

Research Title: “The effectiveness of GCSE textbook distribution as a form of development aid to the region of Mtwara, Tanzania”.

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Introduction

'I say what kind of development is it when people live shorter lives than before? They catch HIV/AIDS. Our children are beaten in school and won't go there. Some become prostitutes...They are starting to commit suicide. We never saw that before. It hurts to say this. Is this development? [...] If anyone had read a lot of books and thinks I am primitive because I have not read even one, then he should throw away those books and get one which says we are all brothers and sisters under God and we to have a right to live' (Sesana 2005, www.survival-international.org)

In his speech about the liberation of the Kalahari people, Roy Sesana (2005) addresses a concurrent theme within the issue of development. Originating from a 'tribe' located in the heart of Africa he condemns those forcing his people to 'develop' according to European standards. The issue at hand concerns the education system where Sesana (2005) argues against the influence of foreign education and the adverse impacts it has had upon the local communities. This research project traces the work of the educational charity READ International, a charity for which I have worked over the past year that specialises in the transference of educational resources in the UK, namely textbooks, to various regions in Tanzania. The study derived from the initiative of wanting to see the project through; whether our efforts in collecting, sorting, fundraising for books were actually making a difference to the Tanzanian education system or proving to be a hindrance, as in Sesana's (2005) case. It is thus through a series of observations and interviews I sought to answer the question whether book distribution is effective as a form of development aid to find that the answer cannot be given in concise 'yes' or 'no'.

Background Information

On READ International 'recycling education allowing development' is a charitable non-governmental organisation that specialises in recycling GCSE and key stage 3 textbooks, which correlate to the Tanzanian national curriculum of forms 3 and 4. The charity oversees a group of student led projects based in various English universities (www.readinternational.org.uk). Such groups are responsible for collecting textbooks locally and generating the necessary funds to ensure the transmission of the books to Tanzania at the end of each academic year. The regions which the textbooks are sent to are selected by the Ministry of Education. The charity was founded by a group of students who saw a lack of educational resources in Tanzania and an abundance of textbooks being wasted in the UK, the solution seemed obvious and simple hence the success of READ International today.

Figure one: READ Book Project logo.



On Tanzania The history of Tanzania is one littered with extraordinary occurrences ranging from German and British colonial rule to the adventures of David Livingstone. To give a brief outline would fail to do justice to the history of the country however for the purposes of this research project I will be drawing light upon post-colonial Tanzania as it was under the rule of President Julius Nyerere. Never was heavily inspired by the works of Karl Marx and the Chinese communist system and so sought to bring socialism to Tanzania. Prior to his involvement in Tanzanian politics, Nyerere was a teacher. After British colonial rule came to an end in 1961, policies implemented by Nyerere included ridding all forms of colonial influence from the educational system; there was a strong concern to counteract the colonialist assumptions and practices of the dominant, formal means of education (www.infed.org)

Methodology

The investigation into book aid development will involve qualitative research methods where as an ethnographer I will be travelling with the charity to Tanzania and conducting participant observation along with a series of interviews to inform my study.

'In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions- in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:1)

I had chosen participant observation as a suitable form of investigation since I had been working for the charity prior to the proposition of this study. This enabled easy access into the charity and allowed me to experience the reality of the environment which I was in. For the past academic year (2006-2007) I worked for READ INTERNATIONAL collecting GCSE and secondary school level textbooks; I was involved in 'sorting' which books would be culturally appropriate, for instance subjects such as mathematics and the sciences which arguably contain minimal cultural

bias. To avoid ethical issues of dishonesty and potential harm I refrained from a covert role making my intentions of critically examining the charity explicit to the director as well as to my colleagues furthermore, where I had made observations of schools I refrained from taking down their names providing a degree of confidentiality.

I found that rather than hinder research this form of ethnography furthered accessibility into the charity where through their existing contacts I was able to conduct informal interviews with persons such as the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, there were instances where I had to distance my role within the charity to that of the ethnographer purely to prevent confusion for my interviewed subjects. This did cause a few complications for not only the research but for me since I had undertaken multiple identities in my role as a researcher.

'There are times in the course of the research when I began to confuse my role- researcher, pregnant woman, mother, feminist, participant observer and so on. I found such confusion disturbing but healthy, for it indicates the artificiality of the boundaries we set ourselves. Human experience is often not as neat and tidy as we strive to make it' (Oakley cited in Dunsmuir and Williams 1991:31).

