

The Imperative for Cultural Sustainability: Reflections on the Donor Agenda and Conditionalities in Zimbabwe

By

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship donor agenda and political conditionality of donor agencies (subsumed under euphemisms of development, good governance, democracy, rule of law and rights), and self-determination (cultural freedom and autonomy) by the recipient communities using Zimbabwe as the case study. The sporadic closures of Non-Governmental Organisations by the Zimbabwean government in the post-2000 period vis-a-vis the uproar in the civil society concerning these closures illustrates the challenges posed by external influences on supposedly autonomous domestic policy decision making. Indicative of this, is the agenda, conditionalities and prescriptive development paradigms by the donor agencies which disregard the role of cultural capital in sustainable development. It is argued in this paper that, the programmes of NGOs in Zimbabwe are aligned to the agenda and conditionalities of the donors which imply that they lack autonomy in its operations. And therefore, there is an eccentric setting in this nature of giving where the giver (donor) is active as demonstrated by defining the needs of the recipient while the recipient (communities) remain dormant with virtually no choice. Thus the giver defines the needs of the communities and provide for those needs which could be imaginary in a way he sees fit. As a result, the NGOs get into the communities with preconceived answers and solutions to the communities for the questions and problems they do not have. In this study, it was shown that the funds, agenda, and conditionalities of the donor agencies contribute to cultural extension. This in turn contravenes the economic, social, political, and religious structures and philosophies which sustain the local communities. This is cultural capital, which if it would have been sustained, would have contributed to sustainable development. Therefore, cultural sustainability against the background of foreign aid is not obtainable.