



Skillshare
International

Skillshare International's response to Our Common Interest, the report of the Commission for Africa

Skillshare International welcomes the Commission's report and the British Government's willingness to take a lead on rolling back poverty in Africa. We believe that successful delivery of the report's recommendations would be a big step forward and we are committed to supporting implementation efforts.

However we are concerned about two areas of weakness:

- The report gives insufficient weight to the role of civil society organisations in combating poverty, inequality and HIV and AIDS, risking under-investment and non-recognition for these organisations which directly represent and speak for poor people.
- The report fails to consider the role of volunteering in development, both within communities and across international boundaries.

Invest in civil society

Africa's public, private and civil society organisations must be strengthened now to deal with urgent problems, most of all those of HIV and AIDS. As the Commission stated in its report,

"Top priority must be given to scaling up the services needed to deal with the catastrophe of HIV and AIDS which is killing more people in Africa than anywhere else in the world."

We believe that the Commission does not focus sufficient attention on the role that civil society organisations play in addressing poverty. These organisations are often the most effective at dealing with the catastrophe of HIV and AIDS: they are created by, and are close to the people. In many countries, people trust civil society organisations more than they trust their own government.

In addressing the need for good governance and economic development the Commission is right to look at the public and private sectors first but it must give more weight to the role of civil society. Its call for African governments to draw up capacity-building strategies must explicitly include civil society infrastructure and organisations.

The Commission must ensure investment in community, voluntary and faith organisations, in terms of funding for service delivery and for capacity building, infrastructure and skills and leadership development.

Support volunteering

The Commission has recognised that to fight the causes of poverty and drive development Africa needs investment in people and capacity building in all sectors. Many Africans volunteer in their communities. Many people travel from around the world to volunteer in development projects. Yet Our Common Interest barely mentions volunteering. Its extremely limited proposals on volunteering - for building a 'grey corps' of skilled and experienced volunteers from developed countries and for encouragement of young people in developed countries to work and study in Africa - are put in the context of maintaining public support for development in the North, rather than in terms of their direct contribution to development. This tokenistic approach is a disservice to Africa's volunteers. Their selfless work deserves more recognition. Without the contribution of volunteers, there is even less chance of achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The Commission should think again about volunteering and two aspects in particular:

- The contribution of local people volunteering in their own communities must be recognised and encouraged. Through volunteering people who would not be helped, get help; people who didn't know they had power, are empowered; organisations that could not survive, survive. Volunteering and community are inseparable.
- Right now thousands of experienced individuals are working as international volunteers in Africa, often in remote or difficult areas. They share their skills and experience with local colleagues. Through this, they assist in building the capability of government departments, health and education establishments and local organisations in a wide range of disciplines. Agencies such as Skillshare International support sustainable development by facilitating volunteer placements that transform the skills and capacity of local partner organisations. Placements come about because the skills, knowledge and experience aren't available in local job markets – there is no immediate replacement for this sort of volunteering.

The Commission must promote national and international volunteering as part of the solution to development not simply for building North-South links.

Leicester
United Kingdom
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About Skillshare International

Skillshare International is an international development charity working to reduce poverty, injustice and inequality and to further economic and social development. We do this in partnership with people and communities throughout the world, by sharing and developing skills and ideas, facilitating organisational and social change and building awareness of development issues. Our vision is of a world without poverty, injustice and inequality where people, regardless of cultural, social and political divides, come together for mutual benefit, living in peaceful co-existence.

We currently support partner organisations in Botswana, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Uganda. Our support manifests itself in different ways, including providing development workers to share their skills, securing financial resources for our partners and our Leadership Development Programme. We prioritise economic empowerment, education, environment and health with a thematic approach that takes in gender, HIV and AIDS, peace building and human rights. We believe that addressing the issue of poverty effectively means working with locally-based organisations as drivers of social change. We are committed to empowering men, women and children to have their voices heard and make informed decisions on poverty, injustice and inequality, so we advocate development awareness work in the North and South and aim to strengthen the capacity of civil society to influence policy change within their societies. In the UK and Ireland our programmes take in awareness-raising, advocacy, fundraising and development worker recruitment.

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More information about Skillshare International is available at www.skillshare.org