The complications discussed by Oakley highlight the impossibilities of staying within one methodological paradigm. For instance, what in theory may be doable in practise may not. Furthermore, like Oakley, I myself had assumed dual roles whilst conducting my research; I was not only a researcher on behalf of the Reinvention Centre and a volunteer for READ INTERNATIONAL, on a more personal level I was also tracing the steps of my forefathers who through a colourful migration history had lived in Tanzania, and lastly I was the only non-white member of a group of twenty five students from the UK.

To elaborate on these roles I had obtained, I am of an Indian heritage. Prior to travelling to Tanzania I conducted an interview with my Grandfather, Mr. Harsukhlal Damji where I was to learn that my fore-fathers migrated from India to east Africa in the 1930's- 1940's, significantly prior to Indian Independence¹. Scattered around Kenya and Tanzania they were to remain in this part of the world until the 1960's, again around the time of East African Independence. They finally moved to England in the 1970's, the heart of the British Empire. Now why, one may ask is this colourful family history worth referring to? Perhaps it is my empathetic understanding of countries such as Tanzania had fought for so long to achieve independence from its influences here I was, less than half a century later gallivanting off with my 'British' charity to help the 'third world' develop!

¹ See **Appendix one**

collect much tuition fees from students / about five years old / upon our arrival the 'debating team' were preparing for the argument "Did the arrival of whites hinder the development of Africa?"/ School had only Black children.

The schools in Bukoba were the very first few schools we had seen in Tanzania. I included this diary entry for several reasons, firstly I do believe it highlights the politics of development in that when we entered the mentioned classroom there were several awkward looks exchanged between teachers since they felt uncomfortable questioning the foreign presence in Africa whilst simultaneously requesting aid from our charity. Secondly, the racial dynamics of Western aid were made apparent as one of the teachers- in order to humour us and the students stated 'and here are the whites' in response to the debated question. I myself am not white, yet was somehow seen as such. What I felt this implied was that foreign aid work was a 'white' mission- endemic of the Victorian initiative of the 'White woman's burden'.

Date: Wednesday 29th August 2007

Region: Dar es Salaam; commercial Capital of Tanzania

FIRST INTERVIEW: 10:00am to 11:45am

Interview with Dar University Printing Press Managing Director Mr. Lipangala D.T Minzi (*for the purposes of this study I have chosen only selected questions and answers, my questions will be written in italics and Mr. Minzi's response following*)

In regard to the activities READ INTERNATIONAL are conducting in Tanzania do you feel in any way that this may be an infringement on the domestic production of textbooks?

"Rather than an 'infringement' textbooks from the United Kingdom would provide an alternative perspective, different views should further instead of hinder education. The University Printing Press derives a reasonable income from the development of secondary school books, whilst ideally we would be able to supply all the schools in the country economically there is a need to specialise in particular areas to generate income. The secondary school market is not as predictable as primary schools, and while there is a preference of working with local people, publishers and book sellers 'books selling' is a new business since the 'Liberalisation of Publishing'. Since Liberalisation has just begun there are still areas which need materials, especially science books; there is still a big gap. READ is therefore supporting the government and as a source is not big enough to flood the market. It is a 'drop in the sea'."

... You referred to 'Liberalisation'; can you please explain what this is?

"Until 1991 the government had a monopoly on publishing to ensure education is accessible. They were supervising the writing of education; manuscripts were sent to the government to government controlled publishers and were distributed by the government to various regions..."

...What can you tell me about the African reading culture?

"Teachers never saw books whilst they were studying; they therefore don't know what to do with them. And schools don't have libraries and so there is a very limited variety of materials available."

...To what extent would you agree or disagree that charities such as READ coming from the West are a modern day form of imperialism?

"It depends how we define imperialism, how do you define imperialism?"

To me the term suggests the transference of cultural and political values from a dominant to a subordinate country...

"Things need to change in accordance to globalisation; we are as they say bringing the world into one small village. Anti-imperialist sentiments aren't as strong as at the time of independence due to globalisation. Problems remain in examples culturally based in the UK- how can they relate to the village people? It depends on how we define imperialism, is it the new globalisation? Since globalisation is positive, whilst imperialism negative, if we see charities as investing Tanzania like a business it is positive but it can also be seen as robbing sources on the negative..."

