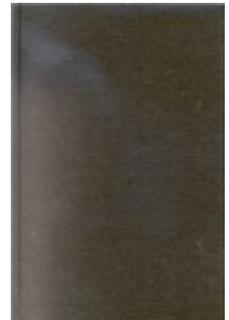




Phyllis R. Pomerantz. *Aid Effectiveness in Africa: Developing Trust between Donors and Governments.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004. ix + 151 pp. \$66.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7391-1002-7.



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Published on H-Africa (April, 2007)

Decades of western aid have done little to ease suffering in Africa. In fact, many would argue that the situation is worse than ever. With more than 300 million Africans living on less than a dollar day and two-thirds of the world's poorest countries located in Africa, is it finally time for aid agencies and donor nations to rethink aid strategy? Phyllis Pomerantz's new book *Aid Effectiveness in Africa*, while not an intellectual tour de force, is an important contribution to the growing literature on foreign aid. What makes this book important is not simply its concentration on Africa, but its fresh and pragmatic argument for aid reform. The picture that Pomerantz paints is reminiscent of James Morton's well-received, yet dense and hyper-specific, *The Poverty of Nations: The Aid Dilemma at the Heart of Africa* (1994). Like Morton, Pomerantz examines what has gone wrong and why aid has so often been ineffective and even counter-productive. Unlike many analyses of the effectiveness of foreign aid, Pomerantz locates its failure not in aspects related to political economy or state sovereignty. Nor does she locate its ineffectiveness in internal faults like selfishness, corruption, greed and/or arbitrary use of

government power. Rather her argument, developed out of nearly thirty years of service for the World Bank, is that culture matters.

Over the course of six chapters, Pomerantz makes a strong cultural case for why donors and governments need to begin to build greater levels of trust in order for aid to truly be effective. Although she does not argue for indigenous ground-level planning, she does call for greater cultural sensitivity and dialogue between giving and receiving countries. If aid reform is to bring sustained development to Africa, something that Pomerantz is hoping for, it can only be successful if aid agencies and other institutional entities change what they are currently doing. According to Pomerantz, as currently configured and presented, foreign aid is unproductive, vain, and fruitless. Instrumental rationality has overtaken purposive action and reform; reform that places people at the center of interaction and change.

In the opening chapter, Pomerantz makes clear that the book, although focused on foreign aid in Africa, "is not about money" (p. 1), rather it is about aid relationships and trust. To this end,

she is interested in the nonfinancial aspects of aid and more importantly, how constructive relationships can be built and sustained over time. In doing so, Pomerantz takes an interdisciplinary approach to exploring aid relationships. Her interdisciplinary approach combined with empirical evidence leads to the focus of the following two chapters on the importance of trust in aid relationships.

Chapter 2, "Trust in the Aid Setting," outlines in broad strokes how trust can be developed between sending agencies and receiving countries. According to Pomerantz, the basic elements for building a trusting relationship between the two are the core elements of shared purpose, commitment, and reliability as well as the supporting elements of familiarity, transparency, and open/honest communication. Of the basic elements, two stand out: reliability and familiarity. Here Pomerantz does not shy away from criticizing donors for their lack of reliability: that is, pledging money, but never disbursing it. As result, receiving countries have created coping mechanisms to alleviate donor unreliability. Further, Pomerantz notes a profound lack of familiarity, on the part of donor states, with local history, conditions, and cultural norms. As such, barriers are created by the lack of knowledge of donor agencies, which she explores further in chapter 3.

The third chapter, "Barriers to Trust: Voices from the Field," offers a rare perspective on the extent of these barriers and the challenges they pose, derived from extensive interviews with donors and senior government officials. As Pomerantz cogently points out, rather than dialogue and mutual influence between donor states and African government officials, monologue and unidirectionality take priority; a shared vision of how aid can lead to transformation is lost in donor paternalism and cultural insensitivity. As one African official stated, "They have defined the global view that contains little of African traditions and African conditions" (p. 54). In other

words, the exportation of "western ways"--piggy-backed on the dispensed aid--often do little to improve the lives of the African majority. Further, and a more disturbing fact, is that donors, according African government officials, know almost nothing of the African countries that receive the aid. As another donor stated, "They know very little. The donors see one big country of Africa, and all of Africa is seen in the same way" (p. 60). To this end, in order to limit the cultural and socio-historical confusion among donors, Pomerantz urges donors to become familiar with the history, culture, politics, and social structures of Africa. The minutia and nuances of Africa, past and present, will help build intercultural communication and by extension, trust.

The following two chapters (4-5) highlight the centrality of cultural differences and bureaucratic red tape in building--or preventing the building of--effective aid relationships. Chapter 4 illustrates, somewhat successfully, the broad dimensions of cultural variability. Again, using empirical evidence, Pomerantz shows how concepts of time, educational experiences, and communication styles can impact the aid relationship. Here we learn that many African diplomats prefer in-person verbal communication as opposed to the methods of western donors (i.e., written non-present communication) and the effects of an inherited colonial education on making decisions and problem solving. At first glance, this chapter seems to simply show culture as an obstacle, though Pomerantz's goal is to illustrate that Africa's many "cultural traditions as a storehouse ... [and] useful place to begin" (p. 92).

Chapter 5, "Institutional Roadblocks," takes a Weberian approach to understanding and delineating bureaucratic barriers to aid success. Pomerantz notes that the rationality of bureaucracies begets irrationality, that much of the failure concerning aid is the result of a type of "iron cage" syndrome. As a result, dialogue, mutual co-

operation, and trust are minimized and blocked due to bureaucratic red tape.

After successfully identifying the foundation of the aid relationship (i.e., trust) and explicating the two major obstacles to its development and sustainability, Pomerantz offers in chapter 6, "Tearing Down the Wall: Can Aid Relationships Be Improved?," a degree of optimism and suggests ways to transform the aid relationship. Drawing on her years of experience, Pomerantz notes that in order for aid in Africa to be a success, for reform and transformation to take place, a third way must be sought, a third way that is hybrid in its form (i.e., both African and western). In many ways, the chapter can be summarized with the last sentence of the book, a quote from an African diplomat, "Listen more to the governments. And believe a little more" (p. 150).

In the end, Pomerantz can be congratulated for making the terminology of donors and aid agencies accessible to the beginning student and layperson. Terms like "aid darlings," "aid fad," "aid fatigue," and others are unhinged from donors' argot and clearly defined, thus making this book a must for all introductory courses on aid, development, and international politics. Thankfully she does not use pages of statistical analyses to prove her point and her insider perspective brings an almost ethnographic feel to the prose, making it an easy read. However, the book suffers from a tremendous amount of redundancy and boasts an in-your-face elementary style. Utilizing more explicitly the empirical data that are more suggested than presented in the work at hand would not only have strengthened the book's overall argument, but also added greater depth and interest to the text. However, despite its elementary style and dryness, it is a hopeful book based on years of practical experience and thus should be applauded.

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Citation: Paul Khalil Saucier. Review of Pomerantz, Phyllis R. *Aid Effectiveness in Africa: Developing Trust between Donors and Governments*. H-Africa, H-Net Reviews. April, 2007.

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