

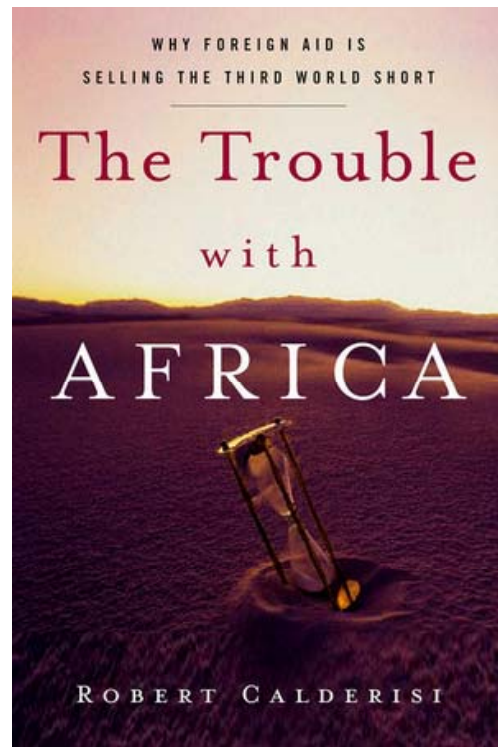
BOOK REVIEW: THE TROUBLE WITH AFRICA: WHY FOREIGN AID ISN'T WORKING BY ROBERT CALDERISI

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Written “with the love and loyalty that Africans expect of their brothers, but also impatience with the political correctness that has kept Africa in confusion and turmoil,” Robert Calderisi’s *The Trouble with Africa* offers a fresh and provocative perspective on the last 40 years of foreign aid. The book analyzes why, despite the \$600 billion invested in helping Africa since the 1960s, most Sub-Saharan countries have become effectively poorer. Calderisi’s 30 years in the trenches of development, spent primarily as an official for the World Bank, and as the Bank’s international spokesperson for Africa from 1997-2000, have simultaneously deepened his love for the African continent and his cynicism that is manifest in the tone of his book.



Calderisi boldly asserts that African leaders must look inward and take greater ownership for declining growth rates, high incidences of preventable diseases, and undemocratic regimes that prey on the vulnerability of the poor. Between 1970 and 1990, Africa lost \$70 billion worth of exports to

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other developing countries because competing nations were able to produce and deliver goods at a lower cost. Calderisi places much responsibility on the misdirected and often poorly administered Structural Adjustment Reforms (SAP) of the World Bank, but even more poignantly, he criticizes African leaders for keeping their citizens in the dark about waning national budgets and the deteriorating investment climate. International funds flowed to governments that mastered the language of international donors. Yet, too often, leaders agreed to reforms they did not believe in or channeled the money towards personal gain while citizens observed the collapse of their countries' infrastructure and public services. He emphasizes that African ills were too often self-imposed by incompetent and corrupt heads of state. "Africa was bleeding to death," he writes, "but instead of worrying about the hemorrhaging, African leaders complained about the pain from the tourniquet."

Although Calderisi's belief in the unique spirit and extraordinary entrepreneurial potential of ordinary Africans shines through in each page, he also takes stock of the nuances of the African character that he argues continue to perpetuate the continent's problems. He touches on African family values, reverence for elders, and a submission to the circumstances of their situation in a way that they are often unable to see that they are agents of their destiny or are lacking the confidence in their ability to improve their lives. If culture keeps "people firmly under control," writes Calderisi, and "character keeps Africans fatalistic," the biggest of all ills is corruption that binds the elites together, hurting the poor most.

The meat of the book chronicles Calderisi's experiences in Chad, Tanzania, and the Ivory Coast among others. Additionally, interspersed in his narrative of his work with the Chad-Cameroon pipeline and his account of self-absorption and self-enrichment of political leaders during leadership shifts in the Ivory Coast is a fascinating personal story of living with a same-sex partner in the African context.

The greatest asset of Calderisi's book is perhaps his commitment to avoid finger-pointing and instead to suggest bold and controversial solutions to address 40 years of disappointment African countries have suffered since Independence in the 1960s. His recommendations range from opening public officials' bank accounts to public scrutiny, abolishing debt relief altogether, and merging the World Bank, the IMF, and the United Nations Development Program to cutting direct aid to most countries in half and using the savings to finance regional universities, multi-country

infrastructure projects and agricultural research. Calderisi's analysis is filled with rich anecdotes and insights of a reformer who has not only spent time with ministers and heads of state but also with farmers and street boys and urban families in the slums struggling to afford school fees for their children. The book's historical richness alongside practical recommendations is an important contribution that will continue to frame the debate for Africa's future.