Mr. Minzi mentions several key factors here primarily that READ International is not big enough to act as a competition to local indigenous publishers, therefore the ethos of the charity as supplementing as opposed to directing the Tanzanian education system is indeed being maintained. The second factor is that of cultural relevance, Mr. Minzi acknowledges one of the problems we were faced with when talking to children in the schools that being trying to explain the Western examples in an African context². This idea is taken up by the author Otike (1993) who argues that book donation charities bring 'culture and propaganda into the country as much as they want to feel that they are being generous'. It is the idea of cultural propaganda, which promotes the values of one culture over another which makes us question whether educational development is an altruistic act or having some ulterior motive of spreading Western values; an act so heavily criticised post-imperialism. Perhaps it is worthwhile referring to the revolutionary ideologies of Paulo Freire (1997) who advocates change within the linguistic discourses to make them far more universally embracing

'What I have been proposing is a profound respect for the cultural identity of students- a cultural identity that implies respect for the language of the other, the sexual orientation of the other, the intellectual capacity of the other; that implies the ability

² see diary entry "Date: Thursday 6th September 2007"

to stimulate the creativity of the other. But these things take place in a social and historical context and not in pure air...'
(Friere, 1997: 307-308).

SECOND INTERVIEW 6:27pm to 7:20pm.

Interview with Philomena Temu a schools inspector working for the Ministry of Education co-ordinating the teaching of the English language.

The Education system in Tanzania has been recently going through significant changes; could you highlight what the key factors have been?

"Every 'Ward'- a small unit of district must have a secondary school. This was implemented in 2006 because secondary school enrolment was very low, at 26%, the plan was to make it increase by 50% but due to political agendas of joining East Africa it has been pushed up to 70%. This has been successful in increasing numbers of students in schools but the government does not have enough money to finance it alone. There has therefore been a need for local people to contribute to put up simple structures for schools."

So, there seems a huge increase in the number of schools but, what have been the implications of this?

"The schools are not well established, over the period of one year the government has opened up more than 600 new schools- also known as 'community schools', which lack resources, there are not enough teachers, facilities and the loans and grants coming through have not been enough to maintain the expansion. The area most affected has been that of teachers, we have had to start crash programmes in teaching, last year six thousand men and women went through two/ three month courses in order to obtain a licence..."

What about supplying schools with books?

"Since the liberalisation the government no longer makes them they become more expensive to buy and so they become more expensive to supply. In 2005, we formed a new curriculum; the new books cost around 10,000 Tanzanian shillings (approx. five English pounds), money from each child's school fees generates 20,000 Tanzanian shillings per year which is not enough to purchase many books. The Ministry of Education is concentrating on building classrooms, then supplying furniture, then teachers and lastly textbooks, which are often left to the private sector..."

...What are your feelings on having to depend on foreign aid to develop the education system?

"READ INTERNATIONAL is a blessing. There is a need for external charities to invest in Tanzanian education although I do feel it will stabilise itself eventually if the government makes it a top priority. However, to rely on this form of development is a necessary evil, Tanzania wants to be self-sufficient but there is no other option...the threat of globalisation necessitates us to adapt. We must therefore create a 'friendly climate' for foreign investment in order to develop our health

sector and education sector...the resources we have right now are not sufficient for example the teachers going into schools are not prepared and if we want to compete on an international level and trade with countries such as America and the UK we need to rely on the education system to revolutionise the country... The idea of this global citizenship suggests we are 'development partners' but how can we be partners with someone who is not in any way a partner?"

The emphasis in this interview concerned the external economic and political pressures upon the Tanzanian education system. While I am unable to mention the details of the account, Ms. Temu highlighted a rather bleak picture whereby she stated the demands to increase the numbers of children in schools acted merely as a political tool, hence the rapid development of school building. Furthermore minimal regard was given to the quality of education the children received. The targets set for numbers of children, she argued were made by those providing financial aid to the government and were thus unrealistic to the Tanzanian infrastructure.

Date: Sunday 2nd September 2007

Region: Masasi, region within Mtwara district.

Interview with Robert Wilson, Director of Read International

Could you briefly outline what your role entails?

'The day to day operations, I manage a team of 15 student projects and indirectly about 125 students. I co-ordinate 100,000 textbooks and oversee the running and the expansion of the organisation. Which itself recycles educational resources from the UK to Tanzania which could expand in the future to tackle educational issues worldwide.'

What were your motives for starting READ, and why Tanzania?

"We recognised a demand for resources the UK had a surplus of. Tanzania's education system is based on the UK curriculum, though a slightly back-dated one hence the convenience of recycling. We basically saw a problem and found an easy solution."

Why did you choose to tackle issues abroad- surely there are enough domestic educational issues worth tackling?

"Developing domestically wasn't an objective to balance the direction of the charity; instead we want to help UK kids to help tackle international development issues hence recycling books. Also, in terms of resources UK schools are rich! They're well supported by the government- I mean it's hard to find a school today which hasn't got an interactive whiteboard... Tanzania is full of the same people as in the UK but they don't have the same opportunities- they can't 'cram for an exam' so why dump textbooks into a landfill when maths hasn't changed? The content of a maths book never changes..."

