



**Book Review: Beyond Humanitarianism: What You Need to Know about Africa and Why It Matters**

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## **Book Review: *Beyond Humanitarianism: What You Need to Know about Africa and Why It Matters***

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*Kevin Mwariri Mungai*

This book was compiled by Council senior fellows from many different sources, principally but not entirely from articles in *Foreign Affairs*, Independent Task Force reports, Council Special reports, and the Council's website—<http://www.CFR.org>. From a U.S. policy perspective, the book is based on current events on the African continent that are of concern to the U.S.

The first few chapters examine several important issues, such as those dealing with economic development, human rights, governance, HIV and AIDS problems, democratic values, conflict resolution, and stability or lack of stability in some African countries including Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Africa, Somalia, and Sudan. The book is an easy read but it does require that the reader be up-to-date on current U.S. policies on Africa. It also addresses the issue of financial aid and whether or not it is helping African countries. The book takes an issue by issue approach.

Many African countries must meet the challenges connected with the distribution of wealth, such as that which comes from oil in Nigeria, but also these countries must gain control of the wealth from oil production. Further, the oil producers must assume greater responsibility than they have shown heretofore. The people in the Niger Delta expect the oil wealth to be shared, but they also expect their human rights to be respected. The best way to deal with these issues is to promote free and fair elections, accountability, institutional reforms, and policy initiatives. During his time in office President Olusegun Obasanjo demonstrated that he was an effective leader. His governance brought Nigeria less corruption and a focus on development. Outside of Nigeria, he has been involved in the efforts to negotiate with rebel leaders for the well-being of ordinary citizens, a diplomatic effort that can be extended by social workers.

When considering governance, South Africa

provides a case in point. The African National Congress (ANC) has a great amount of control as the sole political party since President Nelson Mandela took power in 1991. But recently, other political parties have emerged to challenge the ANC. The ANC, with its fiscally conservative policies, has managed to provide many of the displaced Black population with free water, education, and other basic amenities. However, the inequality of wealth distribution between Whites and Blacks persists. People still have confidence in the electoral process, and conduct successful elections. They also believe that by electing the right people change will come. On the issue of HIV/AIDS, South Africa has not coordinated disease prevention; however, it provides the highest rate of antiretroviral drugs to infected people. Many social workers are critically involved in disseminating information to women about the dangers of HIV/AIDS. Further, social workers are providing opportunities to communities to be self-sufficient in order to educate others and provide assistance to affected families.

The youth are said to be the catalysts for change. History has shown that the youth in Africa can organize themselves to create opportunities, become involved in politics, and speak up against old ideas. There have also been tensions between the ruling elites and the youth. Elites have not moved quickly enough to create jobs for young people. Over 70% of the African population is below 30 years of age. A great number of people have migrated to cities from rural areas. The aid from IMF and the World Bank to African countries has come bundled with conditions that benefit the elite but do not create many opportunities for young people. Therefore, it is suggested that the youths should be provided with jobs and an education, and that civic engagement should be encouraged. The youths have aspirations, but they are being channeled in the wrong way by

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politicians.

In terms of human rights in Zimbabwe, sanctions have not been effective in the effort to keep President Mugabe from preventing political opposition. Therefore, many people in Zimbabwe have fled to neighboring countries or even off the continent. But the southern African community can effectively communicate and persuade Mugabe to share his power (now he shares power with Morgan Tsvangirai). Mugabe's government has received a great deal of aid from the IMF but still the country has deteriorated.

In Sudan, the presence of military assistance has not prevented Darfuri people from being attacked by the government, and the Janjaweed militia. Tough economic and travelling sanctions from the United Nations and the West need to be implemented. The African Union needs to be more effective in keeping peace on the ground. Diplomatic efforts are needed to persuade President Omar al-Bashir to stop attacks on innocent Darfuri. Power sharing between Khartoum, Darfur, and other regions is essential to the stabilization of Sudan. In Somalia and Sudan there needs to be a conflict-resolution initiative brokered by the African Union and the United Nations. The first initiative should be to negotiate a peace deal between opposing sides. Also, peace deals should be followed by tough actions such as prosecutions by the International Criminal Court (al-Bashir is on the wanted list), travelling restrictions on senior officials and rebels, oil embargoes, and economic pressures (p. 144).

Putting aid in perspective, the authors look at how government-to-government aid has not been effective in the past. For one thing, this kind of aid has always had a short life span, offering only immediate help. Dambisa Moyo provides a great insight into how government-to-government aid has not worked in Africa in her new book entitled *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (2009). The second factor has to do with the fact that African states did not start off weak. One thing some schol-

ars tend to forget is that African countries, governed by indigenous leaders, are relatively young. Most of the countries got their independence in the 1960s and others followed throughout the years. What is not mentioned, however, is the crippling effect of structural adjustment programs and how they hindered the development of most African countries. In place of aid, African countries need responsible governments that serve their particular constituents. They have to be self-financing, and create jobs for their citizens, a process that is beyond aid.

Many countries have made considerable contributions for their citizens. For example, Mozambique experienced great economic growth between 1996 and 2003. Kenya has invested in education, allowed for economic entrepreneurship, and tackled corruption. Botswana has profoundly encouraged participatory democracy, civil liberties, and entrepreneurship, and promoted social and economic development amongst its citizens (p. 166). African leaders have formed coalitions to promote good governance and train their successors to good governance. Therefore, it is essential for social workers to be involved in this process to advocate for policies that are beneficial to communities in need and for processes that go beyond aid.

African countries are becoming significant partners with the United States. Also, the United States faces competition not only from China, India, Brazil, South Korea, and some European countries, but also from many other countries who want to invest in Africa. There is a greater realization that African leaders have a stake in improving the lives for their citizens, and polishing the image of Africa from that of conflict, disease, dependency, poverty, and bad governance to self-sufficiency, cooperation among leaders, and creating greater opportunity for trade with other countries.

Throughout the book, the authors seemed to depict the youth as being violent, and organizing themselves in ways that promote disorder. The

youth who contribute to technological advancement, manage businesses, take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities, and provide their skills to society are largely ignored. This is the new generation that will be taking leadership of many African countries. Also, women are largely ignored in this book. Another point worth mentioning is that this book is not based on a theoretical framework and does not include a methodology.

Beyond the old idea of just providing aid to African countries, there can be greater opportunities for social workers to focus on tangible programs and policies that can be run in partnership with Africans. Clearly, aid brings open-ended commitments that are at the discretion of the recipient government.

#### **References**

Moyo, Dambisa. *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa*. Allen Lane: New York, 2009.