

WHICH WAY FOR AFRICA ON DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

By Christine Saru¹

Foreign aid is often regarded as being too much, or wasted on corrupt recipient governments despite any good intentions from donor countries and other development actors. In reality, both the quantity and quality of aid have been poor and donor nations have not really been held to account. Development aid has long been recognized as crucial to help poor developing nations grow out of poverty.

Ineffective foreign assistance has however become widespread in Africa. The debate on how aid can be effective and contribute to Africa's development is still ongoing without any clear way forward. The big question still remains whether or not aid has contributed to (under) development in Africa.

There is a big link between aid, poverty and bad policies in our African countries and it is because of this that aid remains ineffective. Even though external factors like the unfair global economic structure might have a part to play in aid failure, there are some setbacks that lie within the recipient countries. Issues like poor leadership, corruption and especially a policy environment that is wanting are just a few of the factors that act as major hindrances to the Development effectiveness agenda in our African countries.

Bad policies can without a doubt constrain development effectiveness. Aid can only have a positive impact on growth and overall development in countries with good policies, but will have very little or no effect at all in the presence of poor policies. It is this realization that has prompted African governments to start pursuing good policies. Developing countries are now taking the lead in defining their own development priorities, formulating their policies and strengthening their institutions.

The design of good policies should be in such a way that they will support the development effectiveness agenda and overall end results of development such as poverty reduction, and citizens and civil society more generally should be involved in this process.

This said, we see that policies will only be sound if donors and other development partners make it possible for Africans to formulate and decide on the policies themselves because this way, we will own them and begin to see aid being highly effective in contributing to development effectiveness.

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With the achievement of the MDGs beckoning, there are discussions around scaling up of aid to Africa. In order for this aid to be effective and to achieve its intended results, a good policy environment is needed. This is a process that requires active participation of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Their involvement in this agenda is paramount because they have proven to be more inclusive and diverse in their approach.

If CSOs will continue striving towards being people centered, having a sustainable impact and building genuine and long term partnerships characterized with meaningful dialogue and mutual respect, then it will only be a matter of time before African countries start putting aid to better use. The end result will be a more sound policy environment with more sustainable development results.