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# Geldof humanitarian gig

**Marian L. Tupy and Michela Wrong**

Despite a global recession, most the Group of Eight major industrial countries appear to be on track to fulfill their 2005 Gleneagles Summit commitments to increase development aid to Africa.

Africa, however, would surely be better off if rich countries followed the much-lambasted Italian example and cut their aid budgets. Decades of academic research have failed to show a positive correlation between foreign aid and economic development. In Africa, the correlation between the two is negative. In addition to breeding corruption, aid acts as a disincentive to genuine political and economic reform. It is time to free the aid debate from the grip of rock stars and celebrities.

In all likelihood, Italy's aid cut had more to do with the global recession than with any specific theory of economic development. The International Monetary Fund says the Italian economy will shrink 4.5 percent this year. The 2009 budget deficit and explicit national debt, Banca d'Italia predicts, will reach 3.7 percent and 111 percent of gross domestic product, respectively.

Bob Geldof has little interest in Rome's predicament. To him, the Italian government, now chairing the G-8, is a "crowd of shysters." "How can you possibly trust any government that promises something, does nothing, and expect them to lead the world?" the former pop star asked at a recent press conference. "How dare they?"

Let us step back and address the related issues of political trust and aid efficiency. It is true Italy has never been a paragon of good government. It is, for instance, one of Western Europe's most corrupt countries. But Italy has been a parliamentary democracy since 1946. Political

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competition between the parties is vigorous and civil society vibrant and strong. The Italian press regularly rakes Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi over the coals, and elections are free and fair.

Contrast that record with Africa's. In 2009, Freedom House classified a mere 10 out of 48 countries in sub-Saharan Africa as "free." The rest were either "partly free" or "not free." Only seven countries in the region have a free press. Moreover, except for Botswana, Mauritius and South Africa, all the other countries in sub-Saharan Africa were deemed more corrupt than Italy. Out of the bottom 20 most corrupt countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), 11 were in Africa.

The 2008 CPI index ranked Ethiopia and Sudan, both top aid recipients, in 126th place and 173rd place, respectively. Both have appalling human rights record. The Ethiopian government killed nearly 200 protesters rather than concede an election loss in 2005. The Sudanese government's human rights record in Darfur and South Sudan is, to put it mildly, shocking.

Mr. Geldof questions the trustworthiness of a democratically elected Italian government to fulfill its aid promises in the midst of a severe and unexpected economic crisis. We question the trustworthiness of many African regimes not to embezzle or otherwise misuse the money of the Western taxpayers.

But the call for increased aid would be misguided even if it did not exacerbate the problem of African corruption. Between 1975 and 2005, per capita aid to sub-Saharan Africa averaged \$24.60 per year. By contrast, in China it averaged \$1.50 and in India \$2.11. During the same period, the compounded average annual GDP growth rate per capita in China was 7.9 percent and in India 3.5 percent. In Africa it was a negative 0.16 percent. Nine countries in sub-Saharan Africa were poorer in 2007 than in 1960.

Many factors lie behind that vertiginous decline, but the evidence suggests that far from promoting economic reforms in Africa, aid has retarded the pace of reform. Thus, while the rest of the world liberalized and prospered, reforms in sub-Saharan Africa have been limited. The region remains the least integrated part of the global economy.

Thankfully, an increasing number of Africans are now calling for change. These are not members of the African elite who depend on aid for their lavish lifestyles. Nuhu Ribadu, the former Nigerian anti-corruption chief who lives in exile, thinks most aid to Nigeria is stolen and wants further aid disbursements to come with heavy preconditions. John Githongo, the former Kenyan anti-corruption chief who recently returned to Kenya after four years in exile, sees the West's

determination to fund tainted governments like his own as a form of racism - Africa is held to lower standards. Dambisa Moyo, the Zambian author of the best-selling book "Dead Aid," wants aid discontinued altogether.

Regrettably, these African dissenters are often ignored or attacked. When Ugandan journalist and democracy advocate Andrew Mwenda called for Western countries to stop giving aid to Africa, Bono heckled him with shouts of profanities.

Celebrities like Bono and Mr. Geldof may boast the best of the intentions, but through the years they have come to play an outsized role in the aid debate. When challenged, they and other aid advocates, such as Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University, have dismissed the views of Africans directly affected by the issues. How dare they?

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