

'Millions in Africa are poorer today because of aid; misery and poverty have not ended but increased' (DAMBISA MOYO). What do you think?

Foreign aid is defined as the international transfer of capital goods or services from a country or international organisation for the benefit of the recipient country's population (AfroPolitical TV, 2020). It is often provided by developed countries to less developed countries with the goal of promoting economic development and reducing poverty. It is important to recognise the advantages of aid as it can provide critical support to communities facing extreme poverty, via the provision of basic needs such as food, water, and healthcare, enabling them to improve their quality of life and achieve greater self-sufficiency. However, not all aid programs are effective, and some have even been criticised for perpetuating misery and poverty. Dambisa Moyo, a Zambian economist, raises important questions about the effectiveness of aid programs in Africa, and whether they are contributing to, or alleviating, poverty and hardship. Statistics paint a bleak picture of poverty and misery in Africa, with more than 34% of the population living below the poverty line with widespread food insecurity, disease, and conflict (UNCTAD, 2021). Despite decades of foreign aid, harsh conditions continue to persist, and many African countries remain mired in economic and social instability.

The contents of this essay will discuss the impact of foreign aid on misery and poverty in Africa, exploring the arguments presented by Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo and other experts in the field. The essay will also consider alternative approaches to reducing poverty and promoting development in Africa and explore the role of foreign aid in supporting these efforts.

Many components contribute to the assertion that "millions in Africa are poorer today because of aid," and one significant contributing factor is the ineffective allocation of aid resources. Critics argue that aid to Africa is often misallocated, with funds not reaching the most impoverished communities and instead being stolen by corrupt government officials or intermediaries. For example, a report by the African Development Bank found that between \$148 billion and \$192 billion of public procurement funds in Africa are lost to corruption each year (African Development Bank, 2015). Furthermore, according to the Centre for Global Development, a significant portion of aid to Africa, approximately one-third, is subjected to corruption that is discoverable and sanctionable (Charles Kenny, 2017), therefore highlighting the extent to which aid is frequently misused. This misallocation of funds means that aid is not having the intended impact on poverty reduction and economic growth, and may even be exacerbating existing problems. For example instead of the aid improving Africa's schools, healthcare, and infrastructure the aid is often syphoned off by rich government officials, therefore perpetuating existing wealth disparities and in turn exacerbating inequality rates which are already so detrimental in the region. To summarise, although aid in Africa is for positive purposes it can have negative outcomes due to its inadequate allocation. Furthermore, the aid being syphoned off by wealthy African officials prevents the money from amending Africa's socio-economic issues while instead leading to growing inequality rates, ultimately highlighting how aid in Africa can be more negative than positive.

Similarly, another reason why millions in Africa become worse off due to aid is due to ineffective aid programs. Many aid programs are not tailored to the specific needs and contexts of African countries, and

may not have a significant impact on reducing poverty or promoting economic growth. For example, a study of aid programs in sub-Saharan Africa found that many were focused on short-term, top-down approaches that did not take into account the local context or the needs and perspectives of the communities they were intended to serve (Oxford Policy Management, 2015). This can lead to a disconnect between aid programs and the people they are supposed to help, reducing their effectiveness and ultimately having a limited impact on poverty reduction. For instance, the construction of the Merowe Dam in Sudan is an example of a top-down approach that failed to consider the local context and community needs, leading to displacement, loss of livelihoods and increased poverty (MDPI, 2021). These ineffective aid programs not only do not help the receiving countries but also lead to the donor countries profiting from giving. This can be seen through the fact that for every dollar of aid rich countries give to poor countries they receive between 7 to 10 dollars back through debt repayments, profit and trade. Furthermore, the UN conference for trade and development reveals the net transfer of wealth is £200 billion per year from poor to rich countries highlighting how international aid can lead to the recipient countries being worse off rather than being facilitated (Maliha Christhi/ TedX, 2022). To summarise, ineffective aid programs do not address the specific needs of African countries and can ultimately lead to the transfer of wealth from poor to rich nations, therefore, highlighting how it not only does not help the receiving countries but can also make the socio-economic situation worse.

However, despite some small-scale drawbacks, overall the impact of aid on Africa has been overwhelmingly positive as it has led to significant improvements in areas such as education, healthcare, and access to basic services. Firstly, aid has increased the enrollment of children in schools and improved the quality of education. According to UNESCO, between 1999-2017, aid helped to increase the net enrollment rate in primary education in sub-Saharan Africa from 61% to 78% (World Bank, 2022). The increased education has helped to lay foundations for a better future for these children by creating a more skilled workforce which in return increases the output (GDP) of Africa. Furthermore, creating more jobs and revenue, thus ameliorating poverty. Similarly, in the health sector aid has played a critical role in expanding access to basic health care services, reducing maternal and child mortality, and controlling the spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS. According to the World Health Organization, (between 2000-2018), aid helped to reduce the maternal mortality ratio in sub-Saharan Africa by 34% (WHO, 2019), meaning they conquered the millennium development goal of maternal mortality and thereby also decreased misery (the pain of losing a child) within the region. Lastly, aid has helped to improve access to clean water, sanitation, and other basic services seen through the World Bank which published that (between 2000 -2015) aid helped to increase access to improved water sources in sub-Saharan Africa from 57% to 68% (OECD. 2023). Conversely, although these statistics highlight advancements in Africa's living conditions there is no clear evidence that the improvements have stemmed from aid. Furthermore, the enhancements could have been sourced from a myriad of other factors such as globalisation, development, or the efforts of local communities.

Likewise, despite the challenges of poverty in Africa, aid plays a crucial role in preventing further damage during emergency situations and poverty would therefore be more severe without the implementation of aid. Aid is particularly important in the context of natural disasters, where communities can be devastated and require immediate support to recover. For example, in 2020, Cyclone Idai caused widespread damage in

southern Africa, affecting millions of people. Aid organisations responded quickly to provide emergency assistance, including food, water, and shelter, to over 1.7 million people (United Nations, 2019). This assistance helped to prevent further loss of life and reduce the negative impact of the disaster on affected communities. For example, aid organisations were able to provide clean water reducing the risk of waterborne diseases, shelter to the homeless, and medical treatment to treat tens of thousands of injured people. Moreover, the provision of aid allowed affected communities to rebuild and improve their living standards, drastically reducing the poverty that would have been induced by the cyclone. To summarise, as seen through the example of Cyclone Idai, aid plays a crucial role in preventing further damage during crises in Africa. Furthermore, the examples highlight its significance in preventing further loss of life and stimulating recovery, ultimately reducing the potential misery and poverty endured in future years.

In conclusion, Dambisa Moyo's claim that 'millions in Africa are poorer today because of aid is partially correct. In theory, aid should be imperative to Africa and could lead to significant improvements in education, health care, and access to basic services. However, if not implemented correctly, via inadequate allocation of resources and ineffective programs, aid can have no effect on Africa's poverty and can even exacerbate the situation. Ultimately, to maximise its impact, aid programs need to be well-designed, properly implemented, and tailored to the specific needs and context of African countries. Finally, it is important to discuss other alternatives of foreign aid (aid where money is not just simply given to a country) which are immune to corruption and do not lead to worsening poverty. An example of a more sustainable aid alternative is an investment in education and skills training for the African population. Investing in education and skills training can help people to acquire the expertise and knowledge they need to get better jobs and earn higher incomes, therefore helping to increase economic growth and reduce poverty over the long term.

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