How do you avoid the stigma of dumping?

"We work closely with the Ministry of Education bringing across only those books which are desired, the Chief Officer for Education for instance samples the books we bring through..."
How do you feel about the claim that Non-Governmental Organisations are a form of modern day imperialism?

"READ refrains from any form of political, religious affiliations. In the past there may have been a political agenda to charities but in the modern era things are starkly different- we're helping Tanzanians to help themselves... Government organisations tend to pay little attention to local people, NGO's are concerned with the international community to find local remedies hence our ethos to collaborate...It also depends on how you define the term 'imperialism'..."

Would you agree that imperialism and globalisation share similar characteristics?

"No, I wouldn't since globalisation looks at the global community; it creates international linkages and accepts differences. Whereas imperialism divided the world into borders and lines...READ is not funded by the government, now organisations such as the United Nations may be interesting to look at..."

The purpose of the interview with Robert Wilson was to investigate whether or not the charity had explored the dimensions involved in development aid, for instance whether the charity had an ulterior motive, whether they had considered the content of the books being sent out and whether these were relevant to the Tanzanian Education system. While these are questions I could have answered in my capacity as a volunteer what I was ultimately interested in was the political dimensions of READ International. Whilst Rob assured that the charity abstained from any form of political affiliations it is somewhat interesting to know that since the time of this interview, READ International has been awarded 'Best New Charity' in the 'Times' charity awards³ and furthermore is being supported by the British Council based in Tanzania (www.read-international.org).

Date: Monday 3rd September 2007

Region: Masasi district based in the region in Mtwara

First day of book distribution. School One: successful all-girls school; was asked why I wasn't 'white' like the other 'mzungus' (foreigners). School Two: had no water/ food/ electricity/ about 6 teachers for 500 students/ met with young girls who were forced to prostitute themselves for accommodation in the villages near to the schools.

Date: Tuesday 4th September 2007

Region: Newala district based in the region in Mtwara

³ See figure one

Second day of book distribution, welcomed by a school where the children performed acrobatics/singing of their school song and dancing. Made speeches about who we were and what we were doing, received a warm welcome.

Date: Thursday 6th September 2007

Region: Newala district based in the region in Mtwara

Fourth day of book distribution. Talked to children in classrooms explaining how to use the books as well as teachers. Children saw a rollercoaster in one of the books and asked what it was; struggled to explain.

Figure three: Question and answer sessions with the Tanzanian children.



Conclusion

It is worthwhile stating that this study is in no shape or form a criticism of the work carried out by READ International. Rather it is meant to emphasize the 'effectiveness' of book distribution as a form of development aid.

In light of the observations made what was seen as 'a blessing' by Philomena Temu felt like we were doing no more than scratching the surface of the aid the UK has the potential to provide. However, having said this issues raised by Roy Sesana (2005) at the start of this paper

concerning the foreign presence of 'development' in African countries is one which should be re-addressed in this study. The idea of foreign aid workers parachuting into the African countries was discussed by the former President Nyerere who saw foreign education as 'enslaving' and oriented towards 'Western values and norms' (www.infed.org).

Yet indeed, we are in a globalising world, as was argued by Mr. Minzi and Ms. Temu. If Tanzania does want educational resources for its ever expanding education system and the UK has an abundance of resources surely the simple logic of transferring materials from 'A' to 'B' solves our problem. Both sides present valid arguments to our understanding of book distribution and we may never be able to answer the question as to whether or not book aid is effective. However, to conclude this research paper I will end the debate rather bluntly by claiming that as long as there exists a demand for textbooks and we have the ability to provide them it is safe to assume that book distribution as a form of development aid is not 'ineffective'.

Evaluation and dissemination plan

As a last evaluative point on the study conducted I would like to comment on the choice of methodology. Whilst the use of interviews and observations did inform my study rather extensively they did not directly address the question of whether or not book distribution was 'effective' in an objective sense, what may have been worthwhile doing is providing a list of indicators such as: whether or not the books were used over a year, how frequently they were used and how many times they were checked out of the 'library'. However this would involve going back after the course of a year to readdress the charity.

As part of the dissemination plan for this research project, I propose to e-mail or contact all interviewed subjects to inform them of the study and where it would be available to read. I would furthermore be willing to give a talk or presentation to students planning to do similar research next year and lastly, I would submit the paper for the Reinvention Centre Journal.

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