

Turkish Aid and Development Cooperation in Africa: A Win-Win Relationship

With its back and body bruised by the effects of colonialism, extreme poverty, apartheid, terrorism and dependence on colonial masters, the majority of the countries in Africa have always needed a helping hand. Two hands actually. Indeed several hands came in. The shortcoming of this avalanche of hands was that the intentions of majority were ill intentioned. They usually came in with ulterior motives. To rob more by using mileage of the issued aid.

Many countries on the African continent have been recipients of foreign aid for so long. However, the conditions on the ground were not changing positively. This prompted FIUs debates on the efficacy of foreign aid with many African elites concluding that it is the aid itself that is responsible for halting economic, social and political development of the recipient countries. This was blamed especially on the motives and methods of delivering aid which made it hard for it to have real and lasting impact on people.

For a long time, aid from other countries landed in the wrong hands. Selfish African leaders misused funds to enrich themselves at the expense of the majority. They built mansions, dwelled in luxuries and even passed on the wealth to descendants. Since aid was often not intended to serve the recipient's interests, as long as the motivation of the donor was realized, accountability and technical support were marginal.

Turkish aid has been modeled differently offering a bright ray of hope to many people on the continent. Indeed, the Turkish aid model is increasingly becoming the blue print of effective foreign aid. Turkish donors appear to be motivated by nothing but lifting fellow human beings from the dungeons of distress and poverty. Unlike the previous assistance programs, the communities lucky enough to receive Turkish assistance programs have witnessed clear impact without being forced to give up on their pride and dignity. I asked several people in Uganda selected randomly whether they have received any form of assistance from Turkey. The majority of those replied in the affirmative, heaping praise and crediting that assistance for changing their lives for better. One elderly gentleman I talked to had received a life changing medical operation conducted by doctors from Turkey for free. This, he informed me, was an unusual event as in the past people would be required to bribe in order to benefit from such 'free' services.

The increasing number of foundations from Turkey operating in Uganda has raised optimism among people especially among the Muslim community. The Turkish foundations have become famous for reaching out to the grassroots, avoiding as much as possible carrying out projects via middlemen and third parties. This ensures that funds and assistance is delivered to the right people. For instance, over the past few years, many Turkish organizations in Uganda have been slaughtering animals and distributing meat to the people in villages hitherto unable to afford it. What surprised many local observers I talked to was that the most senior representatives of these foundations were involved up to the point of seeing off the animals' slaughter and distribution. Practices such as these have taught local professionals effective management that would later ensure the sustainability of indigenous initiatives.

Acquisition of technical knowledge and management practices is one of the most important benefit of Turkish intervention on the continent. Technical support programs have been carried out by Turkish organizations, helping transfer knowledge to local practitioners and leaders. Turkish assistance programs have often been coupled with technical cooperation. Professionals from varying fields have been given opportunities to acquire relevant technical skills in by sending them to Turkey and by hosting Turkish experts in the recipient countries.

The result has been mutual benefit for all. The popularity of Turkey, its people and products have been increasing following its increased involvement in the continent. An increasing number of African businessmen now look to Turkey to import products varying from textiles to construction materials. Many of these ventures are now aided by an increasing number of Turkish language speakers in African countries most of whom were the recipients of scholarships from Turkish higher education institutions. By the way, Turkey's trade volume on the African continent increased from 3 billion USD in 2003 to about 20 billion USD in 2017. It is projected to improve further as both Turkey and African countries experience further economic growth.