

A Better World, Part 4

America, Canada – the Generous

Any discussion of Development Aid in the U.S.A. or Canada can reasonably start with a review of how well each of our countries is doing in this vital area. Statistics ranking donor countries are based on a percentage of a country's Gross Domestic Product or Gross Domestic Income and are compared to a long standing commitment at the United Nations to spend seven tenths of one percent (.7%) on Development Aid. The well-to-do industrial countries as a group give Development Aid a low priority. From a recent OECD chart which is similar to other tables from various sources including the "Economist," we learn that only Denmark, Holland, Norway and Sweden attain or exceed the .7% goal. Japan's contribution at .34 % is only fair. Canada coming in at .32 %, or in 11th place, in no way reflects the generosity of its individual citizens.

But the big surprise is the United States ranked bottom of the chart of 21 countries with .10% of GDP or about one seventh of the promised amount.



But what is worse is the fact that Americans, as people, are also generous, not only in giving to good causes at home, but to numerous non-profit organizations abroad. It is our government which is the cheapskate. To top it off, we think that our government is generous!! How is this possible? For example, we give billions of dollars in military aid to Israel and Egypt, and these and other military and strategic donations in the public mind become "Development Aid." They are nothing of the kind, and are not even intended as such. Before we can consider how Development Aid should be structured to achieve maximum benefit for people "on the ground," we have to get serious about the problem of poverty. Holland and the Scandinavian countries by themselves can not and should not carry the load.

Once the rich countries as a group decide to "pull up their socks," so to speak, a vast recruitment of capable people who have technical skills and respect for other cultures would have to be undertaken. Difficult as that sounds, we would have a number of important elements in our favour. One is knowledge of the mistakes of the past, and a second is the presence of the so-called NGO's (Non-Governmental-Organizations) which have accumulated a great deal of experience regarding Development in recipient countries. At the risk of leaving out other stellar performers, I can think of the following which I am currently supporting or have supported : Canadian Food Grains Bank, Canadian Friends (Quaker) Service Committee, CARE, CAUSE, CUSO, Development & Peace, M&S Fund United Church of Canada, OXFAM and UNICEF. Any and all of these would agree that, no matter how successful their projects are, they do not have the resources to bring about fundamental change. Our third advantage is the fact that Development has been for some time studied in Universities and private foundations, so that practical experience is seriously evaluated and this academic work is widely available.

As part of the Development scene, one has to consider the Peace Corps, (which merits a separate column) and two UN affiliated entities, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, whose policies have been controversial, but which can not be left out of any future Development effort. Lastly, foreign business investment, which is touted as the obvious solution by most western editorialists, also has a place. However, in this regard one must realize that many Canadian and American companies engage in poor labour and environmental practices abroad in order to get goods or services at the lowest possible price. As a consequence, these entities are often hardly ideal Development partners.

But our greatest problem by far, greater even than the results of prior mistakes and of violence and corruption in places of desperate Development need, is the lack of political will to make the elimination of poverty a priority on the part of industrialized countries. Only leadership which truly understands our world can convince our people to put their greatest efforts into this struggle. The cost would be quite modest: A 5% reduction in military expenditures and its diversion to Development everywhere, and not just by the rich countries, would be enough.

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Date of publication : March 2004