

## The Anson Report ®

### Europe Engages Africa: Philanthropy and Governance

No one who reads or sees media reports today might term contemporary philanthropy a part of a nation's "hidden history," a phrase used by Daniel Boorstein to describe the concerted efforts of early charities and charity workers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.. At that time, philanthropic foundations were few in number and largely limited to providing financial backing for graduate research in the social sciences and research social work. This was an era of both a governmental vacuum in offering supports for the emergent scientific enterprise, and a growing national and immigrant population often geographically displaced by the equally expanding forces of urbanization and industrialization that were transforming agrarian lifeways.

Since that time, privately held and corporate philanthropies have grown, and they have also globalized, a prime area of concern being the alleviation of poverty in the developing world through the encouragement of agriculture on which a majority of the general population depends, and which occupies over 50% of African peoples. The financial largesse of philanthropic foundations is not only great and expanding. Their efforts are also increasingly accompanied by those of thousands of relief workers in the field. It is therefore understandable that philanthropic aid and character of institutionalization have become topics of inquiry and of criticism. One critique centers around the tendency for a multitude of eclectic projects to arise, that may well become competitive in the short and long-term. (1)

An additional challenge may inhere in the fact that financial aid often goes directly to national governments through bilateral arrangements though there is a definite trend towards donations, including those involving microcredit projects, being channeled directly to indigenous farming peoples. Many financial outreaches, however, remain in a nation's capital city, thus reinforcing formal and informal political involvement in financial and service delivery. One foreseen outcome is that there may be a mismatch among original philanthropic goals, national political agendas, and the needs of local indigenous populations. A related critique is that a long-standing preference for national financial routes may not ultimately bring about a needed blend of modern technology and traditional, customary farming methods and thus hinder local integration into developing and broader national economies.

The EU organization itself aims at playing a pivotal role in aiding Africa yet its efforts are frequently viewed as reticent if not overly cautious at the outset. (2) Nevertheless, the European Commission has called for an EU-African partnership that will allocate Euro 28 billion in the coming years towards governance and governmental reform. Some of these monies are meant to enable capital transferences from city to countryside in order to empower traditional agriculture and prevent unemployment and temporary patterns of migration that provoke local labor shortages both in farming areas and with respect to traditional markets. Additional potential lies in the ability of the organization to help coordinate relief workers and a multitude of projects through the management of regional and pan-African ties that are rooted in existent foreign policy relationships. As in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, however, a more familiar role for the EU organization is that it has the potential of funding research and education in economics and in the social sciences, practitioners of which are apt to be knowledgeable about those indigenous economic lifeways that appear better able to be retained under development

pressure, and therefore contribute best to sustainable agriculture. A governmental coordinating role in contemporary higher education may also be warranted. In 1960 Sub-Saharan Africa was home to only 6 universities. That number has now grown to at least 200, of which 87 are devoted to multidisciplinary research and training in agricultural studies. (3)

Whether foundation and governmental efforts will result in reducing poverty through the fostering of sustainable African agrarian lifeways may well be a matter for the future to judge. Looking back again at the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century philanthropic foundations, we may nevertheless conclude that their ability to survive rests not only on financial acumen, but also on an ability to pass through a similar if gradual social organizational life cycle. A first phase is characterized by the outcomes of the choices of individual donors, and often, their families. A second phase involves the transition from kin to nonkin as members of the board, as well as a definition or redefinition of achievable goals. A final phase encompasses the inclusion of professional managers as well as community members as trustees along with staff expansion. (4)

One journalist noted ironically that the successful bureaucratisation of philanthropic efforts tends to lead to those who live in poverty being statistically designated as individuals of "low food security." (5) Nonetheless, this success also allows the philanthropic enterprise a permanency in its private, in the public's, in governments' and in prospective recipient's minds. Lending this topic an evolutionary aspect thus suggests that the European presence in Africa itself may be, like those of the philanthropic foundations, a developing phenomenon, and that it might thus be premature to regard the EU's efforts in anything less than an optimistic light.

(1) Mwenda, Andrew M. "Subsidizing Failure." In *Africa's Plight*. Internationale Politik, Global Edition, Spring, 2008. (2) "An EU Partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Jose Manuel Barroso, President, European Commission (Press Release, 12/13/2007;

" Governance at the Heart of Development Cooperation: Commission Proposes Measures to Foster Reforms. European Commission, August 20, 2006. (3) Teng-Zeng, Frank K. "Institutionalization of Agricultural Science Research in Africa: A Historical Overview of Colonial and Western Influences." International Society for the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology, University of Guelph, June 15, 2005. (4) "Kin and Nonkin: The Gradual Life Cycle of Early Foundations." In Ann H.L. Sontz, *Philanthropy and Gerontology: The Role of American Foundations*. Greenwood Press, New York, Westport, Connecticut, and London (1989) Pp.17-34. (5) Cocco, Mario. 'No Longer Hungry, Just Folks of 'Low Food Security'.' In Claire Stanford (ed.) *Africa's Plight* The H.W.Wilson, Inc. (2007). Pp.166-168. (Originally in The Bergen Record, Bergen City, New Jersey, November 27, 2006.