

POVERTY ALLEVIATION

A ROLE FOR TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE?

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Speech

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In the setting of this conference, when it's supposed to be a sharing of thoughts and ideas, the issue of poverty and its alleviation, particularly talking about the southern part of the world, or the developing countries and the developing market, is a phenomenon that can be regarded and treated in many different ways. But readily we relate to development, and quickly the issue of education also comes up. And then we have the three terms of poverty, development and education. And then it becomes also clear specifically in Africa, that education, has essentially been a foreign enterprise to a large extent, and it still continues to be so.

Having had a chance to travel to Bangkok three weeks ago, it just dawned on me how Africa is classified with South Asia, South-East Asia as developing countries, but while every country in South-East Asia uses its own language as a medium of communication and as a medium of education. Africa is the only country who does not use a single language of its own in education or anything like this. And that

gives the impression that education, as an expression of development, is viewed as a foreign enterprise. And the consideration of education therefore as doing something in a foreign language or foreign enterprise, I think has a big impact on how well we do in overcoming poverty. So that's one thing. And with this I very much like to look at education as considered as a channel of growth and channel of development and improvement or human flourishing. And, in fact, one of the documents that passed over our desk was an event about finance and education for development. And that's a trend that I think is going to be discussed in Addis Ababa. If we need to finance education for development, I think it's probably about time to also consider the character of education and how well it can promote development in some of these countries. Essentially, it just means that when one does not use any mental modules of his own, then one increasingly distrusts his own capacity and his own ability to do anything of his own. And that, I think, is the basic underlying character of aspects of education. And so poverty in Africa in certain cases. The tendency then is that development in everything that we call human flourishing and good has to come from outside. And that is debilitating, I would pretend that is one thing that has to be overcome.

Education also has a component that needs to be in our address. The Pontifical Academy of the Sciences took this up and addressed this some time ago, relating education with an aspect of human culture which have to do with nourishment and feeding. And they recognize, again, the impact of nourishment, feeding to bring development and also therefore evidently also to education and growth. That also, as it has turned out, has to be looked at.

But essentially, for some time, we ourselves have encouraged, whenever we have a chance to do it, to encourage people again to move away, elevate from financializing their indices or their indications of poverty, by moving away slightly from their

\$1.25\$ per day or \$2 per day type of index. And probably, on the other side,, following the suggestions that they make, to consider poverty more in terms of accesses: access to education, access to knowledge, access to information, access to healthcare, access to health. Those type of considerations are useful in, considering how we deal with poverty, accesses. The Chairman also just shared with us a few minutes ago, also becomes very indicative. And as said by, I know about Mr. Negroponte Green Computer in Latin America, that are distributed and that are facilitating in helping education in rural communities. So it becomes a very crucial term: access.

We can consider then poverty and development in terms of accesses.

What access do people have to education, to knowledge, to technology, to healthcare, to everything you want, to work and labour, everything that brings decent salaries. Those are things that and more and more we like to see because in some cultures you can do miracles with \$2. I mean, if it's like feeding or finding something to eat a day, you'll be able to buy decent food for a day with \$2.

You just need to convert it to the local currency, and it will you quite a bit of it. But access, the lack of access to healthcare, the lack of access to information, to knowledge, to labour – those are more crucial determinants on how people live their lives than they are financialized in terms of \$1 or \$2 per day.

The Chair talked about the problem of governance in Africa as a crucial term. On a flight from Accra, in Ghana (that's where I'm from, I'm from Ghana), on a flight from Accra to Freetown, I bumped into a gentleman called Greg Mills. And before we could even take our seats, he threw the question at me, he said: "Reverend Father, I see you are a priest, can you help me deal with this issue? Why do you

really think Africa is poor?" Then I scraped my memory to go to some of the terms that I talked about their indications and the influence of language and all of that. And I said for me I think the answer is very simple. And it was what the Chair said. He said that Africa, he thinks Africa is poor by choice. And the choice is a choice made by its leaders. And that takes us into the question of governance. And the poverty of Africa is considered as a poverty by choice is a very true affirmation and assertion to make poor governance and its impact on Africa takes us all the way. Takes us all the way. Precisely because of how it is characterized by short-termism, lack of objective goals, lack of respect for basic forms of human rights and all of that, and the issue of governance is been seen accessed to... So to wrap up politics or sometimes to have access to the national conference in which one can dig his senses and fingers to get from it anything that one wants.

