

The Transafricana

Development Aid Failed

Presently, Africa has been and still is a playfield for well-doers: Missionaries, Development aid, Advancement programmes etc. etc. I think it can be said without reserve, that none of these programmes had any significant positive effect on standard of life in Africa or the economic situation of Africa. Most of these programmes or donations have, in the end, either been of benefit to the donator, who managed to keep his own manufacturing plants running or provided some exotic entertainment to some of his more adventurous citizens. Just to name a few examples of Swiss development aid: Some hundred Swiss tractors rotting away somewhere in southern Sudan - there is no infrastructure to get sufficient fuel nor for spares, which are only available from Switzerland. Or the Swiss paper plant in Tanzania, far from any paper wood supply and fitted with the latest electronic equipment who rotted away within months in the hot and humid climate. Or remember a few of the South African fiascos? The many manufacturing plants in Bophutatswana or in KaNgwane, which were closed the day the transport subsidy or the tax exemption expired?



Development aid is a typical example of undemocratic and dirigist interference. Projects are not located where the market forces require them to be - their location is chosen by a far-away manager. They do not necessarily lead to a production of goods which can be sold easily or which are necessary for the survival of the people concerned.

What about health care projects in areas where a high mortality rate traditionally went hand in hand with a high natality, thus keeping a very delicate ecological balance? And of how much use are educational projects, if skills are taught which will never be required in the professional world and lead to persistent unemployment of the thus skilled graduates? How much development aid money is pocketed by crooked officials and never even reaches the projects?

The first and foremost purpose of development aid is to make the donors, who have a deeply rooted feeling of guilt for the situation encountered (and often this guilt is not all that mistaken...) feel better and make them believe that they have done something for



the betterment of the people. In actual fact, though, this is nothing more than a passing roadshow, usually leaving behind a situation worse than before.

So much for development aid. No benefits, no benefactors. Impoverished people get poorer, oppressed people get more oppressed, skills learnt turn out to be quite useless. The donors end up making a profit, the receivers get increasingly engulfed in a pitiable condition of handout-receivers.

Transport still the main problem

Up to date, no unhampered transport routes across Africa exist. There is the unofficial North-



South route, cutting from Egypt through Sudan to Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe to South Africa. As the war in Southern Sudan is going on for decades, this route cannot be used anymore. There were merely dirt roads, though. The present detour around Southern Sudan is via the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. Another version of this route is the longer, but politically slightly less troublesome. It starts in Algeria, leads

via Niger and Tchad into the Central African Republic, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe into South Africa.



Most roads are in a poor condition and have not seen maintenance since independence. They suffer during rains and even those roads with a tarmac surface usually have lots of potholes due to poor maintenance. Lorries and cars suffer tremendously on these roads and accidents and breakdowns are frequent. The cost of transport is in no relation to the economic strength of the population.

Despite this obvious lack of roads, there is no railway line across Africa either. Theoretically, it should be possible to travel by Train from Johannesburg to Kinshasha, but practically, I believe the furthestmost north one can travel by train (note that they run all on different gauges to make things more difficult) is up to Nairobi. This would mean to travel by

SAR to Bulawayo, by Zimbabwe Railways and Zambian Railways to Kabwe and from there by TaZaRa to Dar-Es-Salaam. From there there might or might not be a train to Mombasa and from Mombasa Kenyan Railways run a train to Nairobi. As they are all on different gauges, most of the narrow-gauge and in poor repair, this is probably not the means of traffic of the future.



The vision

Africa might never achieve the development standard of Europe. And there is a good chance that it may never rid itself of all its structural evils. But, there is a few things which could make life for those skimming Africa for their own benefit a bit tougher and life for the average man a bit easier.

- Improved communication within Africa and to the outside world
- Better means of transport
- More cultural interaction within Africa
- A bigger internal market

To achieve the above, there is an idea, which a friend of mine, a Burkina-Faso born lecturer of Sociology at the University of Geneva and I, a swiss-born South African, have developed in the moonshine of a clear highveld night, on the stoep of a tiny cottage on a farm in Muldersdrif, 13 kms out of Johannesburg., with the help of a sixpack of Castle Lagers.

The Backbone of Africa



Cut all the development aid. Stop the handouts. Start building the Transafricana. Give Africa a backbone to start growing on its own. Give Africa back its pride.

The Transafricana is a Y-shaped parallel transport string cutting through Africa from Johannesburg to Cairo and Ceuta, consisting of a railway line, a street and a telecommunications cable. The Transafricana does away with capitals secluded from the rest of the country, which used to provide perfect protection to the rulers. The Transafricana will allow any place along its route to trade directly with Europe and the Near East. The Transafricana might have been a threat to the Mobutus of Africa, but a blessing for

those who are prepared to accept the innovations and challenges that will come with the package. Some items, up to now locally confined, will find entire new markets all over Africa at low transport costs:

- Fruits and vegetables grown in Central Africa
- Dates from Sudan
- Egyptian and South African technology
- Coffee from Uganda and from Cameroon
- Copper from The Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia
- Mielie meal from Zimbabwe
- Clothing from North Africa
- Motorcars and lorries from Nigeria and South Africa
- Spices and coffee from Tanzania

The list could be continued endlessly. The dependence on European imports (and expensive airfreight) would eventually cease. With the creation of a transport network, the market-related establishment of small industries would be secured. Every country connected to the Transafricana would have the option to create additional railways and roads to link up other regions. A cultural transfer would start, linking for the first time West Africa with East Africa, thus allowing a inter-african cultural exchange.

There is no perception that Europe has to donate the Transafricana to Africa. No ways. Africa has to build its own Transafricana, put its own engineers to good use. If Europe wants to participate, they can donate some normal-gauge railway know-how (most railways in Africa are narrow gauge...) some loans to carry the enormous cost and some assistance to pacify the Sudan (as the Transafricana would cross the country).