

## Western aid: why it's so problematic

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**The UK's recent attitude to monetary aid highlights a wider problem in the West**

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In 2005, and under New Labour, then Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown insisted that what the African continent needed was its very own Marshall Plan. He argued that a historically large monetary sum injected into African economies would elevate the debt-ridden continent from its woes once and for all. Here, Brown seemed to completely misunderstand the facts: in the past 50 years, Africa has received more than 30 trillion dollars in aid, the equivalent of 6 Marshall Plans. This money has largely been mismanaged, or worse stolen, by some recipient African officials; it is precisely this behaviour which should be tackled. Otherwise the West will continue to waste its taxpayers' money, whilst impoverished citizens on the continent continue to miss out on essential development policies that directly benefit them.

Until recently, current Prime Minister David Cameron continued Brown's flawed argument, injecting monetary assistance into countries like Rwanda without considering who will in fact benefit from the aid. Rwanda's President Paul Kagame recently stood accused of war crimes in neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and, despite a damning United Nations report, Cameron proceeded to unfreeze Rwandan aid just 1 week before the town of Goma was captured by Rwandan-backed M23 rebels.



Finally, though, the British government took the UN report seriously, and re-froze the next instalment of Rwandan budgetary support, due on December 15, 2012. This is positive in that the United Kingdom thought critically about exactly where its monetary assistance was going; in this case the likelihood of the money going to M23 rebels could not be ruled out. However, more critical thinking is needed if Western aid is ever going to make a difference to impoverished citizens in developing countries.

Western aid is often put into a generic governmental bank account that consequently goes towards whichever projects the African government in question sees fit. How, then, does West know that its aid goes to state development, and not gross embezzlement? The UK Home Office recently admitted that dirty money from abroad, or money originating from corruption schemes, makes up a worrying 2% of British GDP per annum. It is also an unfortunate and well-known fact that a number of African leaders are notoriously corrupt; Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe and Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea are tips of a very large iceberg.

One of the things that Western countries should be doing is freezing corrupt officials' bank accounts, in order to prevent them squandering taxpayers' money, originally intended to help people. If Western intelligence, like MI6 and the FBI, managed to freeze the accounts of known Al Qaeda generals – which, incidentally, they did – why hasn't the same process been used here?

Key policymakers in the UK and the West must redress these issues so that well-meaning donations don't end up becoming a poverty-perpetuator. They could start by getting the facts right, in Brown's case, and looking critically at where exactly that vital money is being spent, in Cameron's.