So politics and governance is now seen as helping a community that has come together to work towards its common good, to develop its public good and common good, and so to enhance and to develop human flourishing for the very many members of the community. Governance then continues to be a big issue. Whether it is peacefully done, like we just had in Nigeria or as happens in Senegal and in Ghana, without any military conflict and intervention; or whether indeed it takes a very violent form like we witnessed now in Burundi now and in a few places. Whatever form it takes, unless the governments in Africa can accept a governance that is a government that makes common good and the public good of the people a top priority, we're still going to be grappling with this issue for quite a bit of time. The formulation of this objective goal for the country is very crucial and it's not sitting here that I talk about this. When the past President, he is now dead, Atta Mills of Ghana, when he won the elections they decided to go into a retreat before they begin their session and they invited me to share a few thoughts. When I observed that one of the biggest problems we had in Ghana was the lack of objective goals that directs

the programme of the government and everybody appeared to be: what did you say? That is it. Party manifestos cannot replace national vision and national goals. Party manifestos should be for us a way that a party presents itself as capable of realizing national vision and national goals. But in several cases party manifestos have taken the place and the role of national vision and national goals. As a result of that, you chain government and you chain the vision of a country, its economic vision, its development vision, everybody comes with his own. And so you will find in Ghana projects which are carried on half-way through completion and with the change of government is abandoned. It's abandoned because the government doesn't feel responsible for that project. The lack of objective vision and objective goals is something that can, the formulation of that can help take us a long way. Therefore last December, when I was visiting Ghana I did a small interview for the newspaper, the "Daily Graphic", and invited the government of Ghana to consider taking a break, to introduce a government of technicians to help them lay down certain basic rules for party politics to reengage again. A lot of people thought I was probably crazy and they asked me was there any example anywhere. Happily, coming from Italy I said: "Sure, Italy just did that. Italy just did install a technical government of technicians in and got a few things ready for the parties to engage again. And we can do the same". We can do the same because we have a government in Ghana which, again, in the same level, adopted executive presidency models without any attenuating conditions. Where there are executive presidents like in the United States, you have the Senate and you have the House of Representatives, kind of moderators. It's not like that. So Ghana is referred to as the one country with the most powerful president in the world because that's what it is.

The last thing I want to talk about is again development, local industry, free market and globalization: five terms which are intertwined. Two years ago in Podgorica, Montenegro, there was a session of the European Academy of the Sciences, and

invited to reflect on the relationship between globalization, free market and poverty in Africa. I observed basically the same

At the independence, Ghana had a match factory, beef-cannery factory, a sugar factory, they had five crucial industries. Now all of them are closed down. They can't compete. They can't compete and everything now has become export. So free market is a good in the house and that promotes development, but I think that it should take every local government to moderate free market, to see how free market advances its own local growth, but how now free market rather dissipates and destroys local industry. That's one more issue that we need to deal with.

The present fate of a whole lot of sub-Saharan Africans to cross the Mediterranean to Europe, everybody thinks: "Why? Can't the government provide jobs and activities for all of these young people crossing the desert?" Because they are not there. The industries are not there, they've all collapsed. The factories are not there, they've all collapsed. Everything has is coming from China and whatever quality they come in. And local industry also collapse because of it. What it takes a government to do, namely to moderate a sort of free market and make free markets support local growth has not been there. South Africa here does this very well by saying that everything that is consumed in South Africa should be 75% produced in South Africa. With that kind of a measure it just means that farms and all of that are invited to establish industries and stuff in South Africa if they want to, using the South African market.

And I think several African countries, by way of civil local industry, can also adopt similar measures.

By way of concluding, talking about globalization and free market, I'd like to talk about the fact of solidarity and cooperation as a way of helping Africa to develop.

Pope Benedict XVI, when he wrote his concluding notes about the last meeting that was held in the Vatican for the church in Africa, (it was 2009), when he came out with the document, encouraged Africans to not simply take over projects designed from outside and implement them, but develop their own projects and then seek support of corporations from the outside to implement it. That's why several of us were very happy when NEPAD came up because we thought that Africans had formulated their own development mechanisms for growth. Unfortunately, the commitments failed that out. And so NEPAD collapsed. And so I think that this is the one thing we are talking about. When Africa met with Japan and members of Europe at TICAD, Tokyo International Conference for Development in Tokyo in 2007, there was a vision made by the German Member of Parliament who was there, it's only development formulated by well-meaning Africans that can see the light of day. And this is an invitation for all investors, whatever, to also kind of respect local growth and local development and enterprise and everything formulated from there. And this, I think, calls automatically for a certain amount of spirit of cooperation, growth from outside incorporated with communities from Africa to kind of make and bring to fruition the very many good ideas they have for development and growth.