

Notes of U8 meeting – 30th January 2008

America & Development: Overall, is the influence of the US on the developing world positive or negative?

Positive

- Increase democratisation processes in the world, e.g. through World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) etc.
- All the international institutions working towards development and fighting poverty are primarily US-funded, e.g. the agencies of the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), aid organisations etc.
- The US are the only country with the power to improve the world
- The US and its neo-liberal free trade ideas has opened up possibilities and opportunities for the developing world
- Modernisation theory argues developing countries can learn by example of America
- Global health in general has improved
- The US are justified in being self-interested, just as all developing countries are; the US are not necessarily obliged to help just because they can
- US citizens give a lot to Third World charities privately

Negative

- Impose forcibly their world view
- Developing countries more likely to do well if they have autonomy and are free from the conditionality of American loans
- The US only involve themselves in the developing world for their own strategic gains, e.g. containing communism, even in full knowledge of the presence of corruption/dictators/human rights abuses etc.
- Even when intentions are good, the implementation has generally been unsuccessful
- The existence of the New American Century proves American interests are first and foremost for the elites when it comes to intervention in the rest of the world
- The Structural Adjustments Programmes (SAPs) of the US-funded IMF have actually increased poverty for the very poor
- Dependency theory argues America's success (along with the other developed countries) has been at the expense of and via the exploitation of the developing world who are locked in a state of dependence on the developed world
- Positive influence is only ever short-term – the countries ultimately remain poor
- Global trade laws were largely formulated by the US and work in their favour
- There is a trade imbalance – raw materials are produced cheaply in the developing world, sold cheaply to the US where they are manufactured and then the US sells them on for a higher price – including back to the original countries

- Comparatively speaking, the developing world has got poorer – or in other words the divide between America’s wealth and the poverty of developing nations is bigger than before
- The US is un-co-operative with the developing world if it poses a threat, e.g. won’t sign the Kyoto agreement to reduce carbon emissions as China and India won’t and this would lead to those countries having an advantage over America industrially
- The ‘development’ agenda in Iraq has been very unsuccessful and badly planned with no understanding of the nation in question; the US assumes liberal democracy is for all but this is not necessarily so
- Favours some countries over others, e.g. Israel, Europe post-World War Two
- The US prioritise their own people and businesses and a protection of the status quo, i.e. maintaining US power in the world
- US pharmaceutical companies make massive profits when selling their drugs to the developing world – the discrepancy between the cost of drugs and the profits is huge
- The US has not met the target of contributing 0.7% of their GDP to development

Conclusions

- One of us concluded overall negative; sometimes they could act but don’t, sometimes they accidentally harm the developing world with good intentions, sometimes they deliberately act to impose their will and promote their interests despite the harm it causes (NB The amount of negative points we found would suggest this is correct)
- One of us concluded positive financially but not politically
- The rest of us concluded it was both/neither – positive and negative and that ultimately it is impossible to imagine a world without America – so impossible to answer