



Workshop
Wednesday 24 January 2007

African Development Challenges

Speakers: Edwin Laurent, Head of trade and Regional Cooperation, Economic Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, David Dickie (Founder, Advance Aid), Simon Lucas

Abbreviations: ICT (Information and Communication Technology), NGO (Non Governmental Organisation)

This workshop session aimed to emphasise African development challenges, an opportunity and meeting point for many NGOs, donors, partners, relief and development agencies involved in the worldwide domain of relief and emergency work, trade, aid and development.

The workshop started with a warm welcome to the participants from David Dickie, founder of Advance Aid. Advance Aid is a new initiative that believes African companies can and should manufacture the world's emergency relief materials. With a worldwide relief market totaling £12 billion, of which 80% ends up in Africa, it is unfortunate that hardly any of the required implements/materials are sourced from there.

Currently aid is flown in from all over the world on expensive aircraft charters, the cost of which limits the actual financial aid getting through to the victims. African companies face too many barriers that they need to overcome to be able to engage effectively in manufacturing and trade. Receiving aid but not trade, which is the current situation, is not helpful. African companies should be awarded manufacturing contracts, coupled with the assistance required to overcome ingrained barriers. NGOs should be given disaster relief supplies in emergencies to allow rapid deployment of relief to victims without going through the current tendering system.

While humanitarian needs are unpredictable, there is an increasing trend of disasters in Africa. Although there may be resources available for these unfortunate disasters, sometimes getting what is urgently required to the victims is

delayed because of sheer distance from the donors. If some of these requirements were manufactured or available in Africa it would drastically cut down delivery times and ensure more effective and meaningful interventions.

Western corporate sponsors should do away with their short-term mentality and invest over a three year period and in addition to cash they should also donate expertise. Africa is the market of the future for many companies. Corporate sponsors should take advantage of the current ITC initiative to ensure quality standards are upheld. Advance Aid will pre-position stock and work closely with existing African NGOs to facilitate rapid emergency relief. It will then be necessary to develop partnerships with progressive corporations to provide investment, expertise and continuous support of emerging organisations. Skill shortages should be filled, allowing NGOs to concentrate on their core expertise. This should allow African suppliers to become commercially viable and move towards profitability. In return corporations would receive opportunities to participate in a truly effective form of aid and to have access to Africa's emerging markets, thereby maintaining a high level of visibility locally and internationally. This would also be a way to influence all stakeholders, investors, customers and staff and an opportunity to form partnerships with local companies and governments.

Simon Lucas, with almost twenty years of experience in supplying relief equipment from China, India and Korea, highlighted some of the barriers he had faced. For example, many recipient countries are insolvent, both a financial

risk and a potentially heavy financial burden for many wary suppliers. Government corruption also can be a bottleneck. Moreover, Governments can be apathetic about participating in relief exercises when there are no obvious or immediate benefits for them.

There is a need for African companies to manufacture relief equipment and provide expertise. Production in Africa to be distributed to African countries would reduce financial risks as partnerships created would ensure compliance, which would be in everyone's interest. This would also allow for elimination of

time restrictions by manufacturing in advance and making timescales more realistic. This would ultimately mean the creation of multiple jobs in Africa and would give African companies a chance to compete without compromising quality. Emergency relief would be delivered to victims on time and create a template for African Trade on a much larger scale. Achieving these goals will invariably require substantial adaptation of domestic economic policies, involve changes to domestic regulation and the adoption of new thinking. Commitment is the only way to ensure success.

Reporter: Danny Kema Lemba
Editor: Sarah Webborn
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