

**Development Aid and Its Criticisms:
The View from Zambia**

By Lindsay Morgan

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ABSTRACT

What do an HIV-positive Zambian volunteer health worker, a young American aid worker, and a bureaucrat from the UK Department for International Development think about Dambisa Moyo's indictment, in her book *Dead Aid*, that donor efforts to "save" poor Africans are paternalistic and perpetuate dependency on the West? Moyo was born in Zambia—one of the poorest countries in Africa and a cauldron of donor activity. In 2005, the country received \$1.7 billion in official development assistance—that's 17.3 percent of gross national income for a country of only 12 million people. In this essay, CGD policy analyst Lindsay Morgan explores the reality of aid-supported development in Moyo's country from three (very different) perspectives of people working there. She sheds light on a fundamental paradox of the aid business: huge donor efforts, much good, and massive unfulfilled need. The essay also explores the paradox of these three peoples' lives—of believing they can fight injustice and suffering, and knowing there are significant limits to what they can do

The Center for Global Development is an independent, nonprofit policy research organization that is dedicated to reducing global poverty and inequality and to making globalization work for the poor. Lindsay Morgan is a policy analyst at the Center for Global Development. This essay was written during a visit to Zambia by the author while on leave from CGD.

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Development Aid and Its Criticisms: The View from Zambia

Lindsay Morgan¹

Perhaps an Impasse

Driving through Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, is like a first trip to Las Vegas. Everything is in your face, something to see. Dusty streets, potholes like craters, people hanging off the back of pickup trucks, women wearing babies like backpacks as they hack away at maize, the smell of smoke from burning trash on the side of the road, horns honking, traffic that moves like liquid. Almost two-thirds of Zambians live below the international poverty line—around 7.5 million people. The average life expectancy is a stunning 46 years. Only 58 percent of the population has access to clean water.

Zambia is a poor country. It is also a cauldron of donor activity. In 2005, the country received \$1.7 billion in official development assistance—that's 17.3 percent of gross national income for a country of 12 million people. "The question people ask," says Justin Mubanga, the Director of the Economic Management Department at the Ministry of Finance and National Planning, "is, in the last fifteen years Zambia got so much aid but there was little progress. What caused this?"

Zambian-born author Dambisa Moyo says *aid* caused this. She says it has "hampered, stifled and retarded Africa's development." But there are others who say, on the contrary, that aid improves the lives of the poor and makes the sick well.

Gordon

Gordon Brown, the 35-year-old Zambia country representative for Africare, a U.S.-based non-governmental organization (NGO), is standing at his desk in a crisp navy blue blazer and khaki slacks, a phone in one hand, the other tapping his keyboard. Even standing still, he's humming with energy.

Gordon's job is to develop new programs, oversee those that already exist, and form alliances and partnerships. It's a long way from Augusta, Georgia, where he grew up. "The first time I walked into a store [in Africa] and nobody knew who I was or cared, I felt like I fit in by not being noticed, you know what I'm saying?"

Africare's work in Zambia centers on health, food security and agriculture, and emergency response. Their projects, Gordon says, are about meeting peoples' essential needs. So for

¹Lindsay Morgan is a policy analyst at the Center for Global Development. This essay was written during a visit to Zambia by the author while on leave from CGD. Lindsay would like to thank Tyler Bourke for his photographs of Gordon and Boyd. The photograph of Joy Hutcheon is Joy's own.

