

Preface

In July 1970, ninety students graduated from the University of Zambia, in the country's capital, Lusaka. Among them were the university's first black graduates (including some ten young women), and my parents were two of them. They were both studying for undergraduate degrees – my father reading linguistics, and my mother English. They came from different tribes, from different parts of rural colonial Africa: my father, the son of a miner in apartheid South Africa; my mother, the daughter of a man who would later train to be a teacher. My mother did not speak my father's language, and hence they mainly conversed in English. They met and married while still students.

Zambia (formerly known as Northern Rhodesia) had been independent from British colonial rule for just six years, and the excitement at the prospect of what amazing things lay ahead was palpable. Although, upon graduation, my mother had eleven job offers (at the time companies were very eager to employ black graduates), my father wished to continue his studies. He was offered a scholarship at the University of California at Los Angeles in the USA and, very soon afterwards, my parents packed up my sister and me and decamped to America. Our move was all planned. My parents' goal was for my father to further his education (later my mother would complete an advanced degree in Britain), and then return to Africa.

The 1970s were an exciting time to be African. Many of our nations had just achieved independence, and with that came a deep sense of dignity, self-respect and hope for the future. My parents lived, worked, and studied in the USA for eight years and upon my father's Ph.D. graduation, in 1978, they promptly moved back to Zambia, convinced that their future, and the futures of their

children, lay in their homeland. My parents have never lived abroad again – remaining steadfastly committed to the view that they can help their country, their continent (contributing in their own small ways), to one day become politically and economically great. My mother has forged a career in banking – starting as the first Zambian woman bank manager, and rising to be Chairman of one of Zambia’s leading banks. My father has stayed true to academia but has involved himself in broadcasting and also run an anti-corruption organization.

I spent my formative years in Zambia – primary, secondary, and tertiary school; ending up studying Chemistry at the same university as my parents seventeen years earlier. But in July 1990 my studies were interrupted by an attempted coup against the then President, Kenneth Kaunda. Although it didn’t last long, the disruption was enough to shut the university down and have the students sent home. This would be the trigger for me to leave Zambia and, like my father before me, I ended up in the United States on a scholarship, eager to complete my higher education. And, like both my parents, I was certain that I would soon return.

I spent two years at the World Bank in Washington DC, two years doing a Master’s at Harvard, and another four years completing a doctorate in Economics at Oxford. While away, I missed key moments in my country’s history – our political move from one-party state to multi-party democracy in 1991 (it was the first former British colony in Africa to have its president removed by ballot rather than bullet), the overhaul of our economy from socialism to capitalism, and the tragic advent of the HIV–AIDS epidemic.

Although pulled by family and cultural ties in Zambia, every time I looked, prospects for my personal development appeared to diminish. There seemed to be fewer and fewer reasons for me to return, and more and more reasons for me to stay away. I could not help feeling that job opportunities commensurate with my education and experience lay not at home, but abroad. Those jobs that did exist at home (of course there were highly paid jobs available) were in an environment laden with creaking bureaucracy.

My best friend took a different tack. Having reached academic heights at the best of America's universities, against her better judgement and my warnings she decided to return home. She has spent the last three years providing much-needed help in our country's social sector. But now she is ready to leave Zambia once more. Not because she doesn't love her job, not because she hasn't helped, but because she, like many other educated Africans who live abroad but are desperate to return home, feels that her country continues to flounder in a seemingly never-ending cycle of corruption, disease, poverty, and aid-dependency. She looks at her situation and asks herself, what is going wrong here?

To be sure, Africa is not one country. It is a continent; a collection of over fifty nations with often vastly different histories, with peoples as disparate as those of North America and south-east Asia, varying lingua francas, and very divergent cultures and religious beliefs.

As a former French colony with Arab influences and a mainly Muslim population, Senegal is quite different from Malawi, a former British colony where Christianity is the dominant religion. And what do lusophone Angola and Mozambique have in common with Ethiopia, which was never colonized? (Ethiopia's defeat of the Italians at the Battle of Adowa, in 1896, meant the country remained, for all intents and purposes, independent until the Italian invasion of 1935.¹)

And economically, besides both being commodity exporters, tea-producing Kenya is structurally quite different from the ex-Belgian colony of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which remains a large mineral exporter with more localized pockets of employment. And the health challenges faced by Ghana (where the prevalence of HIV-AIDS is 2.2 per cent in the population) are undoubtedly quite different from those faced by Swaziland, where reputedly whole villages have been wiped out by the ravages of the disease (prevalence is around 26 per cent of the population – it was almost 40 per cent in 2003).

But there are, sadly, common ties that bind sub-Saharan African countries together. Well-publicized are the degree of poverty,

the extent of corruption, the incidence of disease, the dearth of infrastructure, the erratic (but mainly poor) economic showing, political instability, and the historical propensity for violent unrest and even civil war. These are universal themes shared, albeit in varying degrees, across most nations of the African continent. They are the issues that policymakers and governments grapple with each and every day in poverty-stricken Chad, war-torn Somalia, or disease-afflicted Botswana. Whether you are in Zambia, which today has a population of around 10 million people with seventy-two different dialects, or in next-door Zimbabwe, where, with roughly the same population, the indigenous African population can be loosely split into just two large tribal groupings (Shona and Ndebele), Africa's common challenges are real and undeniably stark. Fortunes and misfortunes are intertwined. Even where there are pockets of economic success, it is worth remembering that in the long term no country in Africa can truly exist as an island of prosperity on its own.

For me, finding a sustainable solution to Africa's woes is a personal quest. Having been raised in one of the poorest countries in the world, I feel a strong desire to help families like my own, who continue to suffer the consequences of economic failure every day of their lives. Throughout my professional and academic life as a student of economics I have pondered the question of development. I have often wondered, while other emerging regions have ostensibly turned the corner towards economic prosperity, why my continent has failed. This book is a consequence of my thoughts and deliberations over the years.

This book is written for Africans and African policymakers; and for those in the West and the broader international community who truly wish to see Africa progress. In what follows, I offer my perspective on how we got where we are, and propose ways to find the economic growth which has until now remained elusive.

Although the *Dead Aid* thesis might be controversial, it carries an important message. The lives of billions rest on getting the right financing solutions to the problems of developing nations. After

more than five decades of the wrong diagnosis, it is time now to turn the corner and take the harder but indisputably better road. It is the clarion call for change.