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Aid to Africa

By Michael Holman

Arena (Michael Holman): Of course aid corrupts. The evidence is there, from Congo to Kenya. And who can doubt that most aid to Africa does not work: a greater percentage of Kenyans today live in poverty than at independence some 45 years ago, despite billions of dollars of foreign assistance.

But the consequences of aid are more insidious and more damaging than the pro-aid lobby realises. It undermines the expectations of citizens, and erodes the management capacity of the state. And it destroys the social contract that is at the heart of governance. In return for citizens' loyalty, expressed in the form of paying tax and defending the state when called on, the citizen expects the provision of basic services: roads, water, clinics and schools.

It is precisely these areas in which foreign non-government organisations are most active. If you want a road re-graded, books for your school, or a well for water, you lobby an NGO, for it is more likely to deliver.

The result: the responsibility of the state is diminished, its management capacity withers . . . and the social contract is eroded to the point of collapse. And every year some 100,000 foreign "experts" flock to Africa to administer a system that fails the very people it is supposed to help; and every year some 60,000 of Africa's best and brightest officially emigrate.

Aid to Africa: not only mad and bad, but dangerous to receive.

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