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**Roger C. Riddell, Does Foreign Aid Work? Oxford University Press, New York, 2007. Pp 507,  
ISBN 978-0-19-929565-4.**

Review By: Percyslage Chigora

Achievement of development across the world has generated debate as to what critical factors are central to its actual achievement. In essence, the question of how can the gap between the rich and the poor be reduced. One tool that has dominated development discourse has been the issue of aid. But despite the existence of aid in its various forms debate of its importance in shaping development has remained shrouded in controversies. From such background, the text is of great importance as it seeks to confront the critical issues that relates to aid as a tool for promoting development.

The introduction to the book set the debate on aid into perspective different cultures' perception of aid highlighting that "helping and providing assistance have been viewed by many cultures with skepticism and suspicion' (p. 1). The author noted of changes in aid perceptions in brief at the same time providing justification for the existence of such a text, noting that "it (the book) takes an in depth and dispassionate look at the whole aid enterprise, placing this in a wider historical and political context' (p. 5).

Part one deals with conceptual and historical issues to aid. The author provided an in depth analysis of various definitions of aid and contending issues in conceptualizing aid. On tracing the historical origins of aid, the author used distinctive periods, starting with the pre-1949 era; the author noted the aid coming from states and colonial empires to colonial governments, as well as charity organizations to single out the churches. The 1950s–1960s marked the beginning of institutionalization of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and the expansion of beneficiaries to include developing countries. In fact according to the author " From the end of the 1950s towards the end of the late 1960s, not only did official aid levels rise steadily, but so did the rates of growth of poor countries economies, including

those in sub Saharan Africa” (p. 29). The period 1970S to present was marked by poverty taking a center stage in aid issues, with also marked increase in the activities of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). In the same frame the results were some what disappointing leading into changes with now aid being channeled to adjustment programs as funds were directed towards stabilization of the economy. The disastrous results of this form of aid led to a rethinking in the 1990s with a shift emphasizing poverty reduction. There also saw the rise in ODA as well as activities of NGOs with efforts being directed towards achievement of Millennium Development Goals. The author also noted of the major actors in aid enterprise, i.e. non governmental organizations, bilateral and multilateral donors. Major actors in bilateral and multilateral were explored in greater detail and the contending issues were espoused. In essence the author noted “the world of official aid is still dominated by the discrete action of different donors and agencies, driven by their own assessments of how to use aid and whom to give it’ (p. 88).

Part two addresses the motivations for giving aid. The author noted of eight main clusters for reasons for giving aid and concrete example were provided to illuminate the issues raised. For the author “aid always has been, and still is, provided for non-development purposes, contributing to and shaping the way that it has been allocated, and the forms in which it is provided” (p. 105). This part also analyzed issues of public support for aid, noting that “for over 20 years, successive opinion polls show a extremely high level of public support for foreign aid” (p. 107). Morality grounds for aid were explored in greater detail, as the motivations for people to continue supporting aid at individual, national or at institutional level. The case for NGOs was also examined and the author noting in the final that “ the role of NGOs in providing aid and in contributing to development is changing...[and] the moral dimensions of NGO aid are fast becoming as complex as those of official aid” (p. 162).

Part three is on the assessment of the impact of aid. The author noted on the problems associated with assessment and measurement of the impact of aid. Using project aid as a case study the author assessed the impact of project aid on development, in essence concluding that “the available evidence suggests, quite strongly, that the clear majority of official aid projects achieve immediate objectives” (p. 193). On program aid, technical assistance and capacity building the author analyzed the contending issues and factors that are critical for it to work. The author also examined in general the impact of official aid at country and cross country level and also analyzed factors that are critical in the success of aid. Key

issues on the impact of aid conditionality, official development aid, NGOs activities were analyzed and factors that are critical in their working were espoused. Pertaining to aid in emergencies and humanitarian situation the author noted of key actors involved and examining the extent of success and failures in this area of aid. On the impact of emergency and humanitarian aid the author noted “...too many agencies still do not undertake or commission rigorous evaluations of their work, and only a handful regularly provide public access to the independent assessment of their humanitarian activities” (p. 353).

The last part is on the future of aid. The author noting at the beginning that “Aid has made a difference, but could make a far greater difference' (p. 355). The author analyzed the central factors that impede aid effectiveness both from the donor and recipient side. The last sections the author provided suggestions for making aid worker for the betterment of people's livelihoods.

The text is a must read for those involved in development assistance either as practitioners or academicians. The major strength of the text lies in the fact that it provided a solid way forward for the aid to achieve more positive results.