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Trump's Foreign Aid Suspension Unnerves Washington, not Recipients. Part 1

On January 20th, 2025, Donald Trump paused US foreign assistance for 90 days. This move was followed by the suspension of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through which most US foreign assistance was channeled.



The ‘Donor’ Protesting

Surprisingly, the recipients ignored this suspension, leaving Washington to protest it, which shows that parties in Washington have been the chief beneficiaries of this aid. Meanwhile, some in the recipient countries do not perceive the suspended assistance as worth bemoaning but replacing and moving on. While Trump has repeatedly accused other countries of ripping off the US through aid, using the term ‘development assistance’ to refer to this money that is never used to build roads, bridges, power plants, or buildings is quite ironic. It shows that ‘development’ means something else to Washington. According to USAID’s localization report released in 2023, over 90% of its money went to its international partners in and around Washington.

USAID has always been tied to procuring from the US, making recipient countries fail to develop industries that can organically respond to local challenges

Therefore, only 10% reaches targeted communities, and some end up funding opium production and pedophile-ran children's orphanages, among others. The US and Western Europe frame Africa as surviving on aid, which is only a colonial ploy. In response to Trump's suspension, some Kenyans recognized that America's foreign aid helps Washington and that the US is an unreliable partner. Surprisingly, Kenyan media coverage recognizes the need to move on from Washington's posturing and find sustainable funding sources.

Trump's Cutting Funds for Contractors in Washington

Some Kenyans have been baffled by Trump's suspension of aid, noting how it gave Washington unsolicited influence. For instance, an opinion sent to Kenya's Daily Nation after Trump's suspension revealed that the sender was baffled by the White House, since the aid gave the US soft power and influence. The opinion email proceeded to suggest that Trump's America is cash-strapped due to its senseless tariff war with China. Noteworthy, the US received funds from Europeans before passing the bulk of it to Washington-based contractors, emphasizing the importance of this aid to America. It has been an open secret that Western aid helps the donors and not the recipients. Trump's move will adversely affect American businesses, even as noted by an FP article from May 2022, which revealed that foreign aid was funding a bubble in Washington.

Therefore, his suspension runs against his America First Policy; this drastic move must be informed by a more significant concern for the US empire, such as China. An article authored by Nicholas Okumu, a Kenyan orthopedic surgeon for the Star Newspaper, steered clear of Trump's actions, and their motivations and focused on how Kenya should respond. Okumu observed that American aid has always been a tool for political leverage and economic self-interest, insisting that Kenya should seek sustainable ways of funding its projects instead of relying on Washington's unpredictable and ineffective *assistance*. US aid only yields minimal tangible benefits for Africans, as it is fashioned to prioritize American commercial interests, for instance, by awarding contracts to US firms and undermining industries in recipient countries.

US Aid's Vicious Cycle

Issuing the US *development assistance*, including the part disbursed through USAID, starts by leading the audience into a tunnel vision of how the country is planning an extensive (supposedly) altruistic program to alleviate pressing challenges in poor countries. At this stage, audiences are not informed that Washington created the challenge or wants to enrich its

contractors without addressing the problem. For instance, details that Washington's Pentagon had bombed Al-Shifa pharmaceutical manufacturing company in Sudan in 1998, hence preventing millions from accessing health supplies, are hidden. The aid ends with money being spent in Washington and nothing being achieved for recipient communities, even while a justification for an enormous investment is created. Washington does not care if people access medical supplies, but whether its contractors can benefit from purporting to supply them.

A good example may include the repeated cycle of USAID's Global Health Supply Chain Cycle. The first cycle, conceived in 2015 and worth \$9.5 billion, ended without substantial results and was used in 2024 to justify a new one worth \$17 billion. In the beginning, Washington's media machine told audiences how USAID planned the Global Health Supply Program, which was designed to solve the problem of lifesaving health supplies being inaccessible to poor countries. The empty hype in this endeavor may have been detected in the statement that the project was supposed to "shake up global health contracting," meaning the primary interest was not to alleviate supply problems but to award a massive contract to the main contractor, Chemonics International.

The project's value of \$9.5 billion had been dispensed three years later and was spent on fraud and inefficiencies. After 2017, the main contractor received a deadline extension and an additional \$2 billion without delivering substantial results. An investigative report found that Chemonics International's procurement reviewers had made up figures to report that 80% of the contracts had been delivered. Thirty-nine people had been indicted with fraud, but the main contractor escaped with a slap on the wrist by paying only \$3.1 million to the justice department. Therefore, Washington's aid benefited a contractor who used a façade of delivering aid to other countries. To attest to the failure of the first project cycle, which started in 2015, USAID launched a similar \$17 billion project, dubbed NextGen, by signing contracts for delivering 'lifesaving supplies around the globe.' It is ironic for anyone to think that Washington, which bombed a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan in 1998 and a trauma hospital in Afghanistan in 2015, really cares whether people can access medical suppliers. Noteworthy, most countries are unable to produce medical supplies because America's big Pharma monopolizes them through patents.

Going Forward

USAID has always been tied to procuring from the US, making recipient countries fail to develop industries that can organically respond to local challenges. For instance, American laws mandate that food aid be purchased from American farmers and delivered using

American-flagged vessels, which means farmers in the recipient countries lose business. Similarly, other industries that receive aid from the US can also collapse, which limits Africans' development. The deleterious effects of the US aid programs can explain the donors' insistence on issuing them out, meaning that Africans should not view Trump's suspension of aid as a tragedy. Instead, it is an opportunity for reflection on how American aid should be replaced, since it is ineffective and unreliable. The US will permanently halt its aid when it does not stand to gain. Therefore, African governments must seek ways to finance their projects without relying on Western aid.

Simon Chege Ndiritu, April 02, 2025

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