

Yet another Reason Why Education is the Only Way out – My Rendition of Black History Month 2011 Celebrations

Youssou N'Dour, one of the world greatest performing and recording artists has a song called "Useless Weapons" on one of his numerous over a million copies selling albums called "Womat", which in the Wolof language means Guidance. The song draws attention to how useless weapons are in the world in general and in Africa in particular. In it, he recounts the Vietnam War, the gulf War and many recent historical belligerences that have change the way we perceive our world. In another song on another hugely popular album called "Joko", which is as well in Wolof and means "Migration from rural life to urban life," there is a song called "My Hope Is In You", which is titled and sang in English. One of the lines he sings says: "...drop your gun and go to school, do you hear me brother oohii? My hope is in you...I wanna watch your spirit touch the skies there's so much more you can do...you'll make it through, my hope is in you". The analogy of the two songs and what is there to learn from these them is that there are two types of weapons. One is *useless weapons* and the other is *useful weapons*. A pen, a book and the time taken to read, these are useful weapons. Guns, tanks, bombers, machetes, bow and arrows, these are useless weapons. I am not the first person to note that there is a need for a form education that will lead to self appreciation in Africa and African communities in the Diaspora. Many have advocated this in the past and not a day passes that we do not get evidence of the fact that the issue is a disturbing one.

However, what led to choosing to render my part of the celebration this way is that, I contemplated for a while on what or how my contribution to this year's Black History Month should be since I am not in Austria at the moment, until an opportunity came for me to address one of the prevalent challenges many African communities both on the continent and in the various diasporas face. But before addressing the topic, it is very important to clarify one thing. Some would ask what does such a symbolic Diaspora celebration of a milestone has to do with education issues. Beside the fact that celebrations are often times to reflect on past achievements and a platform for tackling gaps left, the celebration itself marks the end of some of the horrible things that happened to African people simply because they lacked self consciousness and education about self. Moreover, this can be a way of restoring ties because since the passage of Diaspora civil right movement and impendence movement in Africa, the two have slowly lost the direct connection that once upon a time, linked them. Further on the same line, Pan-Africanism should not be seen as a thing of the past or a fading out nationalistic idea because it is alive and plays a key role in African development issues. Just to mention one example, in 2008, Pan-Africanist civil society groups pressurized the Economic Communities of the West African States bloc (ECOWAS), to, for the first time, come out of trade negotiations between the bloc and the European Union with one of Africa's most successful trade negotiation outcomes with powerful world blocs since the formation of these states. These efforts basically yielded fruitful outcomes because at their gathering in the capital of Ghana, Accra on the 11 of august 2008, the pressure groups who felt they were well aware of what Africa needs, voiced their demands

saying that even if ECOWAS leaders should come out of the meetings with good aid deals, regardless of what these deals are worth, it is a failure. With fourteen out of the sixteen-countries bloc making up ECOWAS democratized at that time, the leaders knew those demands will translate into pressure and even lead to loss of elections. These pan-African groups were able to convince the leaders of their countries to get deals, citing that trade with newly blooming economies such as China and India amidst economic crisis in Europe will bring more benefit to Africa than trade deal tied to aid. So education definitely is the key. For instance, Ghana has been hyped as one of the economies to grow more than 5% in 2011 because of its ability to harmonize its political and economic development in positive direction coinciding with its recently launched oil and gas industry. But Angola and Nigeria are living evidence of African states in top ten 'hot' commodity exporters still heavily dependent on aid. If a state lack the necessary expertise a 'hot' commodity will lead to conflict rather than translate commodity earnings into better living standards for its people.

To continue on the reason why I chose to use my column for advocating education and denouncing aid, I had a discussion with a group of friends in a market in Khartoum on the evening of Tuesday February 8, 2011. The discussion centered on poverty in Africa. In fact these three brothers felt the only way that Africa can get out of poverty is continuous assistance from outside. In their view, industrialization is the only way out and Africa is not in the position to industrialize anytime soon so aid should continue. In trying to convince them that education, not only curriculum-based education, but self-awareness and conscious education, and self confidence are the fundamentally key needed ingredients to get Africa out of poverty, I realize "I was running my head again a wall". I quickly came to the realization that the dilemma was the fact that the levels at which each of the four of us was analyzing the issues was very different. In fact there were stack differences in the levels of analysis that there was no way for a compromise. However, the sad reality was that these were curriculum educated brothers from western Universities. This is a clear indication that curriculum education alone will not do the job.

As I left the shop towards the exit of the market, I asked myself so how and when will Africans come to the realization that one of the key reasons why so many of people of African descent are still in servitude to non-Africans is that they expect others to pity them; that the fact that we are all humans with different interests, expecting someone to bring it for you comes with conditions they will want to you to fulfill. That taking psychologically strengthens giver and involuntarily subdues the receiver. I again realized that regardless of what these brothers think, the issues must be addressed. We cannot just stop and say "they would not understand anyway". Who knows? The conversation might be going too fast and may not come out correctly as everyone wants to be heard. Besides, consciousness can take years of series of life experiences to settle on the minds of people, so I decided to use my column for this issue. I decided to address it in such as way that various leaderships of African people can get to listen to the voices of some of the seeds they have sown, have something to take with them if they happen to read this, and ordinary

Africans can also take something home from this article. The idea is not so complicated. It is a simple fact that there are many reasons why there is a need for education, not just curriculum education but also self education, and that there are many reasons why Africans must do everything in their power to stop seeing aid as a sustenance factor.

The issue about education and aid to Africa is this: aid is often seen only in the light of the lives it saves. Naturally, this is not wrong. But have we asked ourselves if it does damages too, and whether there could be a possibility that the damages outweigh the lives it saves? These are questions that we can only ask if we are educated to a certain level. Think about the fact that when aid consumption becomes chronic, and the aid for one reason or the other, stops coming in, people become poorer than they were before they started taking the aid. Their country may even fall into a conflict as result. However, the biggest damage aid does lies in its destruction of long term capacity of a group of people. The main reason is that as people get comfortable with aid, they slowly destroy their own capacity for self reliance, their local market and any long term economic capacity. So in the long run, while aid could provide short term assistance, it creates dependency of recipient on donor and prolongs the period of growth of the capacity of the people to provide for themselves. On another difficulty surrounding the negativities associated with aid, though it will not be right to make a straight forward claim that all donors donate to stake their claim of political influence and other benefits such as the guarantee of the flow of natural resource and other raw material into their own economies. But fact is that whether these are intended or not, donors use aid to exert political influence on receiving countries and some of them will go to destructive lengths to make sure the status quo is not disturbed.

On the one hand, there has recently been a great deal of enthusiasm shown towards Africa's economic future through the fast homogenization of the world. So this has led many people who for a long period of time have advocated education in general and self conscious education in particular in Africa to loosen up in their fight for education on the continent and for African people in the Diasporas. Some think that after all, it's all about self sufficiency and getting rid of poverty. Therefore since economic prosperity is coming towards Africa, so there is no need to worry in this direction any longer. Some have argued that the producers will need markets for products and therefore will be forced by the global political economy to explore places like Africa. But what needs to be remembered is that as African countries democratize and their economies grow, the sustainability of their economies and new found political freedom and self determination will depend on how educated they are to understand their position as Africans in this global political economy, own their freedom, guide its sustainability and guard against a renewed attempt exploit them. On the internal front, the argument is simple: it takes an educated person to realize that chasing one's own personal political and economic ends with the use of military force on own soil can only make weapon companies rich, devastate one's own life and the lives one's own people, and one's own economy. Therefore whereas curriculum-based education will largely sustain the political and economic strides made, self consciousness and

education about self will not only uplift African people spiritually, but also lead them out of servitude and racial subordination. Ideally, the two types of educations must be blended.

On the other hand, many people who rightfully do not buy into this enthusiasm, tend to anxiously want to see an end to aid in Africa or to African people but without stating explicitly and clearly, how to fill the void that will be left until African people put a capacity to sustain themselves in place. In my view, Africa should clearly steer away from prolonging aid, and stay open to emergency aid while giving serious concentration to education of its people. I am against aid but emergency aid and capacity building for African people should be sought. If you think about the amount of money aid has brought into Africa-even though these amounts vary according to different experts but most experts agree that it is in the region of over 2 Trillion US Dollars since the aftermath of the early 1960s wave of independence. As crazy as it may sound, this has done more damage than help depending on how one looks at it. One of the amazing things that lack of education is doing in this direction is that with all these tragedies that have come to pass despite aid money, people still put hope on aid. The time has come for the experts in Africa and the African experts in the Diaspora stop pressuring donors, regardless of whether it is pressure to stop aid or to change the types of aid they give because at the end of the day, it is only Africans who can help themselves. There is a need to invest more energy into strategies of how to present the people with alternative and stop taking aid, than how to get the donors to stop donating. Besides, the donors have interests expected in return for these aids they give, which if they don't get, could lead to challenges in their own economies. Africans must understand that politics is interest-laden; that if states have interests somewhere, it is often not just aid; sometime force can be used to get these interests. That is just how politics works.

. In winding up, I will like to reemphasize a point made above about sieving through and choosing and accepting aid only in emergency, those meant for building for building own capacity and avoiding aid that becomes chronic. Since we are all humans, regardless of where help comes from, one may need to take it for his/her own survival. But fortunately, there are no African states that will collapse within a short time if aid ceases. Nonetheless, it will be suicidal to stop all aids abruptly. So a careful selection of aid, especially those to help build capacity and those that go towards educations should be prioritized. The concluding arguments here should be the ones at hindsight. Whether it is the reasons behind what lead to celebrating Black History Month by rendering such an article, reasons behind what happens to people's self-confidence when they linger for too long in chronic aid or the reasons behind the inability to make the right choices today for the sake of tomorrow, there is a need for majority of the African people to reshape their thinking.

By Abdallah Salisu, on 10th February 2011