

2009 SESSION REPORT

20th Annual General Assembly (AGA) and Conference | 14 – 16 May 2009
Rome Cavalieri | Rome, Italy

tel.: +32.2.512.8938 | fax: +32.2.512.3265 | e-mail: aga@efc.be | web: www.efc.be



From poverty to dignity: partnership with Africa

Moderator: Michael Göring, Zeit-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius

Speakers: Collins Magalasi, Action Aid; Jürgen Langen, Deutsche Afrika Stiftung; Christiane Grefen, DIE ZEIT

Session proposed by: Zeit-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius

Introduction

Helping the poor and assisting poor developing countries has never been an easy task. "Enabling people so that they can help themselves," is more easily said than done. Development aid has long been under discussion. This session strived to answer which methods have been most effective, and provided some examples of projects that have had sustainable results. Financial aid will not suffice to achieve successful impacts; it is the question of respect, trust and dignity that is at the centre.

The moderator, Michael Göring of the Zeit-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius set the scene of the session by reminding participants of the mock-trial that was held at last year's EFC annual conference in Istanbul, in which foundations in Europe were accused of not sufficiently supporting the poor south. While many foundations are bound by their statutes, it is apparent that only a few foundations work in Africa. European foundations should do more in and for Africa. His foundation, Zeit-Stiftung, has one programme focusing on Africa called "Partnership with Africa". Established in 2005, the programme started as an initiative of the Federal President of Germany, Horst Köhler, in cooperation with the Zeit-Stiftung. Those involved in the initiative have encountered many challenges, prejudices, and barriers, however, they have learned to carefully listen to each other. Dignity is extremely important in this relationship – human dignity calls for mutual respect and trust. Could dignity be a vital tool in the fight against poverty? The moderator posed a set of questions and introduced the panelists to the audience.

Collins Magalasi, Executive Director of Action Aid Malawi started his presentation by saying how positive he is about the future of Africa. He understands that currently foundations are very cautious about their funding because of the financial crisis but is sad to see that the majority of the support that foundations do provide does not go to the poor. Setting the scene by presenting a proverb from Malawi "a beer that you brew yourself tastes better", he then presented some examples, from his own experience, of how foundations can successfully support Africa or provide development aid to Africa, always with a sense of dignity. According to Mr. Magalasi, the sustainability of the programmes in Africa is very important. Microfinance is a tool that works very well in African countries and that brings dignity at the same time. He also mentioned that already a lot of things are being done in Africa by Africans, such as the initiation or establishment of community foundations. The housing project is one of those example in which people from the community help other people in the community to build houses. These initiatives are very successful and perhaps European funders could support these local initiatives that have proved to be working very well. Finally, Mr. Magalasi mentioned the difficulties African recipients are facing when meeting the reporting requirements of (European) foundations. Each foundation has a set of rules and requirements with regards to grant reporting that do not always facilitate, often the contrary, the work of the recipient in Africa.

Mr. Jürgen Langen, Secretary General of the Deutsche Afrika Stiftung presented the aim and specific focus of his foundation. The organisation is an atypical foundation that works primarily in

Germany and in the European Union. It lobbies for Africa in the German government and aims at changing the view on Africa in Germany and Europe. Mr. Langen strongly believes that there is an urgent need to find new strategies for cooperation and partnership with Africa. Europe has to change its viewpoint of Africa as a dark continent that is already “down the drain”. It is true that a lot of money has already been invested in the African continent but both Africans and Europeans are responsible for the failures that have been made in the past decades. The general public has a completely inaccurate picture of the African continent and this needs to be changed urgently. Mr. Langen then listed 10 points that are essential in order to turn around the situation:

- Europe needs to recognise that Africa has already achieved a lot over the past decades
- Africa is our neighbouring continent
- We are all interdependent
- Human rights are universal
- Europe has to empower Africa by allowing them to do business
- Education is vital
- Interaction and exchange between Europe and Africa is essential
- Europe needs to empower Africa through skills and knowledge
- Europe needs to stop exploiting the African continent
- Europe and Africa need to treat each other with respect and dignity and speak to one another on an equal level

Mr. Langen is confident that European foundations have the tools and means to do so and could change the African situation. Unfortunately, the existing forms of development aid so far have led to a loss of self-confidence and self-trust and pushed the African continent in a corner. It has become clear that Europe needs to change how it deals and works with developing countries.

Finally, the last speaker, Christiane Grefe, journalist of DIE ZEIT, a German newspaper, shared her point of view on how European foundations could help the African continent. Dignity demands first of all Europeans to be self-critical. For too long, Europe imposed its own ideas about development aid on the African continent. It is clear that Europe needs to work on its communication skills and can no longer just transmit its own ideas onto the continent. More questions should be asked rather than always giving answers. If one wishes to take dignity seriously, Europeans need to listen to the perspectives of developing countries and bring those perspectives into the foundations. Ms Grefe also noted that it is important that European foundations engage in Africa in long-term projects and that more attention needs to be paid in the development and support of agriculture. Although of less importance in Europe; in Africa and other developing countries, agriculture is the essence and basic requirement that is needed in order to fight poverty. Ms Grefe also spoke about the importance of cooperation, partnership and long-term network building. Finally she also mentioned that foundations in Europe could also play an important role in supporting south-south initiatives whereby for example an Indian NGO could exchange knowledge and practices with an African NGO. They know, better than any European institution, what the problems and needs are of a developing country in the south.

The session was concluded with a lively question and answer session during which the audience commented on the issues raised by the speakers.