

After the G8, what now?

NEW YORK, JULY 9, 2005 – “What Now?” was all the little sign with a question mark said. It was lost in a sea of much bigger banners with demands for economic justice for Africa. Only one marcher clutched it in a crowd of over 200,000 rallying to Make Poverty History in Edinburgh, Scotland, just down the road from where the G8 leaders were to meet later the next week.

“What Now?” is an even more urgent question now that that meeting is over with concerns about terrorism explosively interrupting the summit debating how the rich world could help the poor. England’s Tony Blair insisted that the original agenda would be pursued despite the bombings of three London underground trains and a bus by an unknown and possibly home-grown terrorist group.

The outcome of the G8 summit for Africa was pictured as a major victory, an outcome that rocker Bono and Live 8 organizer Bob Geldof applauded.

Said Sir Bob: “I wouldn’t say this is the end of extreme poverty, but it is the beginning of the end.” Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, head of the African Union called the summit a success and said African issues were being tackled “realistically.”

Africa must respond by promoting good governance, democracy, human rights and tackle corruption, he told BBC.

It sounded real good and just what western governments want to hear even from the president of one of the most corrupt countries in Africa. Objectively, their promise was nothing to sneeze at: \$50 billion pledged to help ease African poverty over the next five years along with debt relief for 18 countries. Sounds good – but is it?

If the outcome was so great why then why were the organizations behind the campaign, the people who know and care the most about African poverty, so bummed out? This is not a question most of the media explored in a culture where perception trumps reality and spindoctors have proven much more impactful than witchdoctors.

The G8 patted itself on the back. Much of the media, like the world leaders, moved on, but Africa's needs have not

African journalists who also know more than most western reporters about their own countries were frustrated because they couldn't even question their own leaders at the summit. "Was this some kind of a hoax?" asked a Nigerian who works for Sky TV. "If we do not have a chance to talk to them then it will be the mother of all let-downs."

Kenyan journalist John Kamau wrote, "The African story must be given to those who can report it from within and without. We need desperately to know their perspective on the connection between terrorism, poverty, democracy and rule of law."

The anti-poverty campaigns expressed deep disappointment and disgust because while more aid is being pledged, it is far less than what all the experts insist is needed. The UN Millenium goal for Africa demands \$50 billion a year; The G8 pledged \$10B.

BBC explains: "Campaigners say, the modest increases to be delivered by 2010 will be too little too late....Thanks to pressure from Germany and France, it looks like Gordon Brown's International Finance Facility may be financed through air ticket taxes rather than aid budgets."

A lack of progress on trade and climate control issues was widely condemned. Activist Peter Hardstaff said, "The G8's approach on trade seems to be 'Ask not what we can do for the poor, but what the poor can do for us'."

Concluded the World Development Movement: "A historic breakthrough was promised, instead we saw a tiny step. The deals on debt and aid fall way short of what is needed to achieve global poverty reduction targets and on trade it's business as usual as the G8 attempt to bulldoze more liberalization out of the poor. These tiny sums of money are nothing more than a sticking plaster over the deep wounds the G8 are inflicting by forcing failed economic policies such as privatization, free trade and corporate deregulation, on Africa."

Writing in the Guardian, George Monbiot revealed how the US and multi-national corporations shaped the outcome from the shadows in lobbying that much of the press missed: "Multinational corporations, they argue, are not the cause of Africa's problems, but the solution. From now on, they will be responsible for the relief of poverty.

"In the United States, they have already been given control of the primary

instrument of US policy towards Africa, the African Growth and Opportunity Act. The act is a fascinating compound of professed philanthropy and raw self-interest. To become eligible for help, African countries must bring about “a market-based economy that protects private property rights”, “the elimination of barriers to United States trade and investment” and a conducive environment for US “foreign policy interests”. In return they will be allowed “preferential treatment” for some of their products in US markets.

“The important word is “some”. ... It goes without saying that all this is classified as foreign aid. The act instructs the US Agency for International Development to develop “a receptive environment for trade and investment”. What is more interesting is that its implementation has been outsourced to another agency, the Corporate Council on Africa.”

Alas, that’s where we ended up, after Live 8, after the marches, and, in the UK at least, after a massive media campaign about Africa’s urgent problems.

The people spoke and so did their “leaders,” The powerful have now drawn their line in the sand (trap) at the Gleneagles Golf course.

The G8 Globalizers and the goniffs they represent all play lip service to Africa’s needs. They know the life and death problems. They know the urgency. They like having their picture taken with Bono and Brad Pitt. And they want change too – if they don’t have to pay for it.

They are not in a hurry. They can wait.

The passionate protests of the rock stars has now become a product to be downloaded on AOL. The activist army has gone home. Conservatives insist George Bush has done more for Africa than any president in history (and so presumably did the Belgians in the Congo and the Afrikaners in South Africa).

That’s the media-sanitized white western version of history they want remembered. They want the history of poverty in Africa to remain history, especially the part the West played in exploiting the continent. Is our media exposing the charade or has it become part of it?

Back to that simple and most difficult of questions: “what now?”

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