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THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY OPINION

From the issue dated July 21, 2005

Donors Should Join the Rock Stars and Focus on Africa

By Marc Ross Manashil

The deep poverty that scars so much of the African continent has rarely gotten as much attention as it has in the past month, with the meeting of the Group of 8 (the world's seven wealthiest countries, plus Russia) in Gleneagles, Scotland, and the Live 8 concerts and protests that preceded the meeting.

Despite the London bombings that interrupted the gathering, the government leaders were able to adopt an agreement on debt relief for Africa. But the newfound interest government officials have shown in alleviating poverty should not absolve philanthropy of its responsibility to play a role in helping Africans achieve a greater measure of health and prosperity. Indeed, grant makers and other nonprofit organizations should capitalize on the opportunities created by all the attention that has been paid to Africa.

For too long, Africa has received a less than enthusiastic reception from donors in the United States. One key obstacle is that the problems there seem so immense and intractable. Many donors, understandably, feel overwhelmed and unsure of where or how to begin. And the depressing news of conflict, famine, and HIV/AIDS too often drowns out the remarkable work that is happening in Africa and the tremendous impact donors can achieve for a relatively small amount of money.

To understand how philanthropy can play a role, it is important to consider how the burden of debt repayment has so severely hampered efforts to confront the continent's most serious problems. While six million Africans die every year from preventable causes and about 6,000 every day from HIV/AIDS, African countries continue to make approximately \$13-billion in debt payments annually (about \$30-million per day), which is more than they spend on education and health care combined. Ten nations are paying more on debt service than on their entire health budgets.

The agreement reached by the Group of 8 will initially forgive \$40-billion in debts of 18 countries, 14 of which are in Africa, affecting

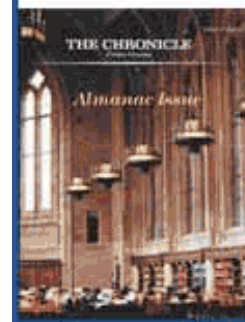
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about 300 million people. Eventually a total of 38 developing countries will be eligible to receive debt relief under the plan, representing a total of 550 million people worldwide. The plan also calls for an additional \$25-billion a year to be spent in development assistance by 2010, double what is now spent. Aid to all developing countries will increase by \$50-billion annually.

Despite those impressive figures, the agreement has a number of significant drawbacks. At least initially, the majority of African countries will not receive debt relief. Second, the agreement is limited only to those countries that have joined the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, which seeks to deal with the debt-relief situation by requiring governments to turn over to businesses the responsibility of operating public utilities like water systems, as well as to reduce spending on health and education -- goals that seem to be incompatible with poverty reduction.

The agreement also fails to deal with the historic trade imbalance that has left African farmers unable to compete against subsidized agricultural goods that flood world markets from wealthier countries.

What's more, the agreement does not acknowledge the illegitimate external debts that were incurred by corrupt dictatorial regimes, particularly during the cold war. By contrast, the U.S. government successfully lobbied creditors to cancel Iraq's \$120-billion debt because it was deemed to be "odious" in nature. It appears that countless Africans are not being afforded that same opportunity.

Still, despite its flaws, the Group of 8 agreement put the key issues on the table for public discourse and offers hope that the industrialized world is ready to confront the failures of the past and eventually get on a sustainable path of progress in Africa.

The increase in public attention brought to the continent by major celebrities will also help shift public perception that the "hopeless Africa situation" is solvable. Now it is time for more philanthropists to join the rock stars who participated in Live 8 and take bold action to bring African and global giving into the mainstream.

Donors can get involved in numerous ways. They can begin or increase direct support to innovative programs that are advancing health, human rights, economic development, and environmental protection in Africa and other parts of the developing world. Plenty of high-impact projects are available for support, either through a direct cross-border grant or via organizations in the United States that are working to make global giving more accessible than ever.

Foundations and other donors should not be limited to projects that provide short-term relief of symptoms. They must invest in groups and people who can bring about social change and those who are focusing on the causes of poverty and other problems, as well as the larger

governmental, corporate, and other social structures that are the source of so much suffering. Donors who believe the global agreements have flaws should support those organizations that can put pressure on the policy makers who have the power to improve them.

Finally, donors must engage in public-policy advocacy, urging the U.S. government to increase its commitment to full debt cancellation for developing countries and devote more resources to foreign aid. The United States currently spends 0.17 percent of its national income on foreign aid. Philanthropic leaders should press the United States to join other major wealthy industrialized countries and increase its share of foreign aid assistance to a minimum of 0.7 percent of gross domestic product by 2015, or even a minimum of 1 percent.

For those donors that have already made commitments to international giving, it is important to share personal experiences with other grant makers and send the message that philanthropy to Africa is not a hopeless cause. More donors should join groups such as the Africa Grantmakers Affinity Group or Grantmakers Without Borders and get active in spreading the word about international giving. Now that governments may be starting to take a greater interest in the problems of the world's most impoverished people, it's time for philanthropy to do the same.

Marc Ross Manashil is executive director and co-founder of the Clarence Foundation, an Oakland, Calif., organization that helps Americans give overseas, especially by sponsoring "giving circles" for groups of donors. This year, the foundation is working with the International Child Resource Institute, also in Oakland, to send a group of American donors to Kenya to make grants to grass-roots groups there. His e-mail is marc@thclarencefoundation.org.



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