

## Saving lives through concerts

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Article

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If the successes of Live 8 and Group of Eight (G8) summit are anything to go by, one is tempted to conclude that major world problems can be better handled by celebrities and artistes rather than politicians.

Already many of them have been made ambassadors to tackle issues and problem like HIV/AIDS, land mines, poverty and even peace on behalf of the United Nations and other international bodies.

Bob Geldof and Bono are the two leading examples of such ambassadors that the world has known.

It was almost two decades ago that both of them led a host of other singers and musicians to raise money for the Ethiopian famine victims through the Live Aid concert.



**INSPIRATIONS: Geldorf and friend, including singer Mariah Carey, exerted influence on world policy - Reuters picture**

They manage to attract more than 1.5 billion people in 100 countries live over television, raising awareness about the levels of poverty plaguing humanity, of which Ethiopia was just one of many examples.

As it turned out, in the ensuing years, the world saw many dramatic changes that affected millions of lives. The Berlin Wall came down and united not only two nations but thousands of families that were kept apart due to political and ideological divides.

Then came the Internet which multiplied the capacity of people to interact and communicate, creating a more unified world.

Aided by cellular telephones and other ICT devices, the world increasingly became one.

However, Ethiopia is still in shambles. Tens thousands of people are still dying every day due to hanger. Diseases like HIV/AIDS continue to devastate the global community. Much like terrorism, they have kept the international community apart.

Political leaders from even the world's richest have not been able to solve the problems. At times, they have become part of the problems as well.

The doctrine of "us versus them", and that of divide and rule are some of the reasons why.

Early this month, much like the Live Aid of 1095, Live 8 came to the rescue. The concerts were held in no less than 10 cities, mainly of the developed world.

An estimated two billion watched it on television and more than one million at the various venues.

In London, among the songs performed were the Beatles' *The Long and Winding Road* which aptly explained the need for a second global concert.

"Make Poverty History" is the slogan, directed mainly at Africa.

Live 8 was timed to coincide with the meeting of the political leaders of the G8 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The multi-country musical event was aimed at ensuring the politicians would not belt out the same tired song with the same old tune.

At stake was a package of debt relief and increased aid for the lowering of trade barriers so that the African agricultural produce can access Western markets more easily.

In short, while the G8 summit is a nice platform for more feel-good statements, its translation into reality was more of a concern to the international community. The success of the previous G8 summits, at best, can only be described as partial.

Some of the questions the G8 was asked were indeed very searching.

For example, why does the host country of G8 provide aid to an African country when its president is said to suppress the population and refuses to relinquish power?

Why is Africa seen as a "poor" continent when it has among the richest natural resources in the world? Why is the world still indifferent to the genocide and conflict in Darfur?

A survey of 10,000 Africans to gauge opinions hinted at some answers. The majority blamed their own politicians (49 per cent) for the continent's woes, compared to 16 per cent who blamed former colonial powers, and 11 per cent rich countries.

The answer, of course, lies somewhere in between. Local politicians and colonial powers and the rich often have common interests that may prove to be an obstacle.

This is one reason why Geldof and his band of (wo)men are regarded as an important expression of the people voice that the G8 cannot simply ignore.

SO far Geldof and friends can take pride that Live 8 is able to exert some influence on the world policy agenda, though there is still some unhappiness particularly in relation to trade liberalisation and global warming.

In fact, the French president has been quoted as saying that Geldof and Bono are inspirations for the politicians.

There indications that some are considering nominating Geldof as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize for marshalling global support to fight poverty, which has been a neglected cause. More so, in securing fresh commitment from the world's rich and powerful nations.

Be that as it may, it is time that the G8 leaders recognised their involvement, in more ways than one, in getting Africa and many other developing countries in the mess they are in today.

It is therefore in their interest to sort out what they have left behind as this is long overdue. This must be done not out of a sense of magnanimity, as it is often made up to be, but rather with a deep sense of responsibility, if not guilt.

Hence, as some have cautioned, Africa and the other ex-colonies should not be made into a "beggar continent". After all, it is acknowledged that aid alone cannot assuredly be the solution to all of the continent's woes.

More efforts should be directed to answering why African are so poor when their continent is so rich - at least they used to be before the colonial days. When will the rape of the poor's resources and the brain drain stop?

These are some of the more difficult questions that beg to be urgently answered if Africa and the developing countries, indeed the entire world, is to get rid of global suffering the poverty.

The fact that the G8 failed to address the urgent issue of trade imbalances in terms of farm subsidies is an indication that its intentions are already casting doubts over its best of intentions.

This is especially so when many argued that removal of the iniquitous system of agro-subsidies by the United States and European countries would have a much more beneficial and lasting effect on the African economies than increased aid or debt relief.

Sadly, the axiom that beggars cannot be choosers is still the reality today. So too the fact that the ex-colonial powers are still calling the shots, long after departing from the colonies.

Clearly, Geldof and friends may have to figure this out when they plan the next concert.

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