

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION COOPERATION: TOWARDS GREATER AUTONOMY OR DEPENDENCY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA?

Editorial

The harambee (self-help) spirit has also greatly promoted the spirit of cost sharing in education where parents and local communities put up facilities and the government provides teachers and other inputs. This spirit continues to be a key element of our education financing system and has been spoken about world-wide as an example of where communities and governments partner effectively to promote education. Our people further learn that they have potential to help themselves and that they are not merely poor recipients of development aid. (Mwiria 2004)

This special issue of the CICE journal is about the complex relationships involved in the deceptively simple concepts of aid and self-help. It examines these from many different perspectives, including those of teachers and pupils, technical advisers and experts, donors and recipients, North and South. The donors or helpers are various; they are not only multi-lateral and bilateral donors, but also international non-government organisations; and in certain circumstances both national governments and local communities can be donors, as illustrated in the Kenyan example above.

One of the greatest challenges of the gift - whether it is a science project or an alternative school system, or a university-level innovation - is to offer it at the right time, when the recipient or the pupil is already on the look-out for a solution, and when they have made sufficient progress on their own that they can sift out what they really need from what is on offer. Absorptive capacity is not a sponge that can only passively soak up so much water (or aid). Rather, it is ideally a dynamic search process that, like Japan in the Meiji era, is engaged in searching out new knowledge but sorting and selecting it into the existing intellectual and cultural frameworks.

This is true of both sides of the exchange: the donor needs in some sense to be a recipient, and the recipient needs somehow to be a donor, if what Sida calls joint knowledge development between North and South is to work. The technical expert needs to be a learner, and the counterpart - awful term - needs also to be a consultant.

It is particularly appropriate that one of the principal audiences for this international journal is Japan. Its development cooperation philosophy, to a greater extent than most donors, has been embedded in its own history and experience of modernisation and reconstruction.¹ The kernel of Japanese development philosophy is that true aid partnership is about the intersection of its own tradition of self-help with the evident spirit of self-reliance in those it

¹ For a version of Japan's aid history and experience, see King & McGrath (2004), ch. 7.

was helping. There may be an idealising strain in this account of development cooperation. Indeed, analysts within Japan's aid community are critical of attaching too much weight to the aid factor in East and South East Asia's rapid growth:

Japan has been modest in its aid, not in terms of quantity but in attitude. We supported the self-help efforts of the developing countries and this style of aid proved successful in South East Asia in particular. But I strongly suspect that this was not because of aid *per se* but on their own merits. Aid did little in Asia in terms of quantity of input. The Asian dynamics derive from their competitiveness in labour, the availability of Japanese private capital and technology and the existence of the huge US market. So Japan should not be too proud of its aid to Asia and should try not to replicate its success to Africa. Africa is as different from Asia as a cherry tomato is different from a cherry. (Aid analyst, February 2004)

What is also important in this quotation is its identification of attitude as being crucial in development cooperation, or, for that matter, in learning. Behind the new vocabulary of aid, in terms like partnership or ownership or self-help, there are crucial attitudinal issues that are probably central to successful aid. These would include notions of commitment, of effort, of the search for symmetry in North-South or South-South relations.

Such terms are very different from the increasing certainties about the international development agenda that can be associated with the International Development Targets or the Millennium Development Goals. These speak of a development consensus, with a series of time-lines if the world's development is to be on track. But this new targeting discourse with the associated aid architecture of sector-wide approaches, direct budget support, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers may give the impression that development has already been defined, and simply needs to be implemented.

The papers in this special issue provide a wide-ranging and critical commentary on this international specification of development priorities, and especially for Sub-Saharan Africa. They point to the need to interrogate much of the current vocabulary in the allegedly new aid paradigm, and to pay as much attention to sustainability as to aid delivery or aid targets.

Finally, they point to the need in Africa to ground the aid impulse in the many local traditions of self-help and local development, just one example of which is mentioned above.

References

- King, K & McGrath, S. (2004). *Knowledge for development? Comparing British, Japanese, Swedish and World Bank aid*. London: Zed Books.
- Mwiria, K. (2004). The Harambee Spirit as the Engine of Education Development in Kenya. *The Sunday Nation*, 8th February 2004, Nairobi.

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