



Trade Not Aid

For many, the idea of trading a life as a high-powered CEO in London for charity work in rural Africa is not an executive's expected career progression. But **Richard Harvey**, who was at the helm of Aviva until 2007, did just that. Indeed, Richard gave up his position, to the amazement of many in the business community, to volunteer his services and time in Africa. It was with the development charity Concern International that he and his wife travelled to rural Kenya and Malawi, and embarked on a journey to assist impoverished communities with infrastructure and education.

Richard recently shared his experience and insight into the subject and possible solutions at the annual Criticaleye Summer Drinks held at the historic All Hallows by the Tower. Along with celebrating Criticaleye's success, Members were treated to an exciting debate about the controversial issues regarding development and aid in impoverished areas of Africa.

"The experience was eye-opening," said Richard, who now believes that sustainable business development is the best route to attaining the UN's Millennium Development Goals in Africa.

"My first mistake was not thinking about the difference between aid and development. I found that aid is not a sustainable answer to the problems in Africa," he said.

Although aid in the form of food is needed to combat the rising global food shortage, Richard considers it short sighted and not sustainable. It does not help communities get their foot on the first rung of the ladder to development.

Business is a sustainable way of helping rural communities

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Photo: Richard Harvey

Three questions should be asked:

- What would change the life of the community?
- How can you help them change their lives?
- How do you create economic growth and development?

The answer to this is good development, according to Richard. “Business is a sustainable way of helping rural communities.”

Another matter that surprised him was the impact of climate change on rural Africa. “I had no idea until I stepped off the plane. Before that, it was an abstract idea to me. Climate Change has happened and is ruining the lives of people in Africa,” Richard said.

“The inconvenient truth is that the developed world has created climate change. For people just trying to survive and the impact has been immense,” he asserted.

Now back in the United Kingdom, Richard is working with Concern Universal to engage international business in efforts to reduce poverty in the developing world and achieve the UN’s Millennium Development Goals.

How can business help? He believes that business leaders should look at real opportunities, think about long term development. “Small business owners in Africa should be your next customers,” he said.

“The situation in Africa is unacceptable. Businesses should be influencing governments. Businesses in the developed world should be advocates and lobby to make trade with Africa easier,” he said.

When questioned about dealing with the ‘corrupt’ governments on the continent, he suggested a “complete cleanout of the ruling governments”.

“Get healthy people on the ground to question their governments,” he said.

Even though he believes that ‘trade not aid’ makes the difference. Richard did concede that there is no overriding solution.

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