

# The Washington Times

## Does Foreign Aid Work?

By: Danny Huizinga – June 6, 2012

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Kenya has gone through many struggles. The current president, Uhuru Kenyatta, is facing charges by the International Criminal Court for his alleged role in the mass violence following the 2007 election.

Poverty is rampant in Kenya, with more than half of citizens living on less than one dollar a day.

However, Daniel Sindiyo, a former government official and director of the Department of Wildlife Management and Conservation for seven years, is hopeful about the future. “I believe changes are going to come. Whether it is dishonesty, whether it is accountability, everything. ... The time to change is now.”

One way some believe Kenya can get back on its feet is through foreign aid. In 2012, the United States government gave \$406 million dollars in foreign aid to Kenya. This is only a small fraction of the total amount of government-based aid that flows from developed countries to developing countries.

However, as Nicolas Eberstadt and Carol C. Adelman at the American Enterprise Institute note, a vast majority of foreign aid comes instead in the form of private investment or philanthropy.

Both types of foreign aid, government-based and private, face considerable problems in achieving their objective, says Sindiyo. “It is negotiated at a certain level where [by] the final implementation all the way down, a lot of resources are lost in between. ... What probably may trickle all the way down to the target group is probably a quarter. That obviously doesn’t amount to real value.”

Corrupt governments are one of the largest hindrances to successful foreign aid. Foreign bureaucrats often lobby for aid money only to spend it on their own fortunes rather than their country’s true needs.

James Bovard of the Cato Institute cites many examples in which foreign governments abandoned their citizens, despite the large amounts of money they were given by the United States. According to Bovard, the ideal type of aid bypasses foreign political structures entirely, avoiding the chance for these governments to squander the money. A recent report by the Economist also celebrates a steady decline in the global poverty rate, while recognizing that aid played a “marginal” role at best.

This is not to say that foreign aid is completely ineffective. Bill Gates, one of the most vocal proponents of increased spending on aid, argues it is the “best way” to address poverty and suffering in poor countries.

Still, we should not blindly give money without recognizing some necessary conditions. Aid organizations often make the mistake of imposing their solutions upon a country without considering the local culture. Firsthand knowledge that citizens have from daily living through their country's challenges is absolutely vital to ensuring the success of aid projects.

Eberstadt and Adelman believe collaboration with local authorities is vital for the success of foreign aid. They say, "Collaboration seems virtually essential for a sustained engagement that brings benefits valued by all." Sindiyo echoes their sentiments, saying, "Local expertise is absolutely necessary."

In Kenya, Sindiyo believes that if the government learns from its past mistakes and structures foreign aid correctly, the country can become stable in as soon as 20 or 30 years.