMENT, HIV/AIDS AND SERVICE DELIVERY: FILLING THE GAPS

At 25 years, having grown up in the environment of vulnerability and currently being an active development activist through ‘Development Research Centre’ an organization that I founded with other youths, i have a number of ideas and proposals that i feel should share with others. I take these ideas to be very critical especially for the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. The proposals cover the area of service delivery problems at community level, sharing of best practices in the struggle against HIV/AIDS and addressing unemployment.

1. Service delivery

The World Development Report (2004) indicated that services in developing countries, fall far short of what could be achieved, for the poor³. To a person like me who has lived at community level in a developing country, the problem of service delivery failing to reach the poor is bleaker than what was captured. It should be noted that the problem of poverty and its common companions like disease unemployment, illiteracy, conflicts, and hunger may never be checked if the problem of service delivery failing the poor is not addressed.

In fact our poverty is like a business because governments and some organisations use it to solicit for aid and loans but never access the aid to the ‘real sufferers of poverty’. For example when Uganda, was crying for debt relief of about US \$6 billion, i looked around my community and country at large to count the tangible impacts of the loans. I asked fellow youths and elders to get their perspective. But from all it was hard to see the tangible impacts of the debt. I later reflected on our per capital income of US\$330 and also reflected on some of our people who live and survive nearly like Old Stone Age man. I asked my self if debt repayment was through direct contribution by citizens, how would the loaning institutions and governments approach the people at community level for their debt, without the later having any tangible significance of the debt at household and community level. I have observed a number of inhibitions that fails aid from translating into services and reaching the poor. They include:

(a). Non-poor focused budget allocations. This is the most dangerous obstruction of service delivery from the poor. For example in Uganda, politicians and bureaucrats allocate a big share of the budget to them selves: this is depicted by common cases where sectors like agriculture where most of the poor fall are given very little funding. Imagine in Uganda’s 2005/2006 budget, government allocated 4% (UG SH 119.85bn) and Public Administration 13% (UG SH 447.23bn) of the entire

³ World Development Report (2004)

budget⁴. As if this is not enough, in local governments where service delivery is largely done, district leaders also spend the little that is sent to them extravagantly. For example, of recent most district chairpersons dumped double cabin Toyota cars and bought for themselves prados and pajeros when their constituents are dying of lack of drugs in health centers.

(b). Channeling of big chunks of pro-poor aid resources through the national budget. I would not have any problem with funds being channeled through the national budget but with the levels of government corruption in most Sub Saharan Africa countries, I practically find this channel to be making aid more insecure and prone to misuse hence service delivery failing the poor. Experience shows that donors cannot effectively control funds that they have trusted with government to deliver services. They only wait for funds to be stolen by politicians and bureaucrats and then respond with suspensions of aid, which in turn impinges most on the poor, because government officials and bureaucrats will be having their loot. For example the recent donor cuts in Uganda eventually impinge most on the poor.

(c). Lastly is massive corruption: after the meager resource allocations to the poor, the same government officials again embezzle the little that is allocated. In Uganda local governments which are the service deliverers are among the leading corrupt institutions in the country. For example corruption has greatly hindered the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy. Case in point there is a project of building primary school infrastructure called School Facility Grant (SFG), but in most areas it has produced shoddy infrastructure because of corruption.

Proposal

To ensure effective and efficient service delivery at community level, I have two proposals:

(i). Development partners have to change the aid delivery channels if they want to help the 'real poor' at the communities. For example, if aid is to help people in the basic areas like rural feeder roads, school infrastructure, rural water and agriculture advisory services, donors should not channel it through the national budget but through their self controlled projects. Where the donors identify funding priorities with communities and government, budget with them but they do the implementation, through contracting firms. This model of aid delivery can take the following procedure:

⁴ The government of Uganda national budget 2005/2006

Step one: setting up Community Development Fund. This fund may cover: rural water, feeder roads, education and Health infrastructure and agriculture advisory services. The donors should manage the fund.

Step two: Donors pool their grants for the above mentioned services and put them in the community development fund.

Step three: Donors, government and communities identify the priorities to fund.

Step four: contracting private service providers. Donors recruit firms to deliver the services.

This model has many advantages that include: minimising chances of mismanaging pro-poor aid resources, it provides an effective and efficient framework to deliver aid to the 'real poor' at community level, provides the efficient opportunity for donors to deal with their target beneficiaries directly, ensure that aid recipients appreciate the donors because they deal with them directly.

(ii) Building service-demanding capacities at community level: the role of the youth.

This is my second proposal for improving service delivery at community level. As a person who has grown up at the community, I believe that effective service delivery to the poor can be achieved, depending on many variables chief among them are:

- High level of consciousness of local people on rights, entitlements, role and opportunities from service deliverers like local governments.
- Existing systems for downward reporting and accountability in local governments.
- Consultative planning, that involves beneficiaries and participatory implementation.

Short of the above, service deliverers like local governments, centralise power and decision making and exploit the ignorance of the people about their rights and entitlements to embezzle funds, hence failing service delivery.

Together with other youth at Development Research Centre, we have develop an empowerment guide for rural people on how to demand for services, influence, monitor and evaluate activities of their local governments. The ultimate goal of the guide is to promote effective service delivery through informing the poor people in rural areas about their entitlements and roles in activities of service deliverers (local governments).

I therefore encourage and call upon youths in other developing countries to come up with actions that can empower the poor to demand for services, influence policy and monitor and evaluate government. I believe that if these two proposals are taken up, service delivery to the poor will be a reality and the road to the Millennium Development Goals dead line will be cleaned for millions of the poor.

2. HIV/AIDS epidemic: sharing the best practices.

HIV/AIDS is taking one of the highest tolls in causing human suffering worldwide. The epidemic has claimed millions of lives and is continuing to infect and kill more. Projections by UNAIDS indicate that 45 million more people in low and middle-income countries will become infected by the year 2010, unless the world mounts effective campaigns to halt the epidemic's spread. Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst affected region of the world. It has just over 10 percent of the world population, but is a home to over 60 percent of all HIV/AIDS cases about 25.8 million people⁵. In the fight against HIV/AIDS, sharing of information on best strategies and policies has been identified to be very vital for the success of the campaigns and policies across the world. However, little has been done to facilitate easily the sharing of proven-actions between different actors. Africa in particular (worst affected continent) lacks one effective mechanism for identifying and disseminating quickly and timely the proven-approaches to HIV/AIDS. This partly explains the discrepancy in prevalence among African countries, as proven-approaches in one country are not effectively availed to others. For example: South Africa prevalence is estimated at range of 18-25% for adults, Botswana 37%, Mozambique 12% for Kenya 6.7% and Uganda 6.4% according to the 2004 UNAIDS Report on global AIDS epidemic⁶. Such a discrepancy in prevalence shows that such countries have a lot to learn from each other. It should be noted that because of multi-actions by organisations and governments, effective and efficient transfer of proven-approaches needs an independent and specialised system to help governments and organisations benchmark each.

Proposal:

(i) AIDS Centre for Communication of Effective Policy and Training (ACCEPT).

ACCEPT is proposed as centre to be set up with a purpose of help governments and organisations across the world benchmark policy successes easily from each other in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. It shall play a vital role in the struggle against HIV/AIDS in Africa and the world in general.

Objectives of ACCEPT

(i) To offer timely and quick identification, documentation and dissemination of proven- Anti-HIV/AIDS strategies as an easy, cheap and efficient way of helping governments and organizations to adopt effective approaches to HIV/AIDS.

⁵ UNAIDS (2005) Global AIDS Epidemic report.

⁶ UNAIDS (2004) Global Aids Epidemic report

(ii). To create a One- Stock- data-base of proven- Anti-HIV/AIDS actions and develop a cheap, efficient and quick mechanism for exchanging information and linking of HIV/AIDS plans and actions in Africa and world in general.

(iii). To strength the Anti-HIV/AIDS capacities of Governments, Organizations and individuals through providing evidence-based training in policy development and HIV/AIDS management.

Projected Contributions of ACCEPT to the struggle against HIV/AIDS

- a) Help governments and organisations to effectively and efficiently learn from each other's successes against the epidemic.
- b) It will develop cheap and convenient mechanism for disseminating widely project experiences like through the Internet: developing a worldwide website for proven policies.
- c) It will help organisations and governments to adopt proven policies.
- d) It will offer voluntary technical advice on HIV/AIDS policy.
- e) It will be a one stop-center for HIV/AIDS proven policies.
- f) It will facilitate effective net working and collaborations for linking of Anti-HIV/AIDS actions across the continent and the world.
- g) It will compliment the existing monitoring and evaluation efforts of AIDS programs and the use of action- resources.
- h) It will compliment the existing efforts of advocacy and lobbying for more Anti-HIV/AIDS resources for the most affected countries.

Target beneficiaries of ACCEPT services.

- a) Countries with both high HIV prevalence and low HIV prevalence- availing to them best policy options.
- b) Countries where HIV infection is picking up- avail to them proven- policy options and technical support in the design and implementation of policies.
- c) Donor Agencies- offering to them advice on best interventions to support.
- d) Organisations- avail to then effective policy options and technical support in the design and implementation of interventions.

Funding for ACCEPT

The funding will be solicited from all stakeholders in the struggle against the HIV/AIDS epidemic: governments, Multilateral Institutions, and medium organisations. It is hoped that because of the proposal's relevance it will attract funding.

3. UNEMPLOYMENT.

The United Nations World Youth Report (2005) indicates that there are over 200million youths living in poverty, 130million illiterate, 88 million unemployed.⁷ In the Sub Saharan Africa, the unemployment situation is bleaker: International Labour Organisation report (2005) indicates that 9.7 percent unemployment rate of this region is the second highest in the world. The region also has the highest share in working poverty, and that in all global regions, working poverty at the US\$1 level declined in 2005,except in Sub Saran Africa where it increased by another 2.5m people. This situation poses a major challenge to the struggle against poverty in this region. Unlike in some developed countries where they have unemployment benefits, the unemployed in developing countries encounter high vulnerability to poverty and exploitation and are condemned to constant dependency and isolation.

To reduce and consequently alleviate unemployment requires various actions from different stakeholders in the economy including the unemployed themselves. We need new policies and practices we cannot leave it to economic growth. The world over, enterprise creation and the promotion of entrepreneurship are regarded as one way to increase youth employment, a strategy that I concur with. However, in a country like Uganda, where savings, investment and entrepreneurship are very low, we need great incentives for them to be developed in order to cause Such incentives: entrepreneurship training, credits schemes, enterprise grants, investment guarantees among others. Accordingly let me offer the following proposal:

Proposal: turning the unemployed into investors in agricultural economies.

In most developing countries, agriculture is the backbone of the economy, main export sector, has high employment creation potential, but largely subsistence like the case of Uganda. Though markets of developing countries products are still a problem in global economy, there cases when even the market is available but the country cannot have an adequate responsive production to exploit them even when it has the potential because of lack of responsive plans. For example recently, there was a market for Vanilla because of poor production in Madagascar, but Uganda, which has a high potential for production of Vanilla, could not optimally exploit the opportunity, because of lack of a responsive plan and Madagascar has re organised. Currently there is forecast that Kenya will suffer shortages of grains because of droughts, Uganda which neighbours it, has no plan to produce for this market. At international level there are emerging market opportunities fore

⁷ United Nations World Youth Report (2005)

example United States of America has opened up its market for some goods from some African countries and debates for more markets of African products in other parts of the world are going on. Therefore for a country like Uganda to exploit its agricultural sector employment creation potential and optimally exploit various emerging market opportunities, i propose the following strategy:

Stage one: setting up an unemployment fund. The sources of the fund would be direct national budget allocations and grants from well-wisher development partners. The fund should be for the unemployed willing to invest in agriculture to supply identified market opportunities. The fund should be interest free, but refundable after the beneficiary's project expiry and beneficiaries have to give security to access the fund.

Stage two: identification of entry points. The entry points would mainly be in agricultural sector because being the biggest sector of most developing countries' economies, it under pins all efforts geared towards employment generation. Government will have to identify properly the market opportunities locally, regionally and internationally. This requires government to have a concrete strategy on market forecasting, negotiations at regional and international levels.

Stage Three: Identification of Beneficiaries (investors) On this stage, identification of unemployed people with the potential and willing to produce for the identified markets is done, they are given funds to invest and produce for the identified markets. The beneficiaries would also need to access simple and cheap technologies, like drought resistant varieties and cheap irrigation technology.

Stage Four: pay back. After harvest the beneficiaries (investors) should sell and take back the funds and those interested in continuing, they re-apply for the fund.

Rational for the proposal: it inspires and promotes the growth of local enterprises; It builds the economy's capacity and preparedness to exploit market opportunities immediately, It promotes entrepreneurship and savings growth which is lacking in most developing countries, It is an incentive for investment in agriculture, it will accelerate the modernisation of agriculture.

Conclusion

I believe that the primary responsibility to transform our poor societies in developing countries from poverty, disease, hunger illiteracy, conflicts and squalor lies with in our hands. This paper is based on my aspirations, experiences and vision to fight for development in my community, country and

world in general it is my hope that government, multilateral agencies and individuals will find a great deal of relevant proposals and experiences that can have great input in the development and transformation of poor societies.

To my brothers and sisters in developing countries, you should know that life everywhere is a struggle and indeed your life it is what you make it. Its high time we realized that surviving on other people for our budgets, food, clothing and education is not good.

To African Christians and Moslems, it will be sad for Jesus and prophet Mohamed to return after thousand years and find us poor and starving in the land of plenty. While for our counterparts in developed countries, these guests will not be happy to find you satisfied, enjoying freedoms while in other parts of humanity are starving.

Sources